

Rooted: Studies in Christian Discipleship

-The Bible: How Do We Know We Have All of It?

- Teacher's note- In writing this lesson, I spent time studying Psalm 119, 2 Tim. 3.14-17. I also read the relevant chapters of Wayne Grudem's *Systematic Theology*, J.I. Packer's *Knowing God*, , and Gregg Allison's *Historical Theology* as well as *Can We Trust The Gospels?* by Peter Williams, *The Old Testament Documents: Are They Reliable and Relevant?* by Walter C Kaiser, Jr, and [updated: an exhaustive treatment on this would be *The Historical Reliability of the New Testament* by Craig Blomberg (2016)].
- Introduction- Read from "The Davinci Code." What is the pop culture view of the Bible?
 - ➔ In some ways, we can thank Dan Brown for his book because he caused Christians to have to answer the question of where the Bible came from. Oftentimes, the best thinking, writing, and teaching comes from the need to respond to heresy or false teaching.
- It makes sense for us as Christians to ask this question- where did we get the Bible from?
 - ➔ How did we answer that question last week?
 - ◆ The Bible is God's revelation to us. Ultimately, it came from the Holy Spirit inspiring men to write the Words of God.
 - ◆ We talked about how that means that the Bible has authority- if we disbelieve or disobey the Bible, we disbelieve or disobey God Himself. It is perfectly true because God is a God who cannot lie.
 - ➔ There are enormous implications to what we said last week about the Bible- if it is truth, if it is the only way that we can know how to obtain salvation, if it has the authority of Almighty God to speak to us, then it is perfectly understandable that we would want to make sure we know that we have the right Bible. Do we have all the books? Are there some books that have disappeared?
 - ◆ We're talking about thousands of years here, how do we know that whole words or paragraphs or even pages haven't been lost.
 - ◆ What about books like the Apocrypha? The Gospel of Thomas?
 - ◆ What about Dan Brown's claim that the New Testament didn't come into existence until the 4th century, hundreds of years after Christ?
- The Ultimate Answer to this question is simply that we have faith in God's sovereign power over history. Our final confidence isn't in historical facts (although there are plenty), but in the God who spoke the Word, and sustains it. We're not trying to prove the Bible is God's Word- the only way a person can be convinced that the Bible is God's word is to read it and see.
- However, while we can't be convinced that the Bible is the Word of God apart from Him speaking through it, we can gain confidence and grow in our faith when we see HOW God has brought His word through History. We can see God's working and praise Him. We can use this knowledge to encourage others, and remove stumbling blocks from their way to help them in their faith as well.
- So first, How do we know we have the whole Bible?
- The Old Testament-
 - ➔ Do we have the right books? Are the 39 books that we have in our Old Testament correct, and how do we know?
 - ◆ What about the Apocrypha? Isn't it included in some Bibles?
 - ◆ I heard somewhere that the Hebrew Bible only had 22 or 24 books. What about that?
 - There's an easy answer to this one- the 22 or 24 books (depending on which tradition you look at) are exactly the same as our Old Testament. They're just organized differently. There is a breakdown of how they're organized on an article I linked to on the Website.

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- ♦ The Old Testament as we have it here was completed about 435 BC- These would have been Malachi, Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther. From the time of Moses up until these books, the Scriptures were being added to, and were growing.
 - Deut. 31.24-26, Josh. 24.26, 1 Sam. 10.25, 1 Chron. 29.29, 1 Kings 16.7, 2 Chron. 26.22, Jer. 30.2
 - But after around 435 BC, the Jewish people stopped adding to Scripture. Nothing else was added to sacred Scripture between Malachi, Ezra, Nehemiah, or Esther and Jesus' coming. The Jews believed that God had stopped speaking through the prophets.
 - We have clear evidence from historical data that the Old Testament we have now is what it has always been. The same books, the same content.
 - The question comes up then, what about the Apocryphal books- the Maccabees, The Wisdom of Solomon, Bel and the Dragon? These books are in the Roman Catholic Bible, right?
- ♦ The Apocrypha- to understand why these books are not considered sacred Scripture, we first have to understand that the 39 books we have in the Old Testament were considered Scripture from the onset. The Jews attributed to these books the authority of the Word of God, and Christianity built on that foundation through the authority of the Christ.
 - The Jews never attributed authority to the apocryphal books. Even from the beginning, it was understood that these books had a lesser purpose- they were history, or they were sermonic, or illustrations, but they were never sacred Scripture.
 - Josephus, the early Jewish Historian born c. AD 37/38 wrote this- "From Artaxerxes to our own times a complete history has been written, but has not been deemed worthy of equal credit with the earlier records, because of the failure of the exact succession of the prophets." (Against Apion 1.41)
 - The Jews recognized that during this period there was no prophet speaking the Words of God. As we talked about last week, the writers of the Bible understood how God was working here, and recognized that there were men who were speaking with God's authority. But not after 435 BC. The literature admits this. The book of the Maccabees for example, writes about how the Jewish people are to store items of the Temple "until a prophet should come to tell them what to do with them." The book also speaks about how the prophets have ceased to speak.
 - The Apocrypha is in the Roman Catholic Bible because of its inclusion in the Latin Vulgate, written in AD 404. This was the most widely used version of the Bible, and yet even Jerome, the man who translated the Greek and Hebrew into the Latin Vulgate made the statement that the Apocrypha was not canonical. They were "books of the church" which were helpful but not authoritative.
 - It wasn't until 1546 at the Council of Trent that the Roman Catholic Church officially included the Apocrypha in the canon. What was happening in the church at that time? The Reformation- you had Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, John Calvin and others arguing against the Roman Catholics about how people are saved- by grace, not works. There is not purgatory, etc. The apocrypha has passages in it that could support those doctrines, and so it should be no surprise that the Roman Catholic Church would want to find "biblical" support for their doctrine. But it doesn't really stand up to historical truth.

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- So we can be sure that we have the original Old Testament as it was intended.
- The New Testament
 - ♦ What about the New Testament now? Dan Brown really shakes things up when he talks about how the New Testament was actually put together and chosen by a church council several hundred years after Christ. If that's the case, then how do we know that these books weren't arbitrarily chosen?
 - Again, first we know it because we have an underlying belief in a God who controls history.
 - ♦ So, why these books?
 - They were written during the time of the Apostles and had the authority that God gave to the apostles behind them.
 - John 14.26 and John 16.13-14- this foreshadows the Holy Spirit's work to call to mind all the things Jesus taught his followers as they are writing them down.
 - Some passages on apostolic authority.
 - 2 Peter 3.2
 - Acts 5.2-4 (lying to the apostles is the equivalent of lying to the Holy Spirit.
 - 1 Cor. 2.13
 - Two passages where Apostles recognize other writings as Scripture
 - 2 Peter 3.16
 - 1 Tim. 5.17-18
 - So then, all the books written by Apostles understandably became part of the canon
 - that leaves Mark, Luke, Acts, Hebrews, and Jude
 - Mark and Luke-Acts were accepted very early on because of their close relationship with the Apostles Peter and Paul. Paul quotes Luke, and Peter and Mark had a very close relationship as well.
 - Hebrews was also accepted- even though it is uncertain who wrote the book- because of its Christ-centeredness. It in no way contradicted other Scripture, and was clearly accepted by the church
 - Jude was accepted because of the close relationship that Jude had with the Apostle James.
 - So all of these books were written in that 70 year period after Christ. What we see in the 4th century at the Church Councils is not the church choosing which books were in the canon, but simply giving formal recognition to what the church was already practicing.
 - We have quite a bit of historical evidence to back all this up as well. There are really only a few books from early Christianity that were ever even up for consideration to be added to the canon and it was clear early on that the church as a whole would not agree on them
 - Ignatius who wrote about AD 110, clearly says of himself that he was not an apostle like Paul or Peter
 - Another book was called the Shepherd of Hermas, and was incredibly popular in its day- imagine a Rick Warren, Chuck Colson type of book in the early church. However, it was never given full endorsement because there were some serious doctrinal errors in it.
 - The Gospel of Thomas, which got a lot of press recently as it was

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“rediscovered” which is not entirely true was also clearly out of the running because of its own false doctrines. It was also considered to have been written, not by Thomas, but much later in Church History.

- Wayne Grudem tells the story of how he was contacted by a new organization for a comment on the Gospel of Thomas after it was “discovered.” They wanted to know what effect it should have on Christianity and the New Testament. He then read a section of it to the lady, and said he didn't think anyone would take it too seriously. This is what he read
 - “Simon Peter said to them, “Let Mary go away from us, for women are not worthy of life.” Jesus said, “Lo, I shall lead her, so that I may make her a male, that she too may become a living spirit, resembling you males. For every woman who makes herself a male will enter the kingdom of heaven.”
- So, what's the point of all this? It isn't to show that we get to choose what was in Scripture. History doesn't show us that at all. Dan Brown's description of some authoritarian conspiracy in the church is just plain wrong, historically speaking. The evidence we have from all the writings of the early church leaders (and there is a lot- I have about 8 volumes full of them down at the house) shows instead that the early church simply recognized that these particular books were the sacred Scriptures. There really wasn't that much discussion over the books that were formally recognized in the 4th century, and the discussion that was had (over books like the later epistles of Peter and John) was simply because they weren't as widely circulated but once they were read widely they too were recognized. It's really amazing when you think about it. The History shows that God was clearly working to make His Word known. Jesus said it in John 10 when he said, “My sheep know my voice.” The books that caused controversy were inevitably not accepted because of doctrinal untruth, and because those books often claimed that they were NOT Scripture.

→ Conclusion

- ♦ We can praise God as we see Him working through History. Ultimately, we trust in His word because He speaks through it. A history lesson like today's won't ultimately convince anyone that the Bible is God's word.
 - Think about this- one reason we don't say that this information proves the Bible is true is because there is a dangerous implication here. If we say the Bible is God's Word because of God, then clearly the Bible is dependent on the authority of God. BUT, if we say that the Bible is God's word because of these historical evidences, then we're saying that the Bible is dependent on something other than God. The authority behind the Bible becomes historical proof. But there is no authority higher than God's own words. We have faith in the Bible because we have met the God who speaks through it, tells us of his son.
- ♦ But we can also praise God because He gives us things like History to comfort us, and give us confidence. Amen.