**BIBLE TALK Radio Broadcast**

**On KTTR (99.7 FM) Every Sunday at 8:30 a.m.**

**Rolla, Missouri**

**10/9/2022**

**How We Got The New Testament (Part 1)**

Many people believe today that we cannot be assured that what we have in our Bibles is what was written by the prophets and apostles of old. They believe that the Bible has been corrupted so that we cannot be sure that what we read in our Bibles today was what was originally written. You may hear someone say, “You know, the Bible has been copied and recopied for hundreds of years and has been translated many, many times. I’m sure some of these copyist and translators made some mistakes and changes along the way. So we can’t really be sure that what we have in the Bible today is what the original writer actually said.” This raises a very important question. How did we get the Bible, and particularly how did we get the New Testament Scriptures, because if the New Testament that we have is accurate, then all the Bible is accurate. That is what I want to talk about on the program today and next week, the Lord willing. When we come to understand how we got the New Testament, then we will be able to have the confidence that what we read in the New Testament is an accurate reading of what was originally written by the original writers.

First of all I want us to deal with the question, “How did the books we have in our New Testament get there?” We need to understand that the New Testament was not written by a single person, but it is a library of several books (27 to be exact) which were written by about eight different people. And the New Testament was not written all at one time, but over a period of 20 to 50 years, from the 50’s to 96 AD. This raises some questions: 1) “How did these books that are in our New Testament get there?” 2) “Who decided that the 27 books we have in our New Testament should be there?” 3) Why were other books left out, and 4) “Do we have all the books that should be included?” I want to respond to some of these questions on our program today, and then next week I want to deal with the question “How do we know that these inspired books that we do have, have come down to us as they were originally written without corruption?”

Basically, the questions of how did the books in our New Testament get there concern what is called the "canon" of Scripture. "Canon" literally suggests the idea of meeting a standard or system of rules. When we talk about the canon of Scripture, we are talking about those writings that adhered to a certain standard or set of rules. The writings that met those standards and rules were included in a list of books that were viewed as being legitimate and authoritative. These are the ones that were included in the New Testament, called the New Testament canon. But how did these books get there, and what is the standard or the set of rules that determined which books were included?

It is important to understand that the early church of the first century AD believed that the men who wrote these books were moved by the Holy Spirit in what they wrote. The apostle Paul said in 1 Cor. 2:13, *“These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.”* They believed that the very words they spoke and wrote were words taught by the Holy Spirit. Paul said in 1 Cor. 14:37, *“If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord.”* Paul could say that because he was guided by the Holy Spirit in what he wrote. Paul says in 2 Tim. 3:16-17, *“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”* The phrase “given by inspiration of God” literally means, “God breathed.” The Scriptures were then breathed out by God. And so the writers of the New Testament wrote by inspiration of God.

And it is also important to note that these scriptures were immediately acknowledged and accepted by Christians in that time to be the word of God. We read of the early Christians continuing in the “apostles doctrine” in Acts 2:42. They knew what the “apostles doctrine” was, that it is the very words of God, and so they listened to it and continued in it. Paul said to the church in Thessalonica, *“For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.”* (1 Thess. 2:13). They understood that Paul’s words were the words of God. When the early Christians received the words from the apostles, whether orally or written, they received it as the word of God. Someone said something like this, “The writings of these men were acknowledged as ‘Scripture’ before the ink dried on the page.”

Some people have the erroneous idea that the New Testament Scriptures were not regarded by men as the authoritative word of God until several generations or centuries after they were written. They believe it took a gradual evolution of thought before men accepted these writings as the words of God. This is absolutely not true. This is NOT the way it happened. These writings were believed to be the word of God immediately after they were written. And they begin to be circulated. Paul said to the church in Colosse in Colossians 4:16, *“Now when this epistle is read among you, see that it is read also in the church of the Laodiceans, and that you likewise read the epistle from Laodicea.”* Notice, they were instructed to circulate the epistles and have other churches read them, and this took place shortly after they were written.

And it is also important to note that just 50 years after the apostles lived there were several secular writers that made frequent appeal to the authority of these New Testament books. You know, today, we may write Bible articles in our church bulletins, but we do not claim divine authority for what we write, rather we quote Scripture, that which does have divine authority, to prove that what we are saying is from God. Secular writers shortly after the apostles lived did the very same thing. They did not claim divine authority in their writings as the apostles did, but they referred to the authority of the writings of Paul, Peter, John, Matthew, Mark, Luke, etc, the books of the New Testament. For example, Clement of Rome, who lived around 95 AD, in his writings made reference to the books of Matthew, Mark, Hebrews, Romans, 1 Timothy, Titus, 1 Peter, and Ephesians. Justin Martyr, who lived from 100 to 165 AD quotes from Matthew, Mark, Luke and John 268 times, from Acts 10 times, from the Pauline epistles 43 times, from the General epistles 6 times, and from Revelation 3 times. And many other examples we could give of secular writers in the second and third centuries appealing to the authority of the books of the New Testament. Neil Lightfoot in his book “How We Got The Bible” stated, “About the middle of the second century, a Christian writer, Justin Martyr, stated that on Sundays in the Christian worship assemblies the ‘memoirs of the apostles’ were read together with the ‘writings of the prophets.’ It is evident, then, that not long after the close of the apostolic age the New Testament writings were being read generally among the churches.” (Neil Lightfoot, “How We Got The Bible”) Josh McDowell in his book, “New Evidence That Demands A Verdict” quotes Igantius, who lived at the end of the first century and the beginning of the second century, as saying, “I do not wish to command you as Peter and Paul; they were apostles.” These secular writers, by referencing the New Testament books showed how these books were regarded by the early church. They regarded them as the authoritative word of God. And it also proves that these books were already in existence before the end of the first century.

And so the books we have in our New Testament Scriptures were recognized to be inspired of God long before any “Church Council” met to decide on them. Some people will lead you to believe that we did not know what books should be in our New Testaments until almost 400 years after Christ when a Catholic Church council was convened and they voted on which books should be in our New Testament. They contend that the New Testament is the product of the Catholic Church.

This is not the truth. The Council that met in 397 AD only confirmed what was already known to be true about these inspired writings. F.F. Bruce states that “when at last a Church Council—The Synod of Hippo in A.D. 393—listed the twenty-seven books of the New Testament, it did not confer upon them any authority which they did not already possess, but simply recorded their previously established canonicity….” (Quoted from Josh McDowel’s “New Evidence That Demands A Verdict”, p. 24)

Well, how did they determine whether a book should be in the New Testament canon? The test for New Testament canonicity was “apostolicity.” In other words, did the book have apostolic authority or approval? In order for books to be considered New Testament Scripture, they had to be confirmed as the work of an inspired apostle or of a prophet so closely associated with the apostles as to imply apostolic approval of their writing. All the twenty seven books met this test.

Greg Gwin has stated, “Early heresies initiated by the Gnostics and others required that faithful brethren make a defense of the inspired writings. This they did, and we have the record of their defense preserved unto this day. In the process of defending the New Testament works, they actually insured that we would have historical verification of the writings that were known to be produced by inspired men. Someone has said, ‘in the struggle with Gnosticism the canon was made.’”

A legitimate question to ask is: Do we have all the New Testament books? In other words, are we sure that all of the writings that should have been included were, in fact, included when the canon of Scripture was compiled? The answer is, YES. While there are some other writings that claim apostolic authorship, they are shown to be forgeries. They contradict the acknowledged and genuine apostolic writings. And, furthermore, it has been proved that most of them were written long after the apostles died.

No other writings bear the marks of true inspiration and apostolic authority, than the 27 books we have in our New Testament. A strong defense can be made for each of the 27 books that we find in our New Testament today.

Next week the question I want us to consider is, “How do we know that the inspired books that we do have, have come down to us as they were originally written without corruption?” Some people believe that those writings have been corrupted, therefore, we cannot be assured that what we have is what was written by the original writers. So join us next week.

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