

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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Do We Have All the Inspired Books in the Bible?

Many people today are claiming that there are "lost" books of the Bible. So-called "lost" gospels and epistles have been floating around for years and used by skeptics and unbelievers to cast doubt on the inspiration and completeness of the Bible. These issues deal with what is called the "canon" of Scripture. "Canon" comes from the Greek word *kanon* meaning "rule" or "measure." The "canon of Scripture" is the authorized list of inspired books that make up the Old and New Testaments. The question is: Do we have all the inspired books in the Bible? Can we trust the Bible to contain all of God's word, and that there are no "lost" books that should have been included?

This issue cannot be settled simply by historical research. Historical evidence is sketchy at best, and is dominated by the claims of uninspired men and denominational councils that had already rejected the authoritative pattern of God's word. Historical claims of when certain books were accepted by certain groups of people do not reveal the true account of how the inspired literature was recognized and collected for God's people. We will never be able to know every detail of how the Bible came to its final form, but we can know by faith that it did happen according to the will of God, not man. No one person or any denominational council of men decided what books belonged in the Bible. The saints of God had "the faith once for all delivered" to them by God (Jude 3). And we can know this by what is revealed to us in the Scriptures.

Old Testament

The Old Testament canon, or list of books, was settled and accepted by the Jewish people to whom God had delivered His word. The apostle Paul wrote that "to them [the Jews] were committed the oracles of God" (Romans 3:2). The Jewish historian, Josephus, spoke of the Hebrew books of the Bible (our Old Testament):

For we have not an innumerable multitude of books among us, disagreeing from and contradicting one another [as the Greeks have], but only twenty-two books, which contain the records of all the past times; which are justly believed to be divine . . . (Contra Apion 1:8).

The "twenty-two books" he speaks of are the same as our thirty-nine books of the Old Testament (combining some books together such as 1 & 2 Kings, the Minor Prophets, etc.). Jesus also spoke of the three basic divisions of the Old Testament: Law, Psalms, Prophets (Luke 24:44). Other books (like the Apocrypha) were never accepted by the Jews.

New Testament

The formation of the New Testament canon began in the first century as inspired books were being written. The inspiration of certain writings was recognized early on. Paul told the Thessalonians to "stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle" (2 Thessalonians 2:15). Revelation that was being written was just as authoritative as what was being spoken orally.

The Holy Spirit was active in guiding the Christians of the first century in identifying what writings were inspired of God. Gifts of the Spirit enabled some to know and identify inspired revelation, as noted by Paul: "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" (1 Corinthians 14:37). These New Testament prophets were enabled by the Holy Spirit to identify the writings of Paul and others as inspired of God.

This was very helpful because there were false writings being circulated in the first century. Paul warned the Thessalonians "not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us" (2 Thessalonians 2:2). Faithful brethren could know what was false by contrasting it with inspired teaching and writings.

Books of the New Testament were being identified as Scripture even before all the books of the New Testament were written. Paul gives two quotes in 1 Timothy 5:18. The first is from Deuteronomy 25:4 and the second is from Luke 10:7. He introduced both saying, "For the Scripture says . . .". So by the time Paul wrote 1 Timothy, God had identified Luke's gospel as inspired Scripture!

Furthermore, the apostle Peter spoke of some twisting Paul's epistles "as they do also the rest of the Scriptures" (2 Peter 3:15-16). The phrase "rest of the Scriptures" means that Paul's epistles were already regarded as part of the inspired canon of Scripture at this time.

What person determined that Luke's gospel was Scripture? What council told Peter that Paul's epistles were to be regarded as Scripture? The answer is that no man or council made such decisions. This information and guidance was provided by Christ through the

Holy Spirit, who identified inspired writings through the apostles and prophets. By the time the last New Testament apostle and prophet died, the canon was closed and all the inspired books we have today were fully identified and preserved. Can I prove this by human history alone? No, and I don't need to. The Scriptures reveal that inspired books were being identified and collected, and by faith I know that God completed the task of providing for us the all-sufficient and complete word of truth. We can fully trust our Bibles to be the total inspired word of God for man today!

- Marc Gibson, via Truth Magazine, July, 2010

New Testament FELLOWSHIP

Many local churches of Christ today have their "fellowship halls" for recreation or for entertainment. This is purely a denomination idea and practice; wholly not found in the New Testament. I have no objection to the home providing entertainment or for individuals providing place for social activity among the people of God. But to allow the church to, or teach it is alright for the local church to do it is, again, wholly without New Testament Authority. A local church goes into sin when it gets into the entertainment business.

How is the word "fellowship" used in the New Testament? The main New Testament word for fellowship is the Greek term *koinnonia* or its equivalent. It always carries a spiritual connotation. Fellowship in the New Testament never refers to human entertainment or social activities. It means: "to share with others, to distribute, to be a partner or partaker in a spiritual work or service." In the work of the Lord, fellowship can also refer to what is shared. For example: a contribution. It is sometimes translated distribution, sometimes communion, but always fellowship refers to a spiritual work or service, and should never be used to describe such social events as picnics, fish fries, pot-luck dinners, baseball games, or any such gatherings for social entertainment.

(1) Forbidden fellowship is mentioned in such passages as: 1 Corinthians 10:20; 2 Corinthians 6:14; and Ephesians 5:11.

(2) Fellowship, in the sense of a spiritual association with one another and with Deity, is found in: Acts 2:42; 1 John 1:3-7; 1 Corinthians 1:9; Philippians 2:1; 3:10; 1 Corinthians 10:16 and 2 Corinthians 13:14. "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion (fellowship) of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen."

(3) Fellowship, in referring to financing the preaching of the gospel, is spoken of in Philippians 1:5 and 4:15-16.

(4) Fellowship, referring to distributing to the needy saints: benevolence is found in such passages as: 2 Corinthians 8:4; 9:13; Romans 12:13; Romans 15:16; 1 Timothy 6:18 and Hebrews 13:16.

(5) The Right hand of Fellowship, as a symbolic act to show spiritual cooperation with Barnabas and Saul is found in Galatians 2:9.

Let us consider these holy truths and NEVER be found engaging in the wrong kind of Fellowship!

- Wendell Powell, via The Charlotte Lamp, 09/09/2012

The Foundation of Salvation: the Good Confession!

Matthew's gospel account records Simon Peter's answer to the Lord's question regarding His identity. Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." (Matthew 16:16). This powerful confession of faith prompted the Lord to pronounce a blessing upon him as one to whom the God of heaven revealed the essential truth that forms the foundation of heaven's offer of salvation to the world (v. 17)! Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God!

Later in the New Testament this expression is called "the good confession" that was made in the presence of Pontius Pilate (1 Timothy 6:12, 13; cf. John 18:37). In verse 12, Paul instructed Timothy to "take hold of the eternal life to which you were called". The call to salvation came through the preaching of the gospel: "It was for this [salvation, v. 13] He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." (2 Thessalonians 2:14). Once again, Peter's confession that Jesus is "the Christ, the Son of the living God" forms the essential foundation upon which salvation is based: "for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation." (Romans 10:10). This is the good confession that the specially chosen apostles of Christ went into the regions of the world to persuade people to accept, believe and verbally state (cf. Matthew 10:32; Luke 12:8). Recall the gospel preaching of Peter and the apostles on the first Pentecost following the resurrection of Christ: "Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ--this Jesus whom you crucified." (Acts 2:36). When Philip "preached Jesus" to "an Ethiopian eunuch," he asked for verbal confirmation of whole-hearted belief. "And he answered and said, 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.'" (Acts 8:27-39). At that point Philip baptized the court official into Christ, and he went on his way rejoicing.

The effect of this powerful confession (springing from true, genuine faith in the heart, not mere lip-service) is a change of one's life, a change of one's allegiance, a "transformation" that takes place when one's mind is "renewed" by adherence to Christ in faith and obedience (Romans 12:2; cf. John 3:36).

Friend, have you made the good confession?

- Gary Smalley

* "Home improvement: take your family to Bible study and worship!"

* "Hell has no fire escapes!"

* "Faith is to the soul what a main spring is to a watch!"

* "God judges our riches not by what is in our pockets, but what is in our hearts!"

* "1 Peter 4:3 warns against: (1) "excess of wine," or debauched drunkenness; (2) "revellings," or merrymaking with the aid and stimulation of intoxication; (3) "banquetings," or sipping intoxicants in a way not necessarily "excessive" (see Trench's Synonyms of the New Testament, 225)!"

What Must I Do To Be Saved?

HEAR THE GOSPEL

(Romans 10:14-17; John 20:30-31; Romans 1:15-17)

BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST

(Acts 8:37; John 8:24; Hebrews 11:6)

REPENT OF PAST SINS

(Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38; Acts 17:30)

CONFESS CHRIST

(Romans 10:9-10; Acts 8:37)

BE BAPTIZED

(Romans 6:3-4; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38; Acts 8:36-39; 1 Peter 3:21)

LIVE A FAITHFUL LIFE

(Revelation 2:10; 2 Peter 1:5-11; John 15:1-8; Hebrews 10:23-25)