

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY: (ORGANIZED BIBLE KNOWLEDGE)

Part I: Bibliology (Knowledge of the Doctrine of Scripture)

D. Canonicity (What Books Ought to Be IN the Bible)

I. Introduction

- A. Different groups have differing **books** in their *Bibles*, raising the question what books are **Scripture**!
- B. The study of Biblical Canonicity addresses this issue as follows:

II. Canonicity (What Books Ought To Be IN The Bible)

- A. The Test of Christ's Documentation - Christ's own words document the canon of Scripture as follows:
 - 1. Luke 11:51 - Jesus here stated God would avenge the deaths of the prophets from Abel (Genesis 4:8) on down to Zacharias who died between the altar and the temple (2 Chronicles 24:20-22). Had **Jesus** thought the *Apocrypha* was canonical, He would have mentioned a **Maccabean** martyr **in place of Zacharias**, for the Apocryphal works record **later** Jewish history. Rather, like the Orthodox Jews of His era whose Old Testament canon consisted of the 39 books we Protestants have in our Bible, but in an order beginning with Genesis and ending with 2 Chronicles, Jesus condoned the view of the Jews in His day that **only** the 39 Old Testament books **then** viewed as canonical were Scripture!
 - 2. John 17:20 - Jesus here authorized the words of the 12 who followed Him before the cross. We know from this that Matthew, Mark, John, 1 and 2 Peter, 1, 2 and 3 John, Jude and Revelation are canonical.
 - 3. 2 Peter 3:15-16 - Peter here places the Apostle Paul's writings on par with the "other Scriptures", meaning the canonical Old Testament writings. Accordingly, Paul's epistles through Peter's canonical word here are canonical Scripture, including Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus and Philemon.
 - 4. 1 Timothy 5:18 - Paul's words here, canonical through Peter's canonical statement of 2 Peter 3:15-16 quote Luke 10:7 and Deuteronomy 25:4, calling both texts equally **Scripture**! Thus, Luke's Gospel and his Acts of the Apostles (via Luke 1:1-4 with Acts 1:1) are canonical Scripture.
 - 5. This leaves only the Epistle of James and Hebrews not covered in some way by Christ's verbal authorization since we do not know **which** James wrote the James epistle, and we do not know **who** authored Hebrews. However, (a) both writings confess Christ's incarnation, making their authors true believers (cf. James 1:1; Hebrews 1:1-14) according to 1 John 4:1-3; 1 Corinthians 12:3. (b) Both allude to justification by faith for salvation (James 1:18; Heb. 12:1-2). (c) Both books came to be accepted universally by Christians prior to any ecclesiastical councils officially recognized the New Testament canonical books (Rene Pache, The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture, ch. 15).
- B. The Test of Historical Record - Events in Church History reveal the credibility of the Protestant canon.
 - 1. By A. D. 101, 7,029 of the 7,959 verses we now have in our Protestant New Testament were already universally accepted as canonical in the grassroots Christian communities! The four Gospels, Acts, Paul's 13 Epistles and 1 Peter made up this group of Church wide, grassroots, uncontested writings!
 - 2. The Early Church **never** accepted the O. T. Apocrypha as canonical; Jerome in the 5th century A. D. said so in his Vulgate (Ibid., Pache, p. 172). Only when the Protestants of the Reformation publicly rejected the Apocrypha's canonicity did the Catholic Church in its 1546 Council of Trent, **against** the consent of **leading Roman Catholic** scholars of the time, make much of the Apocrypha canonical (Ibid., p. 173; Z.P.E.B., v. Four, p. 22). To counter the Protestant stand, the Catholic Church wanted the Apocryphal books for their support of its unique beliefs in prayers for the dead, the mass, expiation of post-death sins via almsgiving, intercession of the saints, the worship of angels, purgatory and the post-death redemption of the soul, Ibid., Pache. Amazingly, 1 Maccabees 9:27; 14:41 of the part of the apocrypha sanctioned by the Council of Trent nullifies itself as canonical versus the council's stand!
- C. The Subjective Test of Canonicity - All but one of the ecclesiastical councils did **not initiate** canonicity assertions, but believers at the **lay** level **universally** approved **which** books were canonical through their **lay level** convictions, and the councils **only ratified** these conclusions, Ibid., Pache, p. 178-180. The sole exception occurred at the Council of Trent in 1546 when Catholicism **pontificated** what the laity was to view as canonical **without** the laity's **initial** consent, and we showed that council to be errant in II,B,2!

Lesson Application: The (Protestant) 66 book Bible we have is the canonical, inspired Word of God!