

**REVELATION**



**INSPIRATION**



**ANIMATION**



**COLLECTION**

**1**

**TRANSLATION**



**ILLUMINATION**



**INTERPRETATION**



**APPLICATION**



**COMMUNICATION**

## **THE WRITTEN WORD**

Bethany Bible Church, Adult Sunday School Class, June 28, 2009

### **‘Inspiration’ and ‘Canon’**

*‘Inspiration’ and the biblical ‘canon’ are ideas that are inseparably bound together. When we say certain books of the Bible are ‘inspired’, we mean they are uniquely “God-breathed”; and by the ‘canon’, we mean “these books only, and no others”.*

**When we speak of the biblical “canon”, we are speaking of collection of the books of the Bible.**

#### **I. THE MEANING OF THE WORD ‘CANON’.**

- A. The Greek word that this comes from (κανων) means “limits, sphere, area” (2 Corinthians 10:13, 15, 16). Figuratively, it refers to a ‘rule’ or ‘principle’ (see Galatians 6:16; Philippians 3:16).
- B. Early in church history, the word ‘canon’ came to be applied to creeds as expressions of biblical faith. Later, it came to refer to the tests that were used to establish that a book inspired; and then, to the collection of books that the church acknowledged to be inspired and that make up our Bible.

#### **II. THE AUTHORITY BEHIND THE CANON.**

- A. The canon is not ultimately the product of human decision. It’s true that human debates, ecclesiastical decisions and church councils were a crucial part of the story. But a book was not ‘awarded’ canonicity by the authority of men. Human debates did not weaken the authority of truly inspired books, nor did human decisions give authority to books that did not already possess it.
- B. Rather, the books of the Bible were officially ‘recognized’ by human councils to be inspired and to possess an authority that was already accepted and respected by the majority of God’s people. This was a process that took several centuries and many debates. By the Council of Carthage (397 A.D.) however, the limits of the New Testament were recognized to be established; and the canon of Scripture was considered from then on to be completed and closed with the sixty-six books of the Bible alone.
- C. Prior to the completion of the New Testament, the canon of Scripture was not given at one stated time, but was in process. It was like “a bouquet which a woman holds in her hands as she slowly walks through a garden, with its owner accompanying her. As she strolls along, he presents her with one flower after another until a whole bouquet has been gathered. The bouquet exists and is admired before it is complete--indeed, from the very moment the first blossoms in it are put together; thus the canon was in the hands of God’s people from the moment that the first inspired scriptures were placed there.”<sup>1</sup>

#### **III. SCRIPTURAL SUPPORT FOR AN INSPIRED CANON.**

- A. The books that Moses finished writing were clearly treated as ‘completed’ (Deuteronomy 31:24-26).

- B. Joshua was told to adhere to the books that were given through Moses (Joshua 1:7-8).
- C. Certain writings were considered authoritative as “the law and the testimony”; and together they were considered one “word” (Isaiah 8:20).
- D. Jesus spoke of the things that must be fulfilled “which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me” (Luke 24:44).
- E. The church is said to have been built on “the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone” (Ephesians 2:20).
- F. Paul warned the Thessalonians not to be troubled by false doctrines that were coming to them “either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us” (2 Thessalonians 2:2); but did encourage the believers to stand fast and hold to the traditions “which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle” (v. 14).
- G. Peter designated only two letters that he wrote (2 Peter 3:1); and included Paul’s epistle in the categorization “scripture” (v. 15-16).
- H. The last book of the New Testament includes a warning that it not be added to or taken from (Revelation 22:18-19).

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<sup>1</sup>Rene Pache, Helen I. Needham, trans., *The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), p. 162.