***The Canon of Scripture - CA-023***

In the last session, I discussed with you briefly some of the so-called evidence that is used these days to try to convince people that the gospel is not true.

**The Da Vinci Code**

This is a sample of one of the pieces of evidence that Dan Brown uses in his book, The Da Vinci Code: that, number one, Jesus was married. He married Mary Magdalene. And His goal was not to die for the sins of the world, but to have children and form a dynasty. According to Dan Brown, his book, The Da Vinci Code, is fiction, but he claims that it's based on fact. He has put these facts together.

**The Portrait of the Lord's Supper**

Here's a sample of the type of evidence that he uses: He knows that Mary Magdalene was an apostle, and that she was present at the Lord's Supper, and here's how he knows. In Leonardo da Vinci's famous portrait of the Last Supper, the person sitting immediately to the right of Jesus is supposedly Mary Magdalene. The person doesn't have a beard, and he does look rather feminine. But according to art historians, for the last 500 years, this has been identified as a youthful John, the apostle John. He was the one who was seated next to Jesus. If you'll notice, several of the other apostles did not have beards. Even Christ does not have a beard. So that's very flimsy evidence.

The other piece of evidence is even flimsier than that. That is that the artist made a V-shape between Christ and John (or as he identifies this apostle as Mary Magdalene). The V-based shape is supposed to represent womanhood. So he is telling us there that this figure is really a woman, because there is a V-shape of negative space there.

People who have studied these things (art historians) tell us that this is a common artistic device, especially during this time, to create an area of negative space roughly in the shape of V, in order to draw attention to the center of interest, which is Christ. So this is his type of evidence. We can call it speculation, assumption, and guesswork. The people who believe this (those who have written the books, The Da Vinci Code and then the other book, Holy Blood, Holy Grail, tell us that they really have to read between the lines to come up with their theories, and no doubt about it, they do.

**The Portrait of the Mona Lisa**

Dan Brown also says there is evidence of his claims in the famous portrait of the Mona Lisa. He says that this reveals that Leonardo da Vinci was a follower of the Priory of Zion, which was a secret organization who was privy to this information – that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene; that the wedding where Jesus changed the water to wine was actually their own wedding; and, they had children, and so on. He says that one of the ways they can tell this is that the Mona Lisa is really a man, and that in the name the "Mona Lisa," he is actually revealing the names of two Egyptian gods that new agers have worshiped through the centuries. One is Amun the sun god, and the other was Isis.

Now, first of all, this has to be completely false because Leonardo da Vinci never even called this painting the Mona Lisa. We have it on good word from an art historian from ancient times, Vasari, who was an Italian, as Leonardo da Vinci was, that this is a portrait of a woman whose name was Lisa. And as you can see, you would even have to change some letters of the name to get "Isis" out of Lisa. But her name was Lisa Gherardini. This is what Leonardo titled the painting: "A Portrait of Lisa Gherardini." It was years later that other people called it the "Mona Lisa." "Mona" is an Italian word which is a contraction meaning "my lady."

So Dan Brown has absolutely no evidence to stand on for saying that the Mona Lisa can be used to support his theories. But this is exactly the kind of "scholarship" that is used to try to back up these weird unbiblical theories.

Incidentally, I received an advertisement in the mail this week from a book club that I belong to, and it was advertising the book Holy Blood, Holy Grail. Then on the other side of it is The Da Vinci Code and three other books by the same author in the same genre. So it's getting more popular all the time and it isn't going to go away. So it is important that we Christians know the truth about it so that we can point the way to those who are deceived.

**The Books of the New Testament**

One of the things that the authors of Holy Grail, Holy Blood and Dan Brown in The Da Vinci Code tell us is that there are actually some other good books that should be in the New Testament. They say that the books we have in the New Testament should probably be thrown out, and these other books should be replaced. They say that it was the emperor Constantine who ordered the church fathers to suppress these good books that really tell the truth, according to him: that Jesus was married; that He had descendants; and, so on.

**The Council of Nicaea**

Now, what he bases this on is the Council of Nicaea, which was called in 325 A.D. He says that it was at this council that the church fathers suppressed these books, and had the New Testament (which we read as the New Testament) declared official. Nothing could be further from the truth. In the first place, we know very little about what actually transpired at the Council of Nicaea in 325. There was a second Council of Nicaea, about 380 A.D. (sixty some odd years later) that we know a lot more about. But at the Council of Nicaea in 325, very little was discussed about the canon. Most of the discussion was about the person of the Lord Jesus Christ because, there were people who were saying that He was totally human and not divine. So most of the discussion was spent by the theologians going through the Bible and proving that the Lord Jesus Christ was humanity and deity. There was very little discussion about the canon of Scripture during the Council of Nicaea of 325. There had, in fact, been very little discussion about the canon – about what actually belonged in the Bible and what didn't, because Christians just seemed to accept and to know it already.

It's just like if someone hands you a good book, or maybe a book that's 80% good or 90% good. Some of the things you have problems with, and you read it and you say, "Well, you know, that's a pretty good book," but you're not going to read it as sacred Scripture – as revelation from God. So there had been very little discussion about the canon up until then.

**Marcion**

Now, in about 140 A.D., there was a heretic by the name of Marcion. He came up with his own canon. He was a Gnostic. Marcion said, "Forget about the Old Testament. It wasn't written for Christians. It was only written for Jews. So you shouldn't even read the Old Testament." He also said that the only books that were canonical for the New Testament for the church age were the writings of the apostle Paul and portions of the gospel of Luke. Not everything that Luke wrote was inspired, according to Marcion – just parts of Luke's writings. Then he said that the rest of the apostles had returned to Judaism, so their writings were not to be trusted. But the apostle Paul was the writer to the gentiles, and he had the gospel straight. So we should read Paul and portions of Luke, and nothing else belonged in the Bible.

Up until the Council of Nicaea and afterwards, most of the discussion about the canon had been to refute Marcion, and to say, "Yes, Christians should read the Hebrew Scriptures; the four gospels; the letters of Paul; and the letters of John and Peter as well." So that was pretty much the discussion about the canon until then.

**The Muratorian Fragment**

We also find that at about 140 A.D. (about the same time), there was a scroll that we have come to call the Muratorian Fragment. It was named after its author, an Italian Roman Catholic priest, who discovered it in Egypt in the 1700s (about 1730). He published a book in 1740 telling about it. This is a work to Christians. It was found written in Latin, and very poor Latin. Whoever wrote it made a lot of mistakes in spelling and in grammar. So they believed that it was probably written in Greek, and then translated into Latin by someone who whose knowledge of Latin was not native quality.

So we find in the Muratorian Fragment a canon of the books of the Bible. The author talks about what Christians should study, and what they should read. It includes the Hebrew Scriptures. There never was much question in the minds of the Hebrews about what belonged in the Scriptures. There were a few Jews who wanted to include the Apocrypha as sacred writings, but the vast majority said, "No, they're OK to read. They have some good history and good stories in them, but they're not sacred Scripture." So the Muratorian Fragment says, "Yes, Christians should read the Hebrew Scriptures." Then it quotes from every book in the New Testament except 1 Peter, 2 Peter, Hebrews, and James. It may be that the author wasn't acquainted with those books. Remember that this was back when there were no electronics, and word traveled very slowly. So it could be that the author had not been acquainted with these. But this is the earliest listing that we have of the canon of the New Testament.

Now, as I say, it was founded by a Roman Catholic priest, Ludovico Antonio Muratori. That's where it gets its name, the Muratorian Fragment. It has been dated (most people believe that it was around) 140 A.D., or maybe even earlier. The Christians had no doubt. They knew what the canon was, and it was no problem for discussing. However, over the years, we find in 393 A.D., there was a regional council in Hippo. There was one in Cartage in 397 in which the canon was discussed, and the list of books that we have today was declared to be sacred Scripture.

We do know also that in 325 A.D., one of the key people who attended the First Council of Nicaea was a man named Athanasius. Athanasius is called (by many people) the father of orthodoxy, because at the First Council of Nicaea, he championed the hypostatic union. He said, "Yes, Jesus is human, but not merely human. He was also divine." He's known as the father of orthodoxy for standing firm on this.

Athanasius used to write a general letter to the churches every Easter. He called it his resurrection letter. So every Easter, he would send out a public letter to all Christians from Athanasius, usually celebrating Easter with some good words of encouragement and advice for Christians. In 367, he issued a very stern warning in his resurrection letter about reading apocryphal books. He said, "They can do nothing but get you confused, so don't even read them. If you ever find one, destroy it."

There was some debate about just what books he was talking about in referring to them as apocryphal books, until about 1945 when some Arabs discovered in Egypt some ancient scrolls that were written in Coptic. Coptic is the original language of Egypt. But these were written with Greek letters, so these Arabs couldn't read them. So they took it to a professor at one of the universities, and he said, "Wow, do you know what you have here? These are ancient Christian books. When they were translated, it was discovered that these were apocryphal books which the writers claimed were gospels by different apostles.

There was the gospel of Thomas. This is really heavy in New Age circles, such as the one we're looking at about The Da Vinci Code. There was also the gospel of Phillip and the gospel of Mary Magdalene, among others. Well, scholars look at them and there's not much debate. They say, "No, there is no way they can be authentic. They were written several centuries after the first century. They may make for interesting reading, but they're definitely forgeries." And all you have to do is go down to the Irving Public Library and find the copy that they have of the Gospel of Thomas, and just read a few paragraphs, and you will say, "No, this is not New Testament writing. There is no question in my mind about it." All you have to do is sample it and you will see. But people who don't want to believe the true New Testament will read these and say, "See, I told you there was something else. There was some other truth out there."

The psychologist, Carl Jung, was a disciple of Freud, and he and Freud broke off over one of Freud's theories. That's something interesting about Freud. He never kept friends for very long. He always had a falling out with them. But Carl Jung formed his own school of psychology. Jung was a brilliant man, and he had some good ideas, but he was tainted by the demonic. He had a spirit guide that he called Philemon who he said would lead him to the truth of theories that he came up with about the human psyche. When he got to look at these scrolls, he said, "Wow, all of my life I have tried to understand the human soul, and these people already did." So they were very appealing to people who had already made their minds up that they wanted to believe something other than the gospel.

**Gnosticism**

As I said, these scrolls were Gnostic teaching. And so let's look at Gnosticism for a moment so that we can understand a little bit about where they're coming from. That's what Dan Brown is teaching in his novels. He's teaching Gnosticism. That's what Holy Blood, Holy Grail is. It's Gnosticism, and it's been around for a long time. So the better we understand it, the better we'll be able to refute it.

Gnosticism means "knowledge." It means "a faith in knowledge." You're not saved by works. You're not saved by grace. You're saved by what you know. You're saved by being in the know, and not everybody is smart enough to receive this knowledge. So it really appeals to the ego that everybody else has been deceived. All of these preachers and all of these church members and Christians have been trying to tell you something, and they're really deceiving you because the truth is out there. It's not in the Bible. It's not in the church. It's been suppressed by people who don't want you to know the truth. But you're so smart that you're able to have this secret knowledge. So that's the appeal of Gnosticism. People who believe Gnosticism are in the know. They're smarter than other people. Most people who believe Gnosticism don't even know the name of it. Just look in our society. After I tell you a few things about Gnosticism, you're going to see how it has permeated our society. Many people out on the street are Gnostics. They have been influenced by Gnosticism without even knowing about it. Even in the church, you'll find this.

**Dualism**

The first principle of Gnosticism is dualism, and that means "two." There are two relatively equal forces in the universe. There is good, and there is evil. The way you can tell the difference is that spirit is good, and matter is bad. If something is purely spiritual, then it's good. If it's physical, it's bad. So the line between good and evil goes between the spiritual and the physical.

Marcion, who became a leader in the church until he was excommunicated and then started his own church, was the one who limited the canon. He said, "Don't even read the Old Testament or anything that's not written by Paul, except for a few chapters of Luke. He would not even allow married people to be church members, because anything physical, such as a sexual relationship, was a sin. So they were welcome to come to church, but you could only be a member of a church if you were not married.

Also in the Lord's Supper, they substituted water for grape juice or wine, because wine or grape juice has a taste to it. If you enjoy tasting something, that's physical; that's evil; and, that's wrong. So you had to have water at the Lord's Supper so you wouldn't enjoy tasting anything. So anything that's physical is wrong. It has to be "purely spiritual" for it to be right. So that's the first principle of Gnosticism – dualism of spirit and the physical, and the spirit is good, and the physical is bad.

Gnostics have their own morality, and it's hard to say what Gnostics believe about morality, because there are many different varieties of Gnosticism, and they go from one extreme to the other. That's where you will find them – in an extreme, either of which is equally wrong. They are either extremely ultra-moral people, in that if you ever do anything that you enjoy, then you've committed a sin because that isn't spiritual. Or, they're on the other end, and they say, "Since physical things are wrong and sinful, and God really can't cleanse the world of all evil until it has run its course, let's help Him by helping evil to run its course. So let's just get out and wallow around in everything immoral. We're actually doing good because we're letting sin run its course so that God will be able to cleanse it." So their morality is from one extreme (what we would call a puritanical), to the other extreme of being libertine.

That's something else: Whatever Gnostics believe (whatever they teach – it may be varied), it will not be biblical Christianity. In fact, if you ever wonder what Gnosticism teaches about a certain area, just think of what biblical Christianity teaches, and then think of its opposite, and you've got Gnosticism.

Then there is the place of women in Gnosticism. They give women a much higher place. Jesus taught the equality of sexes. However, the Bible does teach that there are masculine and feminine roles. Gnosticism takes the equality of sexes and pushes it even much further than the Bible teaches. Feminism is a form of Gnosticism. This is one reason that Dan Brown's novels are so appealing, because he teaches that Mary Magdalene was an apostle. In fact, she was the chief of the apostles. She was the apostle's apostle. So women play a much more important role in Gnosticism than in Christianity, because women are the leaders and the pushers. It's a feminist religion.

Also, it's anti-family. Feminism comes from Gnosticism. The women want to push women out of their role as mothers and wives. In fact, some Gnostics wanted to eliminate sex entirely. They would teach that the eventual goal of society was to have one sex – unisex, in which each person displayed the characteristics of both sexes.

Another distinctive of agnosticism is that they believe in a docetic redeemer. The word "docetic" comes from a Greek word which means "to seem like" – something that's not really real, but it seems like it's real. The root of this teaching is that Jesus was not a real human being. He was a spirit. If matter is bad, then how can Jesus (who was good) take on a bad form? So people looked at Him, and they saw Him, and He seemed like a human, but he really wasn't. He really wasn't flesh and blood. He deceived people into thinking that he was flesh and blood.

What does that tell you? If He didn't have a literal physical body, He could never have died on the cross for the sins of the world, or for any other reason, because He really wasn't flesh, and only flesh dies. We might call this a modified Islamic view of Jesus. The Muslims believe that Jesus was a real human being, and some even believed that he was virgin-born. Even Muhammad said that Jesus was the only sinless human being who had ever lived. But He didn't die. He didn't down the cross. Do you know what he did? He had Judas to die on the cross in His place. People thought that it was Jesus hanging on the cross, but He had tricked us. He had made Judas look like He was, and it was Judas who died on the cross. This is what the Muslims believe about Jesus. They will back this up with a forgery of a gospel that they call the Gospel of Barnabas, in which Jesus is quoted as saying, "Yes, My Father would never let me die on the cross since I'm sinless, so Judas is going to die, but people are going to believe that it was Me. But the Gospel of Barnabas is not one of the apocryphal books. This is one that has been dated such that it could be no later than 1400. So this is a different kind of forgery, but it tells us the same kind of view that Gnosticism has of Jesus – a docetic Savior. He was someone who seems to be a human being, but isn't really.

It also teaches that the resurrection was not physical. How could it have been physical? If anything physical is bad, then the resurrection was only spiritual. So Mary Magdalene and Peter and John and all these people witnessed the risen Christ after He was crucified. They saw him walking around, and Thomas poked his finger in the hole in His side, they were just dealing with a spirit – a ghost. It wasn't a real flesh-and-blood person because the resurrection was only spiritual. It wasn't physical. You hear this today in some "Christian circles." There's even an evangelical at a well-known seminary who has written a book saying that the resurrection was only spiritual, and that it wasn't physical. This all goes back to Gnosticism.

So Gnosticism says that you are saved by knowledge: not by works; not by grace; but, by knowledge. Now, Marcion taught salvation by grace. That's a red flag. We need to be careful here. When we're inspecting someone's teachings, we may say, "Well, what do you believe about salvation?" They may say, "Well, it's by grace alone – grace alone and faith alone." We have a tendency to think, "Well, they're good guys." But Marcion was off on everything else. So be careful. One doctrine doesn't make a whole system right. Marcion said, "Yes, you're say by grace," but what he really meant was that you're saved by knowledge – secret knowledge, for people in the know.

**Un-Mediated Spirituality**

One other thing that Gnostics always will teach is a non-literal interpretation of Scripture. Yes, the Bible is true. The Bible may be the final authority and the rule of faith on spiritual matters, but it doesn't mean what it says. There is a hidden meaning behind everything. For example, they may tell you that in the Garden of Eden, when Eve gave Adam the fruit to eat, it was actually a fruit. It was sexual intercourse. Or they can find all kinds of hidden symbols and hidden meanings in the Bible. But you can be sure that they will tell you the Bible is true, but you have to know how to interpret it according to the secret symbols. We call that allegorical interpretation. The bottom line for Gnosticism is that it is un-mediated spirituality. That is, you don't have to look to the Bible for the truth. You don't have to get your spiritual truth from someone explaining the Word of God to you – someone with the gift of teaching. You can discover the truth yourself by looking inside. You can have a relationship with God just by looking inside your own soul and saying, "Let's see. How do I feel about this? How do I feel about God?" And this is basically Gnosticism – un-mediated spirituality.

**Mediated Spirituality**

Now, what is mediated spirituality? That is true spirituality. It is a true relationship with God, mediated by the Word: the living Word, the Lord Jesus Christ; and, the written Word of the Bible. But Gnosticism will have none of that. It is an un-mediated, cafeteria-style, eclectic religion. It's how you feel about something that makes it true.

When the church did have to make decisions to let people know that something was in Scripture, the criteria that they went on was that, first of all, "We're not dictating to people what's in the Bible. Ok? We are recognizing what God has inspired. We're not regulating it. We're recognizing it. We're not the judge. We're the witness. We're not the master. We are the servant. We recognize what is holy writ. We don't dictate what is holy writ." It's something like when we were looking in Titus about a church finding the right pastor-teacher. It isn't that you look around and select the pastor. It's that you recognize who the Holy Spirit has chosen to be the pastor. When you're looking for your right man or your right woman, you're not determining it. You are recognizing whom God has set aside for you. This is the belief that the church fathers operated under. They had about four different criteria that they went by:

1. **Apostolic Authority**

The first and the most important one was: Was the book written either by an apostle; under the authority of an apostle; or, approved by an apostle? The apostles and their writings carried a lot of weight, as they should today. In John 16:12, in the upper room, the Lord Jesus told the apostles (remember who He's addressing now): "I have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth." This has a significance and an application to us. The Holy Spirit will guide us to truth, but it had a special meaning (a primary meaning) to the people that He told this to – those 11 men who were in the room with Him. He said, "When the Holy Spirit comes, the Spirit of truth, He will guide you into all the truth, for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak. And He will disclose to you what is to come (in other words – prophecy). He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore, I said that He takes of Mine, and will disclose it to you." And remember that the "you" was the apostles.

John 15:26-27: "When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about Me, and you (the 11 apostles) will testify also, because you have been with Me from the beginning." He is referring to these 11 guys from the beginning of His ministry. Remember that Judas was not counted among them. He had already left. They had been with Jesus. So this pins it down. This is who He was talking to. He said, "When the Holy Spirit comes, He's going to guide you into all truth." So when we read the words of the apostles about Jesus, we are reading the absolute Holy Spirit inspired truth.

In Ephesians 2:20, the apostle Paul is speaking of the church. He says, "Having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets." All of the apostles had the gift of prophecy. Then there were some who were not apostles who had the gift of prophecy, such as Mark and Luke, who wrote parts of the Bible. They had the gift of prophecy, and they were under the approval of the apostles. So the foundation of the church is the apostles and the prophets – Christ Jesus Himself, being the cornerstone.

Jude 17: "But you, beloved, ought to remember the words that were spoken beforehand by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ." In other words, Jude is saying, "Read the New Testament. These were the words of the apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ."

Hebrews 2:1: "For this reason, we must pay closer attention to what we have heard." This is a second generation of Christians he's writing to. "So that we do not drift away from it." So what have we heard? "For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation." If we neglect the way of salvation that we have heard, then we're really in trouble.

Here's where it was revealed: "After it was at first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard it." So who heard it? The apostles – the men that Jesus spoke to in John and said, "You have been with Me from the beginning. I'll tell you what. The Holy Spirit is going to come. He's going to guide you to all the truth. He's going to give you understanding about prophecy." Then we see that they wrote this down later. That's the New Testament. So this is probably the most important criteria to these men in ancient time. Somebody might say, "Well, we've got a Gospel of Thomas or a Gospel of Mary Magdalene that people are believing. What do you think we should do with this?" The first thing they would say is, "Was it written by an apostle? Can you show that it was written by who it says it was?" And of course, these apocryphal writings could not, so they were not given the status of Scripture. You've got enough discernment to do that yourself. Like I say, just pick up a copy of one of these apocryphal gospels. You don't even have to read very much of it. Just read a few sentences, and you'll say, "No, these are not the words of Christ."

So was it either written by an apostle (such as Matthew, John, Peter, or Paul), or was it written by somebody like Mark or Luke who were not technically apostles (who weren't ones of the 12), but they associated with apostles; they interviewed; and, they sat at their feet." I imagine that when Luke wrote something, he said, "Hey, Paul, would you look this over and tell me if it's OK with you?" Everything that Luke wrote or whatever Mark wrote was under the authority and approval of an apostle.

1. **Consistent with Revealed Scriptures**

Secondly, is it consistent with revealed Scripture? Isaiah 8:18-20 says, "Behold, I and the children whom the Lord has given me for signs and wonders in Israel, from the Lord of hosts who dwells on Mount Zion. When they say to you, 'Consult the medians and the spiritists who whisper and mutter,' should not a people consult their God? Should they consult the dead on behalf of the living? To the law and to the testimony (that means the Old Testament writings that they had then), if they do not speak according to this Word, it is because they have no dawn or no light." So whenever someone claims to have a revelation from God, if it doesn't go right along with (if it isn't consistent with) the revelation that we already do have, throw it out.

The Roman Catholics have a series of 12 books which they call the Apocrypha, which are stuck between the Old Testament and the New Testament, and they say that it's Scripture. However, it has not always been considered Scripture. In fact, very few people took it seriously as Scripture until 1545 at the Council of Trent. At the Council of Trent, the Roman Catholic Church had gone out on a limb. Martin Luther and the reformers were saying that it's not right to pray for the dead, and it's not right to try to earn salvation by works. Roman Catholic theologians had refuted them (guess what?) with passages from the Apocrypha.

For example, 2 Maccabees 12:45 says something like, "It is a good and wholesome thing to pray for the dead." But people with discernment, all throughout history, with very few exceptions (I think Augustine accepted the Apocrypha as Scripture, and maybe a few others), but the overwhelming majority of spiritual leaders throughout the centuries have said, "No way," until the Roman Catholic Church had to. This was because they had built many of their doctrines on the Apocrypha. And so they said, "Yes, it's Scripture. It belongs in the Bible." But it isn't Scripture, because it isn't consistent with what God has already taught in His revealed word, because God does not contradict Himself. It may be OK to read for history; it has some pretty good stories in it; and, maybe it has some good moral lessons, but not divinely revealed inspired Scripture.

1. **Accompanied by God's Power**

The third criterion is: Is it accompanied by God's power? You can think of this as a slippery concept. It is almost a subjective concept. When you read it, is it spiritual food for you? I mean, you go get a copy of the Apocrypha or a copy of the Gospel of Thomas or the Gospel of Phillip. You may read a little bit of it and say, "Did this feed my soul? Did this feed my spirit? Do I want to get up every morning and read several chapters in this book and ask the Holy Spirit for inside wisdom and try to apply it? Let's take it even further. Are these the words of life?"

In John 6:65, Jesus was teaching people two things. He taught them that He was the only way to salvation, and then He taught the doctrine of election: "As a result of this, many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore. So Jesus said to the twelve, 'You do not want to go away also, do you?' Simon Peter answered Him, 'Lord. To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." If you're a born again believer indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and in fellowship, you don't have to have a whole lot of maturity, and you don't have to be a great Bible student to have enough discernment to recognize the Word of life.

Do you remember the Age of Aquarius back in the early 1970s? There was a book going around called The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus. I had only been a Christian for a little while, and I saw that, and I thought, "Oh, boy, this is something I need." It was divided up into chapters and verses, and it was supposed to be an ancient book. I don't know whatever became of it. But I read a few sentences, and I thought, "These are not the words of the Lord Jesus Christ. These are not words of eternal life." Well, Hebrews 4:12: "The Word of God is alive and powerful." It doesn't take you long to read a little bit in these apocryphal books and say, "No, this is not alive and powerful."

We could look at a lot of Scriptures talking about the power of the Bible. You can look in your own experience. A lot of Christians date their big change from just being a superficial Christian to building some spiritual maturity to the time that they really started taking the Word of God seriously, and trying to fill their mind with it: taking it in every day; listening to some tapes; reading the Bible on their own; and, meditating on it. It just doesn't work with any other book – even good books. They just don't have the words of eternal life.

I heard a story told for the truth by a student at Dallas Theological Seminary a few years ago. He was a man from India, and he said he had lost his Bible once. He put a notice on the bulletin board, "If you find the New Testament with my name in it, please communicate with me at this address because it's very dear to me, and I would like to have it back, and I will give you a reward." He waited so long and no one returned his Bible. In these third world countries, you just don't walk down to Family Christian and pick up two or three Bibles. They're hard to come by. So he was very disappointed that he had lost his Bible. After a good while, no one had returned it to him. So he just marked it down as being lost.

One day a man came up on a motor scooter and he said, "I know where your Bible is. If you will get on my motor scooter, I will take you to your Bible, and you can have it returned to you." So he accepted the offer. He got on the motor scooter, and the man took him out to a remote village and showed him the church in their village, and introduced him to some of the elders of the church. He said, "You know, this is a new church. We never had a church here. We didn't know anything about the gospel. Someone found this New Testament, and started reading it. They gave it to the elders of the village. Each night we would get together, and the elders would take turns reading this New Testament to us. We became saved, and we founded a New Testament church."

In Mutiny on the Bounty, you remember this true story about how these men overcame their captain and marooned themselves on an island. The rest of the story is that they became so wicked and so vile that they were murdering each other. Finally, one of the men said, "This has got to stop. Nobody's going to be left if we let this continue. So he started reading the Bible to them, and they changed. They brought order and peace to their society.

In another story, a book was written about World War II. Some American prisoners of war that the Japanese had in prison were just very demoralized. So one of their officers had a New Testament. The man was not even a believer, but he said, "We've got to bring some hope and some morale to our men. So let's start reading from the New Testament." When they did, there was a drastic change, so much so that the man who suggested it in the first place became a believer, along with several others. After the war, he went to seminary and became a military chaplain.

We could go on and on. I could tell you true stories one after another. You have experienced it yourself. If you haven't, I invite you to. Just get into the Word of God. Get it in you, and you will see that it is life transforming. It is accompanied by the power of God. Any particular book may be a good book, and it might be a good read, but if it's not accompanied by the power of God, and if it isn't life transforming, it isn't Scripture. So that's the third one. Is it accompanied by God's power?

1. **Accepted by God's People**

Then the fourth one is, is it accepted by God's people as God's Word? In Deuteronomy 31:26, we see that Moses gave an order to the Levites, as they had the Ark (the box) of the Covenant. He said, "Take this book of the Law and place it beside the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord your God, that it may remain there as a witness against you." Well, what book was it? It was the books that Moses had written under the hand of God. It was the Bible that they had then. The people didn't always agree with it. They didn't always like it. But they accepted it as the Word of God.

Then the next generation after Moses, in Joshua 24:26, we see that Joshua wrote these words in the book of the Law of God: "He took a large stone, and set it up under the oak tree that was by the sanctuary of the Lord." People accepted Joshua's writings as the Word of the Lord.

Then we could go on. We could read of Samuel's writings being accepted as the Word of the Lord. We find something interesting in Daniel 9:2: "In the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, observed in the books the number of the years which was revealed as the Word of the Lord to Jeremiah, the Prophet." Jeremiah was a contemporary of Daniel. Jeremiah was alive when Daniel wrote this. Jeremiah was in Judah, and Daniel was in Babylon. But somehow Daniel got a hold of a copy of Jeremiah's book, and he said, "Hey, this is the Word of the Lord. This is written by a prophet. So he started studying it. All throughout history, not everybody, but those with spiritual discernment have recognized the Word of the Lord and have accepted it. So as the apostle Paul says, "The Scriptures can make you wise unto salvation."

Also, let's look in the New Testament. 1 Timothy 5:18 will just illustrate my point a little more fully. The apostle Paul is talking about paying the preacher: "For the Scripture says you shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing." That's from Leviticus in the Old Testament. Then he says, "And the laborer is worthy of his wages." That's from Luke 10:17. Luke recorded that as one of the sayings of Jesus. So the apostle Paul is quoting Luke. He says, "Yes, that's Scripture. I put it right next to the Hebrew Scriptures of Leviticus."

In 2 Peter 3:14, the apostle Peter writes, "Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by him in peace, spotless and blameless, and in regard, the patience of our lord as salvation." Now, listen to this: "Just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, wrote to you. As also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things in which are some things hard to be understood, which the untaught and the unstable distort as they do also the rest of the Scriptures." So what's the apostle Peter saying here? He's saying, "The writings of the apostle Paul are Scripture. People misinterpret them just like they do the rest of the Bible." So Peter accepted the writings of Paul. He said, "Yeah, they're kind of hard to understand. If they were difficult for Peter to understand then don't feel bad if we don't understand everything at first." He says, "Yes, the writings of the apostle Paul are Scripture, and I place them all on the same level as all the other books in the Bible."

So were the books accepted by God's people? I'm not talking about some lunatic fringe somewhere. But were they accepted by mature Christians with discernment? Did Christians look at these and say, "These have the words of eternal life?" There was really not much discussion (not much debate at all) about the canon of Scripture among believers, again, until the Council of Trent in 1545, about the so-called Old Testament Apocrypha, or what Roman Catholics have between the Testaments. The books that the New Agers (the people who believe The Da Vinci Code) are holding out to us, they say, "This is where the truth is, not in your so-called Bible." They were never even considered. They were never thrown out of the Bible because they were never in it to begin with. They were never even considered seriously by the people who had some spiritual discernment, the leaders of the church.

The only debates, when we read about the councils of Hippo and Carthage and the Second Council of Nicaea, when there was discussion about whether a book should be in the Bible or not, do you know what it was about? It was about James, because some people thought that James taught salvation by works, when James said, "Faith without works is dead." So they had doubts as to whether it was inspired Scripture. Also, 1 Peter and 2 Peter: there wasn't much discussion about 1 Peter, but 2 Peter was written years later. Some people said, "The vocabulary is different and the writing style is different. I just don't believe it was written by Peter." But after discussion, they decided, "Well, you know, in 20 years or so, a guy can change his style and learn different words. He probably used a secretary for 1 Peter, and wrote 2 Peter himself." So these were the only discussions. Hebrews: Some people felt uneasy about Hebrews being in the Bible because the human author was not identified. Others said, "Oh, don't worry about it. It's got to be the apostle Paul. Just read it and you'll see that these are the words of God. They're the words of eternal life." So it was agreed, "Yes, it does belong in the Bible." There was some doubt among a few people about Revelation. John was probably 98 or 99 years old when he wrote it. There were people who said, "The apostle John couldn't have written this. He was dead long before this was written."

But as far as there being any controversy about these pseudepigrapha or apocryphal books, nobody seriously brought up the question. So people today who say we should take these seriously are revealing their ignorance. And it's up to us to explain to them (gently), and to tell them the truth, as we have done here. We'll close with remembering the words of the Savior in His high priestly prayer of John 17:17: "Sanctify them (us, the believers who were to come) in the truth. Your Word is truth."

Leon Adkins, 2003

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