The Legitimacy of the Canon of Christian Scripture

by

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Introduction

The reliability of the Bible is paramount to a belief in Christ. A lack of acceptance of this reliability puts believers in the difficult position of not knowing how to weigh common Christian beliefs with an authoritative document, and even more detrimental, can greatly affect the growth of the relationship between a Christian and God whereby limiting their ability to achieve their life's purpose. The Bible must be fully recognized by Christians as the inspired and inerrant word of God if they are to fully embrace the lifestyle of faith in Jesus. Anything less makes every doctrine and verse suspect. This can further push doctrine into nothing more than social activities or good feelings.[1]

Every follower of Jesus needs to have a firm belief in the scriptures used to guide their lives. A lack of teaching on these basic principles has created confusion within the body of Christ spawning ideologies that refuse to accept all biblical text as inspired, inerrant, or infallible. Some of these ideologies are misguided attempts of young believers attempting to rectify differences between what they read and what they see in everyday life. Other ideologies are purely heretical and destructive to the lives of believers who fall prey to their perspectives. Inerrancy of scripture must be established in order to validate doctrine, which is necessary for the defense of the faith.[2]

Part one of this study will investigate biblical legitimacy showing the scriptures are inspired by the Holy Spirit, inerrant in their original form and language, and infallible in their trustworthiness. This will be accomplished through an analysis of historic theological viewpoints of the church showing a common thread of belief from the church fathers to modern times,

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[1] Walter Conner, *Christian Doctrine* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1937), 11-12.

[2] Conner, 14.

modern theological viewpoints that continue historic beliefs along with contrasting viewpoints of traditional orthodoxy, and the legitimacy of the canon of scripture in its translation and reproduction throughout the centuries. This methodology will refute ideologies that do not accept the full truth of the Bible, equip believers with a solid foundation and necessary faith to completely accept the written word of God, and further equip believers to utilize scripture in fulfilling their God-given purpose.

Part two will show connections between the original disciples of Jesus and the early church fathers who led the church for the first four centuries during which time the canon of scripture was compiled and approved. Historical documents will be utilized to establish these connections and show that the early fathers were highly respected within the church, learned directly from the disciples of Jesus, or through a hierarchy of leaders through several generations, and had the requisite knowledge to determine the legitimacy of documents penned by the disciples of Jesus, the Apostle Paul, and potentially others. This work will also include a review of cultural norms which add to the process of how the New Testament documents were validated.

In the course of the Christian faith, many believers will at some point ponder how the canon of scripture came to be in its current form, especially the New Testament documents, and who the people were that selected the specific books for inclusion. A follower of Christ must have faith in Jesus and faith that the available Scriptures contain the written word of God. Naturally, new believers have many questions which need to be answered to establish a solid foundation. How can one apply Scripture to their life if they do not understand who wrote it, why it was preserved, and why it was accepted as inspired by God?

Part I

Definitions

It is important at the outset to define and contrast common terms used in the discussion of the accuracy and reliability of scripture. One cannot properly interpret ancient text if they do not first understand the author, the translation process, how it was copied over the centuries, and why multiple translations appear to have contradictions with each other, or at least differences of opinion between theologians in the meaning of the text in the original language. The absence of the stone tablets hewn by Moses, or the original animal skins he used to pen his first five books, creates a question of accuracy in the process used to copy texts over several millennia. And the same question rings loudly with the other ancient books of the Bible. Three terms have surfaced to answer these questions and provide assurance to followers of Christ today that the book they so heavily rely on is actually reliable. The three terms to define are the inerrancy of scripture, the infallibility of scripture, and the authority of scripture.

The inerrancy of the Bible establishes that the scriptures in their original form and language contain no errors, and when properly interpreted according to their original meaning, contain absolute truth.[3] This includes historical events, timelines, genealogies, directions, sermons, prophecies, and every other bit of content within each book. This, of course, raises many speculative questions regarding the original form and how what is available today can be viewed as reliable if the original ancient manuscript is not available for comparison. This leads to the second definition where inerrancy is considered a more minor issue.

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[3] David M. Beegle, *Scripture, Tradition, and Infallibility* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1973), 175-176.

Infallibility is closely linked to inerrancy and means the contents of the Bible are perfect when related to its purpose, even if some textual errors exist.[4] Expounding on that definition, it can be said no word spoken by God can be inerrant and His meaning and purpose carry through an individual even when the individual themself is subject to the possibility of committing errors. This definition leaves room for the possibility of minor mistakes in translation and copying processes as long as the original intent of the scripture is still presented.

This is where the debate between inerrancy and infallibility comes into play. If the Bible in today's form cannot be considered wholly inerrant, how many errors can be accepted before the entirety is considered unusable? The current state of scripture is certainly not at this level. Any minor discrepancy highlighted in one translation is corrected in updated versions or newer translations as research of ancient documents yields a clearer understanding.[5] Does choosing infallibility over inerrancy show a lack of faith in God's ability to protect the process? Certainly not. Some have proposed the Bible is "divine in origin" and "human in form.".[6] This view allows the wisdom of God to inspire the right person who will properly convey His message. Accepting either inerrancy or infallibility greatly relies on one's faith in believing the scriptures convey the word of God. This is the core belief that allows for either of these perspectives to be held. The inspiration of the Bible means specific people were influenced by God in supernatural ways that caused them to record divine truths and revelation.[7] The scripture was given for the era they

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[4] Roger Olson, *The Mosaic of Christian Belief: Twenty Centuries of Unity and Diversity* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2016), 106.

[5] Norman Geisler, William Roach, and J Packer, *Defending Inerrancy: Affirming the Accuracy of Scripture for a New Generation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2012), 296-297.

[6] Olson, 100.

[7] Larry Hart, *Truth Aflame: Theology for the Church in Renewal*, Rev. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 51.

were currently living in as well as for all future generations. This is most clearly articulated in Paul's second letter to Timothy which declares all scripture is "inspired by God" (2 Tim. 3:16 [NASB95]). The Greek word here, *theopneustos,* literally means God-breathed. God breathed out His inspiration into the hearts and minds of humans so we would have guidance and direction for our daily lives, how we should interact with others, and most importantly how we should love and pursue God. Acknowledging scripture is inspired by God then leads to an acceptance of its authority for individual lives.

The authority of the Bible means the scriptures contained within, because they are inspired by God, and are authoritative for, not just every Christian, but every member of humanity.[8] This is an inherent truth shown throughout the scriptures. Returning to the previous passage from 2 Timothy, the verse continues to reveal the purpose of the inspired scripture is for teaching, reproof, correction, and training (2 Tim. 3:16 [NASB95]). No other book can legitimately claim divine authority and no teaching of man can rise to the same level. This, of course, is also related to believing in the divine inspiration of the scriptures and can be tied to beliefs of inerrancy or infallibility.

Inerrancy and infallibility are not interchangeable terms, though some have used them interchangeably at times. They hold slightly different meanings, and each also has been subdivided into phrases such as partial infallibility or limited inerrancy providing Christians a perspective of accepting the possibility minor technical discrepancies may exist in translations, or allowing for accommodation of currently understood scientific discoveries, without allowing it to complicate their pursuit of knowing the One who inspired the scriptures in the first place.[9]

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[8] Hart, 50-51.

[9] Geisler, Roach, and Packer, *Defending Inerrancy*, 15.

Each of these has been discussed throughout history with theologians taking different positions at times, but total inerrancy has been the most commonly held orthodox belief throughout the centuries of the Christian faith.[10]

One final definition of heresy is necessary to contrast what has occurred in more modern denominations. Heresy is defined by Joseph Kelly as the "conscious deviation from a publicly proclaimed teaching of a religious group or church."[11] This definition, of course, assumes the church's position on a topic is fully accurate according to scripture. In topics where the teaching of the church has been more fluid, less defined, or only commonly accepted, the term heterodoxy is applied to show disagreement with a teaching.[12] Heresy generally applies to having differing beliefs from established orthodoxy. In the case of inerrancy, where orthodoxy has been well established for more than 1,800 years, one could argue leaving this viewpoint shifts someone into a place of heretical thinking. A look at the historical theological positions will shed more light on the subject.

Historical Theological Positions

History is full of examples of theologians approaching this topic from different perspectives. The majority of early church fathers believed and promoted the inerrancy of all scripture; this will be discussed in-depth in part two. The common ideology was that Holy Spirit does not make mistakes and the people who chose to record His inspired words did so without error. To allow for error in the original writings is to say the entire canon is tainted and

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[10] Geisler, Roach, and Packer, *Defending Inerrancy*, 15.

[11] Joseph Kelly, *History and Heresy: How Historical Forces Can Create Doctrinal Conflicts* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2012), 10.

[12] Kelly, 10.

unreliable. This is an untenable position in the realm of Christian faith because the entire belief system is built upon the foundation the Bible is the word of God on which all orthodoxy is based.

Thomas Aquinas, regarded as one of the preeminent theologians of his era, and who was later canonized by the Catholic church, wrote extensively on the topic of the sacredness of scripture.[13] He held to a strict position of inerrancy in that he believed it was impossible for the human authors of canonized books to have made any errors in what Holy Spirit inspired them to write.[14] He held the Apostles in such high regard that he could not accept the possibility any of their writings contained content God did not intend to have included.

Aquinas' belief was that those who were given authority to pen scripture did so through divine revelation.[15] His argument is expounded from his views on God's perfection. Since God is perfect, He did not err in His inspiration of the scripture, as he has not erred in anything He has ever done.[16] God does not provide error-laden revelation, so the writings of the Apostles, according to Aquinas, were perfect by extension. He connected his honor for the scripture to his belief that what was included in the canon were the only books he could view as perfect.[17]

Aquinas also argued a believer's faith rests on those who wrote scripture. If the scripture itself is flawed with errors, how can a believer in Christ know what to follow or accept as legitimate Holy Spirit inspiration? For him, it was a matter of truth. Truth could be accepted and

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[13] Timothy Smith, *Thomas Aquinas' Trinitarian Theology: A Study in Theological Method* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 13-14.

[14] Saint Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica of Thomas Aquinas* (London: Burns, Oates & Washburne, 1942), I, q. 1, a. 8.

[15] Aquinas, I, q. 1, a. 8.

[16] Aquinas, I, q. 4, a. 1.

[17] Aquinas, I, q. 1, a. 8.

followed without question. Authors of other books could not be held in the same light and could only be seen as writing from their own life experiences and human knowledge.[18] Aquinas, did not, however, discuss the possibility of errors from copies or translation work.

St. Augustine also wrote in an earlier time about the topic of inerrancy. His belief was similar to that of Thomas Aquinas, and likely informed Aquinas' position. In his letter to St. Jerome, responding to some of Jerome's questions and theological positions, Augustine pointedly wrote to the idea that nothing in scripture could be considered false. His notion was those who God used to perform the writing of scripture did not write anything that was false.[19] He argued from the point of Galatians where Paul declared he was not lying in what he was sharing with the church at Galatia (Galatians 1:20[NASB95]).

Augustine further opined that, if Paul was not lying in this instance, it could be certain he was not lying when writing other passages of scripture.[20] From his viewpoint, any admission to even one element of false content in the Bible creates a slippery slope of allowing for other elements to also be considered false.[21] If this is the case, how can anyone trust any portion of the scripture? Of course, this was in a much earlier era of the church and not far removed from the canonization of scripture approved at the Council of Carthage in AD 397.

Turning attention towards a protestant view of this subject, Martin Luther argued, as earlier church fathers, to the sacredness of scripture as God's word.[22] He took seriously the

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[18] Aquinas, I, q. 1, a. 8.

[19] Saint Augustine, *Saint Augustine Letters*, vol. 1, The Fathers of the Church (The Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 173-174.

[20] Augustine, 173-174.

[21] Augustine, 174-175.

[22] John D. Hannah, ed., *Inerrancy and the Church* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984), 110.

importance of following what was established in the scriptures and held firmly to the notion that the ultimate role of scripture is to point to Christ.[23] He accepted the possibility that scripture could be misinterpreted or misunderstood and also affirmed its power and authority as written.[24] Leaders of the faith have consistently held to the viewpoint of inerrancy over the course of more than 1500 years of Christian history. And John Hannah also points out that "practically everybody" in Luther's era affirmed the idea of *sola scriptura*.[25] This belief led to seeing the Bible as inerrant, based on the simple and already discussed principle that God does not make mistakes.

John Calvin followed in Martin Luther's footsteps in teaching and asserting a position of the inerrancy of scripture. This is seen in many of his writings where he defined scripture as "the pure word of God," "unerring light," and "free from every stain or defect."[26] No record exists showing Calvin's direct use of inerrancy in his arguments, but he does use infallible at multiple junctures which carried a similar definition in his time. Calvin consistently taught the reverence of scripture and the importance of elevating the Bible to a proper position in all matters, even to the point of defending elements of the creation story when challenged by the evidence of science discovered in his era.[27] He was staunchly and unashamedly in the camp of inerrancy.

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[23] Hannah, 112.

[24] Hannah, 113-114.

[25] Hannah, 115.

[26] Norman Geisler, ed., *Inerrancy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1980), 391.

[27] Geisler, *Inerrancy*, 392-393.

It is evident up to this point that inerrancy was the standard belief from the time the canon was formally adopted all the way to the period of the reformation, and this belief continues to be held to this day by many branches and denominations of the Christian faith. This brings up serious concerns about how scripture would be handled if it was not considered inerrant. Scripture in its original form could not contain any errors because it was divinely given by Holy Spirit to be written, collected, and used by all believers for the rest of human history. If the original authors erred in their writing, the whole of scripture would be tainted and unreliable. No single part could be trusted for discipling believers, maintaining the function of the church, or pointing out heretical viewpoints. The body of Christ would likely divulge into a Wild West-style religion where every new leader would create their own rules and expectations for believers.

Holding to inerrancy in original form does not mean the acceptance of perfect translations and copies throughout the centuries.[28] People can certainly make mistakes, even when exercising meticulous care when copying or translating large volumes of content. This would push the conversation into the infallible category. It is important to note again that some have used infallible and inerrant interchangeably at times. As defined earlier, these two terms are similar but have differences in how potential errors are viewed. An error from the process of copying is not the same as an error in the original inspiration. This type of error can be acknowledged and corrected without the entire Bible being tossed out.[29] As time has progressed into the 21st century, more recent theological positions have expressed variations to these two terms as well as newer ideas of not accepting either as legitimate.

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[28] Harold Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible*, God and Politics (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), 161-162.

[29] Lindsell, 162.

Modern Theological Positions

More modern arguments in the past 100 years have continued with the orthodox view of inerrancy holding the most weight. Harold Lindsell has highlighted the teachings of several theologians who have continued in recent years to promote inerrancy from the perspective of what is seen in scripture. F.C. Grant clearly stated that the human authors of the New Testament operated as if everything in scripture was from divine inspiration.[30] John Warwick Montgomery specifically pointed out Jesus' use of Old Testament scripture and never put any of it "under criticism."[31] And George Duncan Berry further asserted that no theologian for fifteen hundred years even considered the possibility of anything other than inerrancy.[32]

Norman Geisler and William Roach summarize the thoughts of some theologians who have proposed shifting away from total inerrancy toward a more limited inerrancy viewpoint. Clark Pinnock decided to only accept inerrancy with scriptures related to salvation while taking a more cautious approach to what he refers to as "marginal matters."[33] Bart Ehrman also shuns the view of inerrancy primarily because the original manuscripts have not survived through the centuries causing him to take the position God did not want to preserve His words for future generations.[34] And Andrew McGowan argues quite aggressively against inerrancy because, in his view, it implies scientific precision, was not mentioned in the early creeds and does not have

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[30] Lindsell, 44.

[31] Lindsell, 44.

[32] Lindsell, 45.

[33] Geisler, Roach, and Packer, *Defending Inerrancy*, 41.

[34] Geisler, Roach, and Packer, *Defending Inerrancy*, 55.

a great deal of historic weight behind it.[35] This last point has already been shown to be incorrect within this research.

On the opposite side of the spectrum, some denominations have completely disavowed the Bible and have leaped into a form of Christianity mostly opposite of any mainline denominations in existence today which causes it to not look like Christianity at all. It is one thing to prefer infallibility over inerrancy and another thing altogether to consider all scripture to be full of errors and unreliable. These are more extreme cases and are less the norm. The other commonality is a shifting away from total inerrancy on topics that do not seem to fit currently known scientific or geographical research.[36]

In 1962, the board of Fuller Seminary declared they no longer believed in the inerrancy of the Bible setting off a firestorm of debate over the next 15 years which led to some faculty leaving the school.[37] The heart of the issue for Fuller centered around the issue of accuracy when it came to science.[38] Their leadership could not accept the accuracy of biblical accounts where the science of the day disagreed; they sided with partial scientific discovery over the scripture. This debate eventually led to the creation of the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, with the goal of ensuring the Bible continued to be used as the authority in Christian doctrine and to support the historical view on inerrancy.[39] Fuller seminary continues in their viewpoints today, but others have taken an even greater departure from recognizing the divine inspiration of biblical texts.

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[35] Geisler, Roach, and Packer, *Defending Inerrancy*, 146.

[36] Geisler, Roach, and Packer, *Defending Inerrancy*, 19.

[37] Geisler, Roach, and Packer, *Defending Inerrancy*, 18.

[38] Geisler, Roach, and Packer, *Defending Inerrancy*, 19.

[39] Geisler, Roach, and Packer, *Defending Inerrancy*, 19-20.

Liberal Protestantism takes the approach that divine truth cannot be found within the pages of a historic book, or books, but is only recognizable in the continual work of the Holy Spirit within communities.[40] This "divine truth," according to their theology, is not based on scripture or the revelation given to people, but on a simple "awareness of God" which does not require specific words or forms to understand, appreciate, or live out.[41] This form of Protestantism does not hold to inerrancy or infallibility and instead categorizes the Bible as a witness to "respect of human greatness."[42] They hold a more sociological view of humanity and attempt to frame a broader moral and spiritual value system in comparison to, and sometimes contrary to, the canon of scripture. It can be observed that shifting away from inerrancy or infallibility leads to an even greater separation from orthodoxy.

The beliefs of the Unitarian denomination started by denying Christ's and Holy Spirit's place within the Trinity as they broke away from the Congregational church in New England.[43] Their merger with the Universalist church blended the beliefs of two churches into one and as time went on, they crept further away from traditional orthodoxy disavowing many more key doctrines of the faith.[44] The denomination today has no belief in heaven or hell, the resurrection of Christ, or the virgin birth. They have essentially become apostate with heretical viewpoints and nothing of their organization or meetings resembles any form of true Christianity.[45]

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[40] Francis Schaeffer and James Montgomery Boice, *The Foundation of biblical Authority* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 67-68.

[41] Schaeffer and Boice, 68.

[42] Schaeffer and Boice, 69.

[43] Lindsell, 143-144.

[44] Lindsell, 144.

[45] Lindsell, 144.

Not everyone who has chosen to move away from the view of the inerrancy of scripture has fallen into apostasy or heresy. It would be a foolish notion to make such a statement. There are, however, as Lindsell points out, several problems which are created from these shifting viewpoints that need to be seriously analyzed. First, it would be very difficult to stop the slide of "theological deterioration" if inerrancy is abandoned.[46] Once it is accepted that the text of the Bible is unreliable, every doctrine based on that text can be unraveled and rewritten to suit the reader's desired interpretation and lifestyle. This ideology can easily continue into future generations, where each new generation allows for a small eroding of belief until the entire canon of scripture is called into question.[47]

The second problem Lindsell highlights is the issue of reversal. He ponders the possibility of a church or denomination which abandoned inerrancy to ever return to that table. History has shown this to be a virtual impossibility with little to no evidence of any organization reversing the course and returning back to an acknowledgment of biblical accuracy and legitimacy after choosing to set aside the possibility of inerrancy.[48] Once that path is taken, it will likely lead to the modification or elimination of sound doctrine, exampled by the previously discussed Unitarian and Universalist churches moving towards an ideology more in line with the world's perspective than with those of the kingdom of God.

Holding to inerrancy allows for a continuation of sound theological practices while giving it up also creates the possibility of giving up the same sound theological teaching.[49] A course correction is needed early in the decision process if the church wants to maintain a pure

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[46] Lindsell, 142.

[47] Lindsell, 142-143.

[48] Lindsell, 143.

[49] Lindsell, 143.

focus on God's kingdom principles. Challenges to the legitimacy of scripture need to be rooted out as soon as they begin to appear to keep this spiritual slide from the beginning. There appear to be two roots to this issue. The first is that the canon is unreliable because the earliest manuscripts no longer exist or have yet to be discovered.[50] The second is the reality that so much of the church today has been greatly influenced by the world's perspectives and desires that it has shifted away from true worship of God in order to create a more comfortable and acceptable environment for parishioners who are seeking a religious experience. The first root can be removed through a short analysis of how the canon of scripture came to be compiled and accepted for thousands of years prior to anyone laying a claim of errant works.

Legitimacy of Canon

Peripheral to this topic is the creation of the Canon of Scripture as one needs to first accept that process before accepting inerrancy or infallibility. Evidence exists of a fully developed Old Testament canon in existence by at least 200 BC.[51] This is the canon Jews would have accepted and used in the synagogue and their religious training schools. It is also the canon Christ himself quoted from, or referred to, on numerous occasions. What greater legitimacy is there to scripture than the Messiah quoting from those books? Jesus quoted from or referred to 14 out of 39 of the Old Testament books.[52] And the New Testament has 247 quotes or references from the Old Testament. It is clear the early church fully accepted the Old Testament canon, which is the same used by Christians today. This is further bolstered by the discovery of

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[50] Geisler, Roach, and Packer, *Defending Inerrancy*, 55.

[51] R. Laird Harris, *Inspiration and Canonicity of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1957), 154.

[52] Gleason Archer and Gregory Chirichigno, *Old Testament Quotations in the New Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983), xix-xxii.

the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947 which have shown great accuracy with previously discovered manuscripts.

The Dead Sea Scrolls gave scholars a boost in textual criticism as these manuscripts have been determined to have been written prior to 100 BC, making them the oldest available manuscripts of the Old Testament.[53] Prior to their discovery, the oldest available manuscripts dating from the 8th century.[54] This provides an excellent point for comparing the accuracy of content written close to 900 years apart. Fragments of every Old Testament book, with the exception of Esther have been found among these scrolls.[55] In each case, the comparisons have shown close to identical text in older and newer documents with only minor variations in sentence structure and grammatical flow.[56] These archaeological findings show a great degree of care was given to the process of copying scrolls. So much so, that the now oldest manuscripts support and affirm the Masoretic text of manuscripts previously available.

Turning to the New Testament, it naturally follows one would need to accept the legitimacy of the New Testament canon in order to accept some arguments regarding the Old Testament's legitimacy. The New Testament canon has been widely accepted by Protestants, Catholics, and Eastern Orthodox churches and there has been no serious debate about what should or should not be included since the time of Athanasius.[57] This is evidenced by the "Easter

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[53] Charles Pfeiffer, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), 26.

[54] Pfeiffer, 106.

[55] Pfeiffer, 106.

[56] James VanderKam and Peter Flint, *The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Their Significance for Understanding the Bible, Judaism, Jesus, and Christianity* (San Francisco: Harper, 2002), 104-153.

[57] Harris, 201.

Letter" sent by Athanasius in 367 A.D. where each of the 27 books in use today was listed.[58]

Each book of the New Testament was discussed and agreed upon by the early church fathers and

determined to be inspired by Holy Spirit based on particular criteria including the apostle's

claims within their writings and the fact the writers were chosen by Christ.[59] To deny any part of

the canon is to throw away common church belief which has held sturdy since approximately

370 A.D. Part two of this study will take a more nuanced look at the books of the New

Testament to answer why the 27 New Testament books were chosen, why some were excluded,

and why the people who compiled the canon had the legitimacy to do so.

Focus on the Main Thing

Perhaps, instead of raising objections about the canon which were long ago refuted and

resolved, believers should be focused on living in intimacy with their King. It is only in this

place where the fullness of revelation about His word can come into a believer's heart. Christians

need to be so enraptured with the love of Christ that they desire to sit at His feet in a place of

continuous worship. He is King of the universe and deserves all adoration and praise. The focus

of the modern era has turned towards making church services comfortable for potential new

believers and working hard to not offend anyone who may walk through the doors. This tends to

take the focus off Jesus turning a church service into a social club instead of a place for worship

and discipleship. Many modern churches have become too influenced by the world causing much

of what the scripture requires to be set aside for feel-good services full of leadership training

instead of actively equipping the saints for service (Eph. 4:11-12). Returning to the place where

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[58] R.A. Baker, "How the New Testament Canon Was Formed," *Church History 101*, last modified 2013, https://churchhistory101.com/docs/New-Testament-Canon.pdf, 10.

[59] Harris, 221-223.

Jesus is the main thing, worshipping Him is the priority, and working within His kingdom to transform the world, would shift believers away from arguments about the inerrancy of the gospel as they see the truth of it lived out every day in their own lives.

Part II

Impact of Early Church Fathers

Many historical documents show direct connections between the remaining eleven disciples of Jesus and later church leaders in the first century, as well as indirect connections with additional church leaders into the second and third centuries. These connections help to establish legitimacy in how the early church fathers selected the original books of the canon and who was allowed to be involved in the process. It stands to reason that those leaders discipled by the disciples of Jesus carried forward an eyewitness account of the events that took place in the first few generations after the ascension of Christ. It also stands to reason that they would have intimate knowledge of events which allowed them to validate the various letters and documents that became the New Testament of the Bible.

Three of these early church fathers, Polycarp, Papias, and Ignatius, were purported to be disciples or close acquaintances of the Apostle John as well as having regular contact with some of the other original disciples. Irenaeus, the Bishop of Lyon, in *Adversus haereses,* references Polycarp's connection to the Apostle John on multiple occasions. First, Irenaeus stated that Polycarp was installed as the bishop of the church of Smyrna by Christ's disciples who were in Asia.[60] He also mentioned Polycarp was instructed by the disciples and alluded to Polycarp

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[60] Saint Irenaeus, *Five Books of S. Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, Against Heresies*, trans. James Keble (Oxford: J.Parker, 1872), 208.

spending a significant amount of time with many of them during his long life.[61] Certainly,

anyone who spent this much time with the disciples of Jesus would have learned much about

Jesus' teachings and would have shared all he learned with those he discipled himself.

Irenaeus again references Polycarp when disclosing that he was a friend of Papias, who in

turn was known as a "hearer of John" who was either discipled by the Apostle John or at least

heard his teachings.[62] And, in a letter Irenaeus wrote to Florinus, he again disclosed Polycarp's

direct connection to the Apostle John as well as showing how much the church leaders revered

Polycarp.[63] All of this evidence shows that Polycarp was an eyewitness to much of the work of

the disciples as they spread the gospel of Jesus throughout the region. Polycarp was able to take

what he had learned from the disciples and recount it as he taught others to follow Jesus in the

same manner.

Irenaeus, for his part, living into the late second century, learned directly from Polycarp,

but his own writings in *Against Heresies* do not disclose specific timeframes and they allude to

Irenaeus being younger when he heard Polycarp teach.[64] Irenaeus shares that he was young when

he first encountered Polycarp, but because Polycarp lived into his early 90s before being

martyred, many in the second century had the ability to learn from him directly.[65] This is

valuable information because the influence of Polycarp and the passing on of his direct

knowledge from the teaching of the disciples would have established solid theological

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[61] Irenaeus, *Five Books of S. Irenaeus,* 208.

[62] Irenaeus, *Five Books of S. Irenaeus*, 528.

[63] "Fragments from the Lost Writings of Irenæus," *New Advent*, accessed April 25, 2022, https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0134.htm, 2.

[64] Irenaeus, *Five Books of S. Irenaeus,* 208.

[65] Irenaeus, *Five Books of S. Irenaeus,* 208.

viewpoints and consistency in discussing the authorship and authenticity of certain portions of the New Testament. Irenaeus, in his epistle to Florinus, also discussed his personal recollection of hearing Polycarp share the things he learned from the disciples.[66] Polycarp is one who successfully carried forward the message during the first and second centuries and could legitimately speak to the authenticity of the disciple's teachings.

Papias, the Bishop of Hierapolis, as evidenced in the recovered fragments of his writings refers to the daughters of Philip, and also mentions he had little contact with the disciples of Christ, except for John.[67] This confirms that Papias also studied under John or at least learned from him in some way. Papias goes on to give some insight into how the books of Matthew and Mark were written with Matthew originally writing his gospel in Hebrew and Mark, as "Peter's translator" accurately recording what he remembered from Peter, but not in chronological order.[68] The little surviving information penned by Papias gives us great details about two of the original gospels from someone who had had close contact with some of Christ's disciples, putting him in the category of a highly reliable witness to the later canonized books.

Ignatius may have also been a disciple of the Apostle John, but this is based on tradition and left to speculation as very little written content on his relationship with the disciples or Polycarp exists. One letter from Ignatius to Polycarp shows they were acquaintances, and this may be the foundation for the tradition that, as friends, it was likely they were both associated with the Apostle John.[69] This has not been independently verified by any additional sources, but

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[66] "Fragments from the Lost Writings of Irenæus," 2.

[67] George Anson Jackson, *The Apostolic Fathers and the Apologists of the Second Century* (New York: Appleton and Co., 1879), 119-121.

[68] Jackson, 121.

[69] J.H. Srawley, *The Epistles of St. Ignatius* (London: Society for promoting Christian knowledge, 1910), 54.

the letters of Ignatius do bear some resemblance to letters written by the disciples themselves, showing at least some secondary influence.

Moving into the third century, Photius lists Hippolytus, the Bishop of Pontus, as a "pupil of Irenaeus" placing him into the continuing discipleship line from the Apostle John.[70] Hippolytus is also one who detailed where the twelve disciples, as well as Paul and the additional 70 disciples, ministered during their lives and how many of them died.[71] It should be noted that Hippolytus, along with many of the early church fathers, challenged heresies espoused by others and wrote treatises that challenged the heretical viewpoints of their day. Those who learned from the disciples and from those who succeeded them worked tirelessly to maintain the purity of the gospel. These early church fathers followed in the tradition handed down by the Apostle John, and at least one additional father of the church is recorded as having connections to Jesus' disciples.

Clement, the Bishop of Rome, is reported by Irenaeus as having "seen the blessed apostles," spending time with them and being greatly influenced by their teaching and traditions.[72] Eusebius, the Bishop of Caesarea, refers to Phil. 4:3 when speaking of Clement as a "co-laborer" with the Apostle Paul.[73] And, Origin also makes a similar reference to Clement in that he was a "disciple of the apostles" while discussing the end of the ages.[74] Clement of Rome

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[70] Saint Photius, *The Library of Photius* (London: Society for promoting Christian knowledge, 1920), 121.

[71] "On the Apostles and Disciples," *New Advent*, accessed May 3, 2022, https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0524.htm.

[72] Irenaeus, *Five Books of S. Irenaeus,* 207-208.

[73] Saint Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History, Books 1-5*, The Fathers of the Church (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 143.

[74] G.W. Butterworth, trans., *Origen on First Principles* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 89-90.

was one who church fathers in the second and third centuries looked to as an authoritative source of sound doctrine, likely because he sat at the feet of the disciples to learn all that they had learned from Jesus. Who better to learn from than the ones who walked daily with Jesus for several years?

Each of these leaders had enough contact with the disciples that they would have gleaned much wisdom from their teaching in person as well as from the written letters sent out to the churches. It is logical to conclude since their teachings are referenced well into the third century and beyond, that they continued the same theological perspectives as penned by the disciples and promoted the need for holy Christian lifestyles. Their connections to those who personally walked with Jesus gave them a great degree of legitimacy with adherents to the faith, even to the point of agreement in fighting heresies and excommunicating heretics whose viewpoints muddied the theological waters. In many of their writings, these early church fathers referenced the letters that later became part of the official canon of Scripture. Every follower of Jesus should take comfort in knowing that leaders in the first two centuries had enough first-hand knowledge available to know these letters were legitimately written by the disciples and the Apostle Paul.

Scripture Used by Early Church Fathers

In addition to their relational connection to the disciples, the early church fathers referenced works written by the disciples and the Apostle Paul in their own letters to churches in regions during their tenure as bishops. The use of this content in the first and second centuries as authoritative doctrine to teach members of the church establishes the acceptance of these documents as inspired by the Holy Spirit at a very early time in history. The Muratorian Canon, an ancient list of New Testament books, was not even solidified until somewhere between 142

and AD 157, which included at least 21 of the current New Testament books. This took place

after the death of Papias and Ignatius, and close to the death of Polycarp, all of whom quoted

from these texts.[75]

Polycarp, in his letter to Philippi, quotes from 17 New Testament documents and one

apocryphal document.[76] Content from more than 60% of the eventually finalized canon was used

by a church father in the first century. The fragments remaining of Papias' work show some

agreement with Polycarp with references to five New Testament books.[77] And Ignatius, in his

many letters, referred to 18 of the New Testament books and one apocryphal book.[78] Both of

these bishops also used the gospels and epistles as authoritative documents in their teachings.

Irenaeus continued in this tradition by referencing 21 of the New Testament books and he is the

only one of these four who referenced Titus, Hebrews, and Revelation.[79] Hippolytus is left off of

this list as he was not yet born when the Muratorian Canon was finalized. The table below shows

the works each of these early church fathers cited.

Father	Cited Works
Polycarp	Matt., Mark, Luke, Acts, Rom., 1 Cor., 2 Cor., Gal., Eph., Phil., 1 Thess., 2 Thess., 1 Tim., 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 1 John, Jude, and Tobit.
Papias	Matt., John, 1 Cor., 1 Peter, and 1 John.
Ignatius	Matt., Mark, Luke, John, Acts, Rom., 1 Cor., 2 Cor., Gal., Eph., Phil., Col., 2 Thes., 1Tim., 2 Tim., James, 1 Pet., 1 John, and Sirach.
Irenaeus	Matt., Mark, Luke, John, Acts, Rom., 1 Cor., 2 Cor., Gal., Eph., Phil., Col., 2 Thes., 1 Tim., 2 Tim., Titus, Heb., James, 1 Pet., 1 John, and Rev.

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[75] Kevin Kaatz, *Voices of Early Christianity: Documents from the Origins of Christianity* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2013), 87.

[76] Jackson, 80-86.

[77] Jackson, 120-121.

[78] Jackson, 66-74.

[79] Saint Irenaeus, *The Writings of Irenaeus*, trans. Alexander Roberts and W.H. Rambaut (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1869), 22-280.

Followers of Christ should be encouraged by the fact that key leaders in the church early on in Christianity recognized the legitimacy of much of the New Testament Scripture used by the church today. Their connection to the disciples helps with the validation that the gospels and epistles later included in the different canons were authored by whom they are named after. A verification this early in history, and recorded in historical documents, should give any student of the Bible great confidence in knowing the words they are reading were written during the first century through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. This truth can further be bolstered by looking at the cultural practices of storytelling in the first century.

Cultural Practices that aid biblical Legitimacy

Kenneth Bailey in his studies of Middle Eastern culture asserts that the synoptic gospels are legitimate and contain accurate information due to the oral traditions practiced in the Middle East during the first century and beyond.[80] People who lived in Middle Eastern countries during the first century practiced an art of storytelling known as *haflat samar*, which Bailey shows is the way the community preserved its historical accounts of events.[81] These gatherings pulled the community together so that the elders could pass on their wisdom and knowledge to the younger generation and the shared stories could continue to be retold, without any changes, for many generations. The tradition of Jews reciting the exodus from Egypt is a great example of this type of process where the story has been retold for thousands of years, continuing to this day, and is still done so very accurately.

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[80] Kenneth E. Bailey, "Middle Eastern Oral Tradition and the Synoptic Gospels," *The Expository Times* 106, no. 12 (1995), 363.

[81] Bailey, "Middle Eastern Oral Tradition and the Synoptic Gospels," 364.

Within this process, Bailey notes that the community would quickly correct anyone who tells a story incorrectly, as the accuracy of the story is incredibly important.[82] People could not simply change the story to make themselves more prominent, cut out details they found less important, or modify other elements. The story known by the group must be recited correctly or the one telling the story would be shamed as a result of the correction. Bailey shows that the community-controlled the recitation and leaders within the community also controlled who was allowed to tell the more important stories.[83] The village elders recognized some events were too important for just anyone to recite and must only be done so by the right person, especially when it dealt with, what Bailey refers to as, the "community's identity."[84] This is a level of controlled recitation not common in Western societies where many people are unable to recall events from several weeks past, let alone that which occurred several years earlier. Bailey also discusses the types of stories that would be told in the *haflat samar*, which adds even greater emphasis to the particular topic of the legitimacy of Scripture.

As with many ancient cultures, Middle Eastern culture contains many different proverbs that would be recited in these types of settings. Bailey shared one example of 4,500 unrecorded proverbs which were known and shared strictly by oral tradition.[85] Another common type of recited content is "story riddles," in which Bailey suggests Solomon's decision between the two women with a baby (1 Kgs. 3:15-28) and the woman apprehended for committing adultery (John 7:35-8:11) as potential examples.[86] The goal of each of these within the tradition is to share the

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[82] Bailey, "Middle Eastern Oral Tradition and the Synoptic Gospels," 365.

[83] Bailey, "Middle Eastern Oral Tradition and the Synoptic Gospels," 365.

[84] Bailey, "Middle Eastern Oral Tradition and the Synoptic Gospels," 364.

[85] Bailey, "Middle Eastern Oral Tradition and the Synoptic Gospels," 365.

[86] Bailey, "Middle Eastern Oral Tradition and the Synoptic Gospels," 365.

right element of wisdom for the right situation with the sometimes goal of solving a difficult

problem that seems to have a viable solution. Poetry also fits into these community conversations

and is often recited even by those who are illiterate because, as Bailey once again points out, the

oral tradition works well even if someone does not know how to read or is not formally

educated.[87] This leads to the final commonly recited content in these community gatherings of

stories and parables.

Jesus taught in many parables, and perhaps the reason why is because He knew the

culture of the region would lead them to continue reciting these parables for many years to come.

Bailey teaches that stories are the most common "form of discourse" within Middle Eastern

society.[88] It is an interesting dynamic that is drastically different from Westernized cultures

where information more commonly comes from written content, or content recorded using other

mediums. Oral testimony is more often used in courtroom testimonies than in family gatherings

where one recounts the history of their great, great grandparents traveling the Oregon Trail to

settle in the west. But the oral history is a critical component of Middle Eastern culture,

especially in the time of the early church, and would have played an important role in both the

spread of the gospel and the critical analysis that ensured the stories were recounted correctly.

There are nuances within the *haflat samar* on how much control is placed on the shared

narratives which Bailey lists as no flexibility, some flexibility, and total flexibility.[89] Not

allowing any flexibility means that the content must be recited perfectly, in the correct order,

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[87] Bailey, "Middle Eastern Oral Tradition and the Synoptic Gospels," 365.

[88] Bailey, "Middle Eastern Oral Tradition and the Synoptic Gospels," 365.

[89] Bailey, "Middle Eastern Oral Tradition and the Synoptic Gospels," 366.

without any missing or added elements.[90] Just one thing out of place will elicit a rejection response from those sitting around the campfire. Total flexibility, on the other hand, allows for a lot of creativity and is reserved for unimportant daily conversation, jokes, and other immaterial content that has no significant bearing on the life or history of the community.[91] No one will be shamed if someone changes the punchline of a joke or plays a trick on their unsuspecting uncle about what was eaten for dinner. In-between these two extremes, Bailey discusses how stories are allowed some flexibility that allows the one sharing to shorten or lengthen particular elements of the story as a way to draw attention to specific detail.[92] Even within the allowed space for this type of flexibility, no details can be changed. A character may be left out to focus on just a portion of the story, but the main line and purpose of the story must remain intact, or else the reciter risks the rejection of the rest of the group.

In the telling of the gospel story by the authors of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the community would allow for the stories to be told in different orders and focus on specific events the reciter found more important, which would account for the minor differences in each of these gospels. But the community would hold the reciter's feet to the fire to make sure the stories were told accurately. It is likely that the eyewitnesses to the life of Jesus and the disciples would have been the first to tell these stories, and perhaps were present when others also recounted the same stories. It is also plausible that if one of the gospel accounts, after being written, was found to contain errors or embellished content, it would have never been allowed to be copied.

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[90] Bailey, "Middle Eastern Oral Tradition and the Synoptic Gospels," 366.

[91] Bailey, "Middle Eastern Oral Tradition and the Synoptic Gospels," 366

[92] Bailey, "Middle Eastern Oral Tradition and the Synoptic Gospels," 366.

Bailey asserts that the Christians who lived in the middle of the first century would have participated in this type of activity regularly and would have helped to control the content of the narrative.[93] If for no other reason, the community would have at least provided the control mechanism because it was part of their tradition. But even more importantly, they would have recognized the great significance of the work of Jesus as their Messiah to be so incredibly profound that the stories must be told correctly. Bailey, in a later oral presentation of his own, states that the gospels were likely written down because the community felt the importance was too great to leave the task to anyone who was not an original eyewitness to the accounts.[94] This, once again, should give believers today a great assurance that the content of the gospels is accurate and legitimate.

The early church fathers who regularly quoted from the gospels and epistles in their teaching would have no doubt been familiar with the *haflat samar* and would have also been aware that their recitation would be challenged by others who were knowledgeable of the content being shared. This would have kept them on their toes. Bailey also provides an interesting note regarding the possibility of how Apocryphal books slipped into the mix as a result of the drastic community changes after the first and second revolts against Rome.[95] This could have lessened the number of people who remembered the stories whereby affecting the community's ability to challenge the newer stories.

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[93] Bailey, "Middle Eastern Oral Tradition and the Synoptic Gospels," 367.

[94] Kenneth E. Bailey, "The Reliability of Scripture in Light of the Jesus Seminar," *Youtube*, accessed May 4, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DkU8UCXcJp8&t=10s.

[95] Bailey, "Middle Eastern Oral Tradition and the Synoptic Gospels," 367.

The Formation of the Canon

As time moved forward, church leaders found it necessary to formalize a canon of Scripture, so everyone was living and teaching from the same authoritative list of documents or books. The first such canon, as alluded to earlier, is preserved in the Muratorian Fragment which, as F.F. Bruce notes, contains the opinion of church leaders of that time on each of these documents.[96] The formalization of a collection of authoritative documents was important for the church to be able to grow in unity, and successfully stamp out any heretical viewpoints. If any random letter or gospel purporting to be legitimate was allowed into the mix, the entirety of Scripture would be tainted. No doubt, Holy Spirit brooded over the process to ensure the proper formation. The fragment seems to agree with this notion as it notes the different beginning to each of the gospels but declares it was the same Spirit who inspired each work.[97]

Twenty-one of the twenty-seven books that make up today's New Testament were agreed upon during this pivotal gathering. The opinions of the leaders included in the fragment are almost as interesting as the books they selected to include, as many comments provide an additional layer of historical data about the actions of the authors. Bruce notes, regarding the book of Luke, that Luke himself was not an eyewitness of the events of Christ, so his authority to write a gospel derived from being Paul's traveling companion and "legal expert."[98] Much of what he wrote in the Book of Acts was speculated to only have been what he personally witnessed which is why some key events, such as Paul's trip to Spain, are not detailed.[99]

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[96] Frederick F Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1988), 159.

[97] Bruce, 159.

[98] Bruce, 161.

[99] Bruce, 163.

There were, of course, books that were not included because their authorship or inspiration was in question, or they were written at too late of a date. And there seemed to be intentionality of focusing on content written by the disciples of Jesus and the Apostle Paul during the first century. Excluding the Shepherd of Hermas is one such document and Bruce notes it was likely written in the middle or latter part of the second century making it much too new for inclusion.[100] Bruce also makes the great point that if it had been allowed in, the door would have been opened for many other newer documents to be included in the canon.[101] That is a can of worms no one seemed to want to open at that time. It is also possible that more books were included than is currently known due simply to the fact that the recovered fragment was incomplete. Perhaps they allowed all 27 books at that time. One interesting inclusion was the Apocalypse of Peter, which did not have universal acceptance and eventually fell off the list in later canons.

Later in history, around the middle of the fourth century, Eusebius laid out a listing of acknowledged, disputed, and spurious books.[102] It is interesting that even those books which were disputed were still recognized as legitimate by a majority of the leaders at that time. Unfortunately, there is no known record between the writing of the Muratorian Fragment and the historical accounts of Eusebius which provide insight into when these books fell into these categories. It is also interesting that Eusebius places Hebrews in the list of Paul's letters since that authorship has been called into question for many centuries.

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[100] Bruce, 166.

[101] Bruce, 166.

[102] Bruce, 199.

The combined list of the accepted and disputed books are the ones that make up the 27 books of today's canon.[103] These were later formally canonized and specifically listed by Athanasius in AD 367. How would the governing members of each of these canon-forming groups know about the authenticity and legitimacy of the included documents if not for the oral history and the use by the early church fathers? How would leaders in later centuries determine the authenticity of such works without having this same knowledge passed down to them from earlier generations? The formation of the canon of Scripture was the ultimate culmination of several centuries worth of validating the legitimacy of the documents and retelling the stories around community campfires.

Conclusion

It has been shown that the viewpoint the Bible is the inerrant word of God has been the primary viewpoint of the church as a whole since the earliest days when the Bible was first canonized on through to recent history. Some, in the past few hundred years, have chosen to challenge this viewpoint with the ideology that errors have crept into the text causing it to no longer have the validity it held when originally being penned. Their arguments have been soundly refuted by many theologians, though that has not changed some denominations or kept them from slipping too far away from scripture and falling headlong into apostasy.

It can be held that the Bible is inerrant in its original form and language, and through textual criticism, assurance can be given the modern available scriptures are free from errors that would cause any significant shifting of meaning from the original text. Those ascribing to inerrancy can do so with the understanding that some minor grammatical changes may have occurred, but they can also rest assured, based on comparisons with the Dead Sea Scrolls, that

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[103] Bruce, 198-199.

tested elements of the canon have come through time carrying the same message and content as it did thousands of years earlier.

Some may still choose infallibility over inerrancy as a similar term that allows for these grammatical errors, so they do not feel as if they are lying when saying scripture is without error. This is an acceptable viewpoint, though it should be tempered with the understanding that accepting the possibility of significant errors in scripture will create challenges to long-held orthodoxy and may cause some believers to begin to view the Bible as suspiciously inaccurate when it comes to matters of their own lives. Sound doctrine must be built on the foundation that God's word is inspired by Holy Spirit and "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work." (2 Tim. 3:16) Any other viewpoint leads down a slippery slope that takes believers to a place where they are no longer able to fully serve God. Agreeing with the inerrancy of the Bible, and discipling others to do the same, is the first step needed to make sure this path is never taken.

The original disciples of Jesus took on disciples of their own, teaching them according to Jesus' command to disciple others and replicate His teachings throughout the nations (Matt. 28:18-20). That next generation of disciples, having intimate knowledge of the writings of the original disciples and the Apostle Paul, used their writing as authoritative documents even long before any formalized canon of Scripture was constructed. Their intentionality to convey the message of Jesus as it was handed down to them, even to the point of martyrdom, shows how important the teachings were for the church during the first century and established a solid foundation for future generations of believers to recognize the great value of these inspired documents.

Combining these efforts with the traditional Middle Eastern culture of how stories were passed on through oral tradition that barred the content from being changed by reciters and ensured the historical accounts would continue for many generations, adds a secondary level of protection and authentication for the original documents that now make up the New Testament. The first known canon of New Testament scripture being formed within approximately 100-150 years of the original writings, with acceptance likely based on the oral tradition and the use by first-century fathers also speaks to how easily leaders in the second century could validate the authenticity of the documents.

The thread woven through each generation in the first four centuries of Christendom provided a continual mechanism of validation that every believer today can lean on for confidence that the Scriptures they use to guide their lives are authentic. The work of the Holy Spirit inspiring the authors to write, the communities to share, and the leaders to ultimately announce to the larger church body, is a work only He could successfully accomplish. It is as if the plan of God all along was to utilize the Middle Eastern culture to solidify the scriptures into what they are today. Followers of Jesus can have great confidence and assurance that the word of God in written form today is inerrant, infallible, and is the best guide anyone can use to live their lives in holiness and obedience to the King of Kings.

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