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# The Messenger



“... How beautiful are the feet of those who bring glad tidings of good things!” Romans 10:15

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A Weekly Publication of the Christians Meeting at  
Westlake church of Christ, 2291 Highway Z, Wentzville, Missouri 63385

Website: [westlakechurchofchrist.org](http://westlakechurchofchrist.org)

Sunday: AM Bible Study – 9:30 a.m., AM Worship – 10:30 a.m., PM Worship – 5:00 p.m.; Wednesday: PM Bible Study 7:30 p.m.

*Dedicated to the Proclamation of the Truth in the Spirit of Love (Ephesians 4:15)*

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Listen to PROVE ALL THINGS on 730 AM WKRE, Sunday mornings from 8:15 to 8:30.

## Confidence in the Canon

by Allen Dvorak

“The Lost Books of the Bible! Are you missing books from your Bible?” It is not uncommon to see such advertisements in the supermarket rags or at bookstores. Sometimes they hint at the idea that there has been some deliberate and/or covert effort to exclude certain books from the New Testament.

Americans love a good conspiracy! Tell me that someone (especially the government) is hiding something from me and my interest perks up. Further investigation, however, generally reveals that the advertisement is hoping to sell copies of Gnostic works or some of the apocryphal books from the period between the testaments.

However, it is certainly fair to ask these questions: Can we have confidence that the New Testament of our Bible contains all of the books that God intended? Are there any included books that don't really belong?

Since the word *canon* is commonly used to describe authoritative writings, by definition God determined the canon (via inspiration) of the New Testament. Canonization is essentially the process by which men recognized the books that were inspired of God (II Tim. 3:16).

The Roman Catholic Church claims to have “given” the biblical canon to the religious world. One dictionary of the Catholic faith states, “*The Canon of Holy Scripture* is the list, made by the Church, of the inspired books which make up the Old and New Testament.” Although the early church (in a distributive sense) did pass judgment on the canon, there are at least two problems with that assertion. First, the Old and New Testament canons were recognized prior to the existence of the Roman Catholic Church with its distinctive characteristics, the claims of that church regarding Peter notwithstanding. Second, the various church councils (e.g., the synods of Hippo in A.D. 393 and Carthage in A.D. 397) that made declarations concerning the identity of the canon were merely stating what had already been widely accepted by Christians for some time. In

summary, there doesn't seem to be any historical evidence that the canon was determined by any universal (church) organization or any sub-group of the Lord's church.

Nevertheless, the canon of the New Testament is not the result of a list of books dropped from the heavens. The recognition of that canon was certainly a process that spanned a number of years, one that began when the first books of the New Testament were written.

The churches/individuals who received correspondence from the apostles would have saved and copied such, recognizing the authority possessed by the writers. Of course, not all of the New Testament books were written by apostles, but apostolic authorship certainly provided *prima facie* evidence of inspiration (because of the Lord's promise to the apostles of Holy Spirit guidance; John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13) and thus a place in the canon. Peter gave Paul's epistles equal status with the "rest of the scriptures," (II Peter 3:15-16; it seems likely that Peter had in mind the Old Testament Scriptures).

There is also evidence that some inspired writings were being circulated (shared) fairly early in the history of the church. For instance, Paul gave instructions to his readers that they were to share their letters with other groups (Col. 4:16). Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians was to be read "to all the holy brethren" (5:27). It is thought, with obvious reason (addressed to seven local churches in Asia Minor), that Revelations was intended as a "circular" letter.

There are several New Testament books whose widespread acceptance by early disciples required more time, primarily because of doubts concerning the identity of the author. Although early "canon lists" (e.g., Muratorian Canon [c. A.D. 170]) and citations of New Testament documents as "Scripture" by early church fathers are helpful in understanding the overall process of recognizing the canon, we should probably be cautious about making broad assumptions regarding the exact timing of the conclusion of that process.

The Mormons and the Muslims make a similar claim about the New Testament. They each affirm that the sacred book peculiar to their faith has been preserved without error, while at the same time claiming that contradictions with the Bible are caused by the corruption of the Scriptures. In other words, the same God who supposedly preserved The Book of Mormon and the Quran in flawless condition was unable, however, to do the same with the New Testament! Such claims impugn the omnipotence of the God of heaven.

Is our God sufficiently powerful to cause His word to be recognized and preserved? If God could not, through His providence, cause the correct books to be recognized as canonical, was Peter accurate when he described the gospel as "the word of God which lives and abides forever" (I Peter 1:23)? I believe that we can have confidence in the canon of the New Testament.

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## News and Notes:

Remember to check the prayer list for those with ongoing spiritual weaknesses and physical illnesses.

*"...Pray for one another...The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."* - James 5:16