

What is the canon?

- “The canon is the closed list of books that Christians view as uniquely authoritative and inspired.” (Plummer, *40 Questions About Interpreting the Bible*, 57)

Why is it called the “canon”?

- The Hebrew term is *qaneh*, which literally means “reed” or “stalk.” (See, e.g., 1 Kings 14:15)
- Reeds were used as measuring sticks, so the word came to mean “rule.”
- Greeks borrowed the concept for their word *kanōn*, which referred to any sort of guideline.
- Paul used the term for the principle of trusting alone in the cross: “For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. And as for all who walk by this rule (*kanōn*), peace and mercy be upon them...” (Galatians 6:15-16)
- Athanasius (AD 353) was the first to use the word for a list of authoritative books: “But nothing is common to the Word of the ages, for He it is who is in existence before the ages, by whom also the ages came to be. And in the Shepherd (of Hermas) it is written (since they allege this book also, though it is not of the *Canon*...” (*De Decretis* 5.18)
- The Synod of Laodicea (AD 363) was the first council to adopt the technical use of the term.

Is the concept of canonization found anywhere in Scripture?

- Three times in Israel’s history *documents* were recognized as divinely authoritative. (Wegner, *The Journey from Texts to Translations*, 102)
 - Moses descended from Mount Sinai with the Book of the Covenant: “We will do everything the LORD has said.” (Exodus 24:7)
 - King Josiah read the Book of the Covenant discovered in the temple by Hilkiah: “And the king stood by the pillar and made a covenant before the Lord... to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book.” (2 Kings 23:3)
 - Ezra read the Law to Babylonian exiles back in Israel: “For all the people wept as they heard the words of the Law.” (Nehemiah 8:9)
- In the New Testament, Paul hints at what might be a “proto-canon” when he asks Timothy to bring “the books, and above all the parchments” (1 Timothy 4:13). Most scholars identify “the books” with Old Testament scrolls, and some scholars have argued that “the parchments” were a codex (the modern book form) containing Christian writings (including copies of Paul’s own letters). The Greco-Roman practice of copying one’s letters into a codex is exemplified by Cicero (*Epistulae ad Familiares* 9.26.1), a 1st century BC philosopher and orator. (See, e.g., E. Randolph Richards, “The Codex and the Early Collection of Paul’s Letters,” *Bulletin of Biblical Research* 8:151-156)

- These seminal collections of authoritative documents reveal that both nascent Israel and the early church possessed a “canon consciousness” of sorts.

What kinds of evidence exist for canonicity?

- “Grounds of canonicity are to be found in an interplay of *subjective* and *objective* factors over-ruled by Divine Providence.” (Wenham, *Christ & the Bible*, 131; emphasis added)
 - Witness to the canon of Scripture—like much of the Christian faith—must combine objective and subjective evidence.
 - For example, one of the main themes of Romans 8 is assurance of salvation. That assurance has two sources: *external* fruit (e.g., Romans 8:4, 25) and the *inner* witness of the Spirit (e.g., Romans 8:16). One without the other is insufficient and susceptible to distortion. Objective evidence confirms subjective evidence and vice versa.
 - The Christian faith in general and canonization in particular are “grounded in history and shrouded in mystery.”
 - On the objective front, inspired texts revealed *patterns of historical criteria* that Jewish and ecclesiastical historians “read out” of the texts and preserved in extrabiblical writings.
 - On the subjective front, inspired texts were said to be *self-authenticating* by various extrabiblical authors spanning geography and time.
 - With respect to divine providence, *key historical developments* forced the recognition of certain canonical realities.

What are some objective grounds for Old Testament canonicity?

- Josephus hints at three objective tests of Old Testament canonicity in *Against Apion* 1.7-8 §§37-42: *propheticity*, *orthodoxy*, and *catholicity*. (See handout)
 - **Propheticity.** “...the prophets alone had this privilege... through the inspiration which they owed to God.”
 - God generally determined which books were canonical by entrusting their message to a genuine prophet (see Zechariah 7:12) or one accredited by a prophet (e.g., Joshua).
 - A genuine prophet often enjoyed supernatural confirmation (see Exodus 3:1-3), performed miracles (see Exodus 4:1-9), or gave predictive prophecy (see Deuteronomy 18:15-22).
 - Prophets often claimed to speak for God, e.g., “thus says the Lord” (Isaiah 37:22), “the word of the Lord came” (Jeremiah 1:2), “thus says the Lord God” (Ezekiel 3:27), “declares the Lord” (Hosea 2:21), etc.

- **Orthodoxy.** “...there is no discrepancy in what is written...”
 - A message from God must agree with earlier revelation from God.
 - “If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or wonder, and the sign or wonder that he tells you comes to pass, and if he says, ‘Let us go after other gods,’ which you have not known, ‘and let us serve them,’ you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams.” (Deuteronomy 13:1-3)
 - Some books struggled initially for canonicity because of questions surrounding consistency. Orthodoxy was taken with utmost seriousness.
 - Ezekiel was thought to contradict the Law.
 - Ecclesiastes was thought to contradict David (and even itself).
 - Proverbs was thought to contradict itself (compare 26:4, 5)
- **Catholicity.** “...no one has ventured either to add, or to remove, or to alter a syllable; and it is an instinct with every Jew...”
 - Truly canonical writings will be widely circulated and eventually come to enjoy universal reception by the people of God.
 - The Old Testament canon—comprised of either 22 or 24 books, depending on specific groupings of our 39 books—was largely complete by 300 BC.
 - While canonicity of a few books was discussed well into the church age, “The substance of the canon as it existed a century and a half after the time of Ezra and Nehemiah remained unaffected by those controversies.” (R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 287)

What are some subjective grounds for Old Testament canonicity?

- Commentaries on Old Testament books found in the Dead Sea Scrolls set the Old Testament books apart from other writings of Qumran. Regard for Old Testament books was evidently higher than that of other religious works.
- Questions surrounding Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs imply that a criterion of canonicity was the spiritually transformative power of a text. Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs were both eventually found to be sufficiently edifying.
- Origen (d. AD 253) noted the spiritually transformative power of the Old Testament prophets, arguing they are “sufficient to produce faith in anyone who reads them.” (*Against Celsus* 2.1) He similarly stated: “If anyone ponders over the [Old Testament] prophetic sayings [regarding Jesus]... it is certain that in the very act of reading and diligently studying them his mind and feelings will be touched by a divine breath and he will recognize the words he is reading are not utterances of man but the language of God.” (*On the First Principles* 4.1.6)

- The Westminster Confession (1:5) affirms the inner work of the Spirit in recognizing true Scripture: "...our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority (of the Bible) is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the word in our hearts."
- Subjective tests alone are not enough to establish canonicity. They must be combined with the above tests of *propheticity*, *orthodoxy*, and *catholicity*.

What is the evidence for divine providence in determining the Old Testament canon?

- The destruction of the first temple in 586 BC forced Israel's hand to collect its Scriptures beginning with the Law and the Prophets, and the study of those texts became a new religious focus.
- After Malachi, no one impressed himself upon the nation of Israel as a prophet. Israel lamented the fact that *God had chosen to withhold his voice* from his people.
- The death of Malachi thus implicitly signaled the close of the Old Testament canon. Some contend it was closed by the time of Judas Maccabaeus (165 BC). It was definitively closed with the arrival of Jesus and the New Covenant instituted by him (see Hebrews 1:1-2).

Did Jesus have anything to say about the Old Testament canon?

- Jesus claimed that the whole Old Testament was prophetic: "Therefore also the Wisdom of God said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and persecute,' so that the blood of all the prophets, shed from the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation, *from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah...*" (Luke 11:49-51 [cf. Matthew 23:34-35]; emphasis added)
 - Abel—the first Old Testament martyr—died in Genesis 4:8. Zechariah—who was not the last Old Testament martyr—was killed in 2 Chronicles 24:20-22. Why did Jesus mention Zechariah if he wasn't the last martyr? Because Chronicles is the last book in the Hebrew Bible. Jesus was intentionally affirming the Old Testament books "from A to Z," to borrow an English idiom.
 - Jesus gave a three-fold description of the Old Testament in Luke 24:44: "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the *Law of Moses* and the *Prophets* and the *Psalms* must be fulfilled." (emphasis added)
 - Psalms was the first and largest book of the final section in the Hebrew Bible, so it was often used to refer to all of the other "writings."
 - Jesus elsewhere affirms all three parts of the Hebrew Bible, namely, the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms (or Writings).
 - Law: "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" (Matthew 4:4; cf. Deuteronomy 8:3)

- Prophets: “For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person’s enemies will be those of his own household.” (Matthew 10:35-36; cf. Micah 7:6)
- Writings: “And Jesus said to them, ‘Yes; have you never read, “Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise?”’” (Matthew 21:16; cf. Psalm 8:2)

What about the Old Testament Apocrypha?

- Does it pass the three-fold test of *propheticity, orthodoxy, and catholicity*?
- **Propheticity** is absent. There was no more prophecy in Israel after the 4th century BC, and all of the Old Testament apocryphal books were penned after that time (ca. 250 BC to AD 100).
 - No Old Testament apocryphal book claims prophetic authority. There are no “thus saith the Lord” statements. In fact, 1 Maccabees 9:27 admits it was penned when “there was no prophet seen in Israel.” Likewise, 1 Baruch 85:3 laments that the “prophets had fallen asleep.”
 - No Old Testament apocryphal book contains predictive prophecy.
- **Orthodoxy** is compromised. The acceptance of the Apocrypha at the Council of Trent (1545-63) is suspicious, since it came on the tails of Luther’s criticism of prayers and indulgences for the dead (e.g., 2 Maccabees 12:45-46 speaks of “atonement for the dead”).
 - No Old Testament apocryphal book enjoys Christological affirmation.
 - Neither Jesus nor the New Testament writers *formally* cited the Old Testament Apocrypha. Jesus might have alluded to Sirach 12:4-7 in Luke 6:27-35, but, if so, it was a *refutation* of the apocryphal passage. (Wallace, “The Apocrypha and the ‘Lost Books of the Bible,’” 4)
 - Conversely, Jesus and the New Testament writers collectively cited almost every Old Testament book a total of nearly three hundred times.
 - Trent was seemingly arbitrary in its selection of books. There were fourteen books from which to choose; they only chose eleven. Why?
 - A theological “tell”: Trent rejected an apocryphal book that argued against the efficacy of prayers for the dead. (See 2 Esdras 7:102ff.)
- **Catholicity** is lacking. Rome calls these books *deuterocanonical*, suggesting they are a second tier of writings distinct from books everyone agrees are Scripture.

- Jewish scholars at Jamnia in the late 1st century and early 2nd century rejected the Old Testament Apocrypha. The Jews—who were custodians of the Hebrew Scriptures (cf. Romans 3:2)—have always rejected the Apocrypha.
 - In fact, the apocryphal books are not found in any Hebrew manuscripts, but rather the Septuagint—the Greek translation of the Old Testament dating from the 2nd century BC.
- No canonical lists or councils accepted the Apocrypha during the first four centuries of the church.
- Cardinal Cajetan—one of Martin Luther’s biggest nemeses—rejected the Old Testament Apocrypha. So did other Roman Catholic scholars in Luther’s day.

What are some objective grounds for New Testament canonicity?

- The Muratorian Fragment (ca. AD 170)—the earliest datable list in the history of the New Testament canon—hints at three tests of New Testament canonicity: *apostolicity*, *orthodoxy*, and *catholicity*. (See handout)
 - **Apostolicity.** “[The Shepherd of Hermas] cannot be read publicly to the people in the church either among the prophets, whose number is complete, or among the apostles, for it is after [their] time.” (Note the parallel between *propheticity* and *apostolicity*.)
 - God generally determined which books were canonical by entrusting their message to an apostle (or in some cases an associate of an apostle).
 - All 13 of Paul’s letters, all four gospels, Acts, Jude, 1-2 John (and possibly 3 John), and Revelation are included in the Fragment. Each of these was authored by an apostle or an associate of an apostle (or an associate of Jesus himself). All told, 22 (or 23) of 27 New Testament books formed a core canon according to the Fragment.
 - The Fragment is missing some shorter writings and one major work: Hebrews. Hebrews had an obvious literary and theological depth, but the early church wrestled with its canonicity because of questions surrounding authorship. The church in the east accepted it because they believed that Paul wrote it (note the reference to Timothy in 13:23). The church in the west doubted Pauline authorship. This shows how important apostolicity really was. It also shows intellectual honesty, since the impulse to “rubber stamp” it as apostolic must have been strong.
 - Some canonical books were written by associates of an apostle. Papias informs us that Mark was “Peter’s interpreter.” Note also here the church’s great restraint: since the gospels were originally anonymous, why not assign Peter’s name to it since he was a primary apostle? Answer: the church exercised historical integrity.
 - The author of Revelation identifies himself as “John,” but it’s not obvious that he is the apostle by that name. Part of Revelation’s struggle for canonicity was

tied to this ambiguity. Melito argued for the apostle John as author, as did Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, the Muratorian Fragment, and possibly Papias. Dionysius rejected apostolic authorship but was eventually overruled. It's notable that Melito (of Smyrna) and Irenaeus (of Sardis) lived in cities addressed in Revelation. They thus "could well be reporting firsthand evidence." (Carson and Moo, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 701)

- 2 Peter similarly struggled for canonicity due to doubts of Petrine authorship. Jerome noted the style differed greatly from 1 Peter, but this could be explained by different amanuenses.
 - Luke was a close associate of Paul. (See Colossians 4:14; 2 Timothy 4:11)
 - James and Jude were associated with Jesus.
- **Orthodoxy.** "...according to [the general] belief."
- There was a core of apostolic teaching—often called "the rule of faith"—that was used as a measuring stick to determine what was acceptable and what wasn't, especially regarding the person and work of Christ. The assumption here is that divine truth won't be contradictory.
 - This criterion can't be used alone to *include* books. There are some sound writings—like the Didache and Shepherd of Hermas—that don't contradict cardinal doctrines in any way. Rather, this criterion is employed to *exclude* problematic books.
- **Catholicity.** "...these [writings of Paul] are held sacred in the esteem of the church catholic..."
- "In the matter of canonical Scriptures, he [the reader] should follow the authority of the great majority of catholic churches, including of course those that were found worthy to have apostolic seats and receive apostolic letters. He will apply this principle to the canonical Scriptures: to prefer those accepted by all catholic churches to those which some do not accept. As for those not universally accepted, he should prefer those accepted by a majority of churches..." (Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine* 2.21)
 - Though Paul wrote to specific audiences, he intended his writings to be broadly authoritative. (See 1 Thessalonians 5:27; Colossians 4:16)
 - By the end of the 1st century all 27 books were recognized as canonical *somewhere*.
 - Eventually all 27 books of the New Testament were universally accepted by both eastern and western branches of the church. The eastern church took longer to land on 27 books than their western brethren, but by the end of the 4th century the canon was effectively closed.
 - There are no rival canons. Indeed, "[t]here is no reasonable alternative to our twenty-seven books." (Wenham, *Christ & the Bible*, 164)
 - The earliest complete list of 27 books is usually attributed to Athanasius and his *Festal Letter* of 367. But perhaps the first complete list was produced by Origen around AD 250 in his *Homilies on Joshua* 7.1. (See Kruger, "Origen's

List of New Testament Books in *Homiliae on Josuam 7.1: A Fresh Look*,” in *Mark, Manuscripts, and Monotheism*, 99-117)

- Despite the emphasis on catholicity, there was no formal pronouncement of the New Testament canon in the early church. So, naturally, there was debate. Was 2 Peter really written by Peter (apostolicity)? Who wrote Hebrews (apostolicity)? Who wrote Revelation (apostolicity), and was it too bizarre (and thus at odds with orthodoxy)? Was 3 John overlooked by some in the universal church because it was so short (catholicity)? Questions always surrounded *apostolicity*, *orthodoxy*, and *catholicity*.
- A historical survey reveals that Paul’s thirteen letters and the four gospels were part of virtually every canon list from the start. And Acts, 1 Peter, and 1 John were generally undisputed. Hebrews and Revelation were rarely disputed. Thus, at least 22 of 27 books were widely recognized early on.
- Some books remained “on the fence.” Suppose they were removed from our New Testament canon. What would we lose? James, Jude, 2 Peter and 2–3 John (three of these are only one chapter long!). In other words, we’d lose five books comprising just eleven chapters. What cardinal doctrine would be missing? Not a single one!

What are some subjective grounds for New Testament canonicity?

- Jesus promised that his sheep would recognize his voice. (See John 10:3-16)
- Large portions of the New Testament were *read alongside Old Testament texts* in the early church’s *corporate worship*. Whether or not canonicity was immediately recognized, the spiritual authority of these writings was quickly established in the church’s sacred practice. (See 1 Corinthians 1:1; Colossians 4:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:27; Revelation 1:3; 2:7, 11, 17)
- The author of Hebrews believed the Christian message proclaimed by the apostles, referred to here as “the word of God,” to be self-authenticating, dynamic, and spiritually discerning. (See Hebrews 4:12)
- Paul said the “spiritual” knew his writing reflected a command from the Lord. (See 1 Corinthians 14:37)
- Athenagoras of Athens (d. AD 190) began his work on the resurrection like this: “The word of truth is free, and carries its own authority, disdaining to fall under any skillful argument, or to endure scrutiny through proof by its hearers. But it would be believed for its own nobility, and for the confidence due to him who sends it.” (*On the Resurrection*, chap. 1)
- Clement of Alexandria (d. AD 215) drew a line of demarcation between the words of men and the words of the New Testament when he wrote, “No one will be so impressed by the exhortations of any of the saints, as he is by the words of the Lord himself.” (*Protrepticus* 9)
- Chrysostom (d. AD 407) claimed that the Gospel of John uttered “a voice which is sweeter and more profitable than that of any harp or any music,” and that “nothing counterfeit, nor fiction, nor fable” is found in it. (*Homilies on the Gospel of John* 1.2)
- Jerome (d. AD 420) declared that Philemon’s brief, beautiful expression of the Gospel is a “mark of its inspiration.” (*Preface to Philemon*)

- John Calvin (d. 1564) writes of the self-authenticating nature of canonical works: “Indeed, Scripture exhibits fully as clear evidence of its own truth as white and black things do of their color, or sweet and bitter things do of their taste.” (*Institutes*, 1.7.2)
- The Westminster Confession (1:5) affirms the inner work of the Spirit in recognizing true Scripture: “...our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority (of the Bible) is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the word in our hearts.”
- Subjective tests alone are not enough to establish canonicity. They must be combined with the above tests of *apostolicity*, *orthodoxy*, and *catholicity*.

What is the evidence for divine providence in determining the New Testament canon?

- Heresies (especially Marcionism, Montanism, and Gnosticism) arose and spread through writings that forced the church to formally distinguish between authentic and inauthentic writings.
- Persecution arose (under Diocletian from AD 303-311) that forced the church to formally distinguish between authentic and inauthentic writings. Which writings should early Christians hand over to imperial guards for destruction? For which writings should they be willing to die?

Did Jesus have anything to say about the New Testament canon?

- Though Jesus did not directly mention a New Covenant canon, he did and said things that principally were necessary for the formation of an inspired canon.
 - Jesus gave the apostles authority by way of keys (Matthew 16:18-19), binding and loosing (Matthew 18:17-18), judging (Matthew 19:28), and forgiving (John 20:23).
 - The apostles thus functioned as “stand-ins” for Jesus, such that rejecting the apostles equaled rejecting Jesus (Luke 10:16) and receiving the apostles was tantamount to receiving Jesus (John 13:20).
- Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to teach the apostles supernaturally. The apostles were given words to speak (Matthew 10:19-20; Luke 12:12), provided recall of past teaching (John 14:26), and led into truth (John 14:26; 16:12-15). Mysteries (revelation previously unknown) were disclosed to the apostles (Ephesians 3:4-5).
- As a result, the apostles understood themselves to be authoritative revealers of New Covenant doctrine based on *firsthand testimony* (Acts 5:38). They were, in a manner of speaking, a “living canon,” and could logically have no successors.
 - Though he might not have known he was writing Scripture, Paul knew he was passing on more than tradition. Indeed, he received direct revelation from the Lord (Romans 16:25-26; 1 Corinthians 2:7, 10, 13, 16; Galatians 1:12; Ephesians 3:3-5) and expressed the “mind of Christ” (1 Corinthians 2:14-16). It could be said, then, that the Lord was speaking directly through him (2 Corinthians 11:10; 13:3).

- Paul conveyed commands from the Lord (1 Corinthians 14:37), with both spoken and *written* authority (1 Corinthians 14:37; 2 Corinthians 10:11; 13:10; Colossians 4:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:27; 2 Thessalonians 2:15).
- Since Jesus gave the apostles authority to stand in for him and sent the Holy Spirit to speak through them on his behalf, Jesus implicitly authenticated a New Testament canon.

What about apocryphal New Testament gospels and other pseudepigraphical books?

- Eusebius (d. AD 339) hints at three reasons for rejecting pseudepigraphical writings in *The Ecclesiastical History* 3.25. (See handout)
 - **Apostolicity** isn't genuine: "...writings which are put forward by heretics under the name of apostles..."
 - **Orthodoxy** is compromised: "...the opinion and tendency of their contents is widely dissonant from true orthodoxy..."
 - **Catholicity** is lacking: "To none of these has any who belonged to the succession of the orthodox ever thought it right to refer in his writings."
- Note Eusebius doesn't say the pseudepigraphical writings are "disputed" or even merely "rejected." He plainly labels them "heretical," meaning they were never candidates for canonization.
- Most of the pseudepigraphical writings are products of the 2nd and 3rd centuries. The first canon list we're aware of was compiled by Marcion, an anti-Semitic Docetist (who denied Jesus was truly human), around AD 140. Among other books, he rejected all the gospels except a heavily edited copy of Luke. Tellingly, Marcion—who, as a Docetist, was highly sympathetic to Gnosticism—had no Gnostic gospels on his list. Why? The most logical inference is that they did not yet exist.
- The New Testament rejected pseudepigraphy. Perhaps Paul's convention of ending letters by noting they were signed with his "own hand" was a way of verifying actual apostolic authorship (1 Corinthians 16:21; Galatians 6:11; Colossians 4:18; 2 Thessalonians 3:17; Philemon 19). To be sure, some letters already falsely bore his name (2 Thessalonians 2:2).
- The church fathers rejected pseudepigraphy. (See Tertullian, *On Baptism*, 17 ["3 Corinthians" in *Acts of Paul*]; Serapion, referenced in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 6.12.13 ["Gospel of Peter"]; *Muratorian Fragment* ["Epistle to the Laodiceans"]).

Is the New Testament canon closed?

- Unlike the Old Testament, the New Testament has not been definitively superseded by a newer covenant. Nevertheless, there are implicit reasons to believe the New Testament canon is closed. When we apply the criteria of *apostolicity*, *orthodoxy*, and *catholicity*, we see it's impossible for any document to be added to the canon today. Any suggested document would surely fail the text of catholicity, since it would have enjoyed neither widespread acceptance in the early church nor prevalent usage across the centuries.

- Nevertheless, some have at least implied that the Gospel of Thomas should be added to the canon and perhaps even replace the Gospel of John. *The Five Gospels*, a product of the Jesus Seminar, deemed more sayings in Thomas to be authentic than in John. Indeed, the Seminar concluded that not a single saying of Jesus in John was spoken by him. Conversely, one saying in Thomas was uttered by Jesus and thirty-five sayings reflected ideas espoused by the historical Jesus.
 - Such radical ideologies underscore the need for understanding the criteria of canonicity and how they collectively function. The Gospel of Thomas fails the tests of *apostolicity* (it's dated in the mid-2nd century—too late to be apostolic), *orthodoxy* (it claims women must become men to enter the kingdom of heaven!), and *catholicity* (Eusebius, among others, labeled the book heretical).

Concluding thoughts: three Ps

- **Process.** Our survey of the historical evidence reveals that recognition of canonicity took time. The Bible didn't fall out of heaven into the Crossway Books warehouse. Its completion was a historical *process*, and considerable time often passed between initial recognition of a canonical work and its final, universal reception by the church.
- **Patterns.** Though we have no historical documents detailing official principles of canonization, the selection of biblical books was not arbitrary. Various primary sources reveal *patterns* of criteria. *Propheticity/apostolicity* were foundational (cf. Ephesians 2:20), and *orthodoxy* and *catholicity* were of primary importance. Likewise, we find repeated statements regarding the self-authenticating nature of inspired books spanning geography and time, and both testaments are affirmed by Christ.
- **Primacy of Scripture.** The patterns of criteria revealed in our historical investigation show that the church discovered the canon rather determined it. Inspired texts possessed an intrinsic *primacy* that no extrinsic authority could match. In other words, the canon is “a collection of authoritative books” and not “an authoritative collection of books.” (Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament*, 282)
 - In his *Festal Letter* of 367, Athanasius explained why some books were included in the canon and others weren't: “Since some have taken in hand to set in order for themselves the so-called apocrypha and to mingle them with the *God-inspired scripture*, concerning which *we have attained to a sure persuasion...*” (emphasis added)
 - The church was ultimately persuaded by the evident character of canonical books. In other words, standards for inclusion in the canon were not *imposed* upon the text by the church; rather, the text *impressed* itself upon the church and *implied* the patterns of criteria that organically surfaced.
 - The canon was thus not *invented* by the church but *inherited* by the church.