

ILLUMINATION

B. NEED FOR ILLUMINATION (CATEGORIES OF SCRIPTURAL TEACHING)

1. MORAL ANTIPTHY (TRUTH KNOWN BUT REJECTED)
2. SPIRITUAL BLINDNESS (TRUTH NOT KNOWN)

C. THREE PARADIGMS REGARDING COMING TO KNOW REVEALED TRUTH

In Apologetics there are these approaches that are based on one or the other of these two understandings.

With moral antipathy, people can know the truth, so there is common ground, and you can appeal to truth that can be commonly observed. The Holy Spirit has to move their hearts to accept what is otherwise unacceptable, to soften their hard hearts to truth that they find despicable. There is a tendency in that line of apologetics to follow more of an evidential approach; you appeal to evidence and the Holy Spirit has to work in their hearts to accept the evidence and yield to it.

In the presupposition approach there is more of this recognition of spiritual blindness. People can't get it; our world views are incomprehensible, and it is impossible for unsaved people to look at the same truth and understand it correctly.

You have these two different views.

1. FIDEISM

A term given to the thought that until someone is a part of the faith he or she cannot see the truth correctly. They can't understand what it is. You are out of it altogether. What is the point of trying to convince people of the truth of the Bible or the truth of the Christian faith? Unless you believe it, you can never be convinced of its truthfulness. There is no point in even trying. You have to step into the faith, believe, and then you can understand.

That is the fideist view. That view does pretty well at accounting for the spiritual blindness group of texts. If people are blind, the first thing they need is regeneration; they need to see in order to see the truth and then embrace it. But it does very poorly at accounting for the moral antipathy texts, where you see the truth and hate it; you know what it is and you don't like it. Romans 1 is a great passage supporting this moral antipathy.

Rom 1:21 For even though they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

Fideism does a great job accounting for the blindness theme, but it does not account for the moral antipathy theme.

2. RATIONALISM

Rationalism holds the view that anyone can see words on a page and understand what they mean. Anybody can see evidence before them, or truth in front of them and get the point if they have a mind, and it is functioning normally. The problem is not understanding the concepts or seeing what the truth is. The problem is a moral

problem of not yielding to it, not accepting it. A strong advocate would be Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas developed natural theology, in which he would appeal to the created order and by that prove that God exists: his five ways. Thomas Aquinas was a firm believer that human being's minds were still intact, almost as they were in creation, even after the fall. The fall affected the moral disposition of people, but their minds could think correctly.

If you hold this rationalist view you are going to account for the moral antipathy passages and circumstances. People see it but just don't like it. But what about the blindness passages; what does Paul mean in 2 Corinthians 4:4, that the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers that they cannot see?

3. CRITICAL REALISM (A MIDDLE POSITION)

It recognizes both of the forms. The fideist form and the rationalist form are reductionistic. They are partial truths pushed to an extreme.

In Critical Realism there is an acceptance of the notion that we all can really see the world; we can really understand what is there, hence realism. It is a form of realism which says, yes, we can have access to the real world. But it is not naive realism. It is not a realism that would say; well anybody and everybody will see everything just the same way. No, it is critical realism. The term critical means that there is a recognition that we are responsible for doing something with that truth, with that evidence, with what is out there in a way that we receive it. It is possible for distortion to take place or for valuing of data to take place which effects how we understand it.

It is possible that we might not get it right because it is siphoned through biases, experiences, worldviews, and presuppositions which keep us from seeing it exactly correctly. That's true in everyday life. I will use an example. Say you went to a primitive tribe where the people believed in the spirits, were animists and believed that the spirits governed nature. So here you are standing with an animist, a primitive tribesman, and a storm comes. You, with your worldview, think of checking on the internet and seeing what the weather conditions are and what is moving the storm. You will think in terms of a naturalistic explanation of these things. The tribesman is going to think the gods are very upset, so they are bringing in this horrible storm that is going to blow everything apart. There is a sense in which the modern person who is there can see the same thing that the tribesman sees; they see clouds; they see wind blowing, trees bending, and darkened skies; they see the same thing, but they don't see the same thing. One sees it as this, and one sees it as that. But both can sort of give common agreement in describing what they see. But interpreting it is a different level of understanding.

Let me define our issue here. We should talk about illumination as it relates to seeing the truth. We should see this as both happening at the very same time.

2 Cor 4:4 in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see *the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.* (Emphasis added)

Look carefully at what Paul says the unregenerate person is blind to, what the unregenerate person cannot see: The light of the gospel of the glory of Christ. What they really can't see is the truth of the gospel that is about the glory of Christ.

Think of the people in Jesus' own ministry, i.e. the Pharisees in John 8:58.

Jn 8:58 Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am."

Did the Pharisees understand what Jesus said? Yes, we know they did because they wanted to stone him. They did not take his statement as a silly statement, that he was 2,000 years old. If that is what he was saying, they would have laughed. They knew that was not what he was saying. They knew he was claiming to be the I AM of Exodus 3. "Before Abraham was, I AM." I am YAHWEH; that is what he is claiming, so they took up stones to stone him. Would you say that they see Christ and understand what he said? Yes, but do they see Christ and understand what he said? No. Is it possible that what this is about is that although they can see Christ, they can see his miracles, they can hear his teaching, they can observe his ways with people, though they can observe all of that, what they can't see is the **glory of Christ**. They can't see Christ as glorious. If they saw Christ as glorious, they would fall down before him and worship. They would wonder in amazement at what he said and what he did. They can see him, but they can't. They get it, but they don't. Both take place at the same time. *You cannot see the truth as truth without the illumining work of the Spirit.* You cannot see the truth as truth. You can get the concept of it to the point that you say, I hate that, but what you don't see is its glory.

Think of Romans 1. The heavens declare the glory of God; the heavens are displaying the wonder and magnificence of God. What do people see, according to Rom 1:18 ff. as they look at the heavens? They don't see a creator before whom they bow; they see a universe that is theirs to do with as they want. They fashion gods of their making and create idols that they bow down to, made from their own hands. They don't see in the universe the glory of God manifest. They can see the stars and everything that is out there, but they can't see the glory of God in it. What does it take to see the wonder, the beauty, the glory of truth? It takes illumination.

CANONICITY

A. DEFINITION

This is a term that is not common in our English usage, but it is a very important term for us.

The term canon comes from the Greek word "kanon". For example, Galatians 6:16 uses this term.

Gal 6:16 And as for all who walk by this rule...

It refers to a rule, a rod or a standard of measurement. It is something by which you measure something else. A ruler is a canon, or the laws of the land are a canon. They judge or measure whether actions are appropriate or not, whether they are right or wrong. There are all kinds of different canons. A watch is a canon because it helps you judge whether the time that is stated is correct or not and so on. A canon is a rule or rod or a standard of measurement.

In theological usage, the canon or doctrine of canonicity refers to the list of books that the church recognizes as inspired and therefore as canonical. Canon is the rule, the standard, the measurement for how we should live our lives. So it is the list of books that the church has recognized as inspired. Those books (the 66 books of the Bible), then, become for us the rule and the standard by which we measure our lives.

Let's be clear; canonicity has to do with acknowledging or recognizing that these 66 books that make up the Bible have *inherent authority*. Canonicity is not the church investing these books with their authority or the church establishing the authority of the Bible. There is a huge difference there. It not because of church proclamation or because councils have met or because the church has decided that this book is authoritative, that it is therefore authoritative. No, the church merely recognizes, acknowledges, that these books have intrinsic, inherent authority because they are inspired. They are the Word of God, and therefore they are authoritative.

The doctrine of canonicity is the church's affirmation of the belief that the 66 books of the Bible comprise the only inspired books that there are. Therefore, because they are inspired, they have a unique divine authority by which we follow in our life and belief what they teach.

B. CRITERIA FOR CANONICITY

How did the church come to the decision about these 66 books being the normative standard for faith and practice?

1. WRITTEN BY A RECOGNIZED PROPHET OR APOSTLE

This did not cover every book of the Bible; in fact there are some books for which we simply do not know who the author is. Hebrews is one book that took a long time for the church to recognize; now, don't have in mind that the church just decrees that now this is authoritative. But it did take longer on some books than others for the church to come to recognize as authoritative. The book of Hebrews took longer because who is the author? By a number of other criteria, it is clear that Hebrews is inspired; it belongs in the canon, but authorship caused it to be accepted late.

But many of the books of the Bible can be accepted by the fact that they are written by a recognized prophet, by Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Moses, Paul or Peter. There are a lot of books that are pretty clear cut because of the author.

2. WRITTEN BY THOSE ASSOCIATED WITH RECOGNIZED PROPHET OR APOSTLE

These are books written by those associated with a recognized prophet or apostle who obviously learned from the apostle or prophet, and therefore the book is recognized as under his supervision or teaching or instruction. The clearest case of this would be Luke and Acts. They comprise a lot of the New Testament in terms of total pages. That is a big volume of our New Testament that is not written by an apostle, but Luke traveled with Paul and learned from Paul. As he explains in Luke 1, he worked very hard to represent accurately from sources which he gathered what was true about Christ, his life, ministry, teaching, death and resurrection.

3. TRUTHFULNESS (DEUT. 18:20-22)

Truthfulness of the writing. If anything were found in a writing that was not true, it would be dismissed as not from God. God himself said in Deuteronomy 18:20-22 that if a prophet claims to be speaking from me, and what he said is not true, then he has not spoken from me. It is not from the Lord if that is the case. You can see why inerrantists are so insistent on the accuracy of the Bible. God himself goes on record. If it is from God, it must be accurate.

4. FAITHFULNESS TO PREVIOUSLY ACCEPTED CANONICAL WRITINGS

This is where Hebrews shines, in terms of the Church's acceptance of it. Hebrews not only agrees with, but helps explain and bring to greater clarity, what has been taught in the Old Testament; it is now seen anew in Christ and the New Covenant is so beautifully displayed.

It was on this criterion that Luther wanted to throw the book of James out of the canon. "That straw epistle," as he called it, "with its justification by works doctrine." How dare James say that we are justified by works when Paul makes it clear that we are justified by faith, not by works! Read Romans 2 to be reminded of the fact that it is not James verses Paul, it is Paul verses Paul. Luther really has trouble with this particular book, but thankfully the Church didn't follow him on it. But that is what he was thinking; it just wasn't faithful to what Paul said. But in fact it is; Luther just misunderstood what James was saying.

5. CONFIRMED BY CHRIST, PROPHET, APOSTLE (E.G. LUKE 24:44; 2 PET. 3:16)

The whole Old Testament, although this was not convincing to Jewish scholars (to Judaism in the first century); the Christian Church has had no difficulty accepting the 39 books of the Old Testament because of what Jesus said in Luke 24:24-27,44. You will recall when Jesus met the two on the road to Emmaus and was talking with them.

Luke 24:24 Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just exactly as the women also had said; but him they did not see. Luke 24:25 And he said to them, "O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Luke 24:26 Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into his glory?" Luke 24:27 Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, he explained to them the things concerning himself in all the Scriptures.

That is clearly a reference to the Old Testament that was used and accepted in the days of Jesus.

Even clearer is Luke 24:44.

Luke 24:44 Now he said to them, "These are my words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled."

These are the three parts of the Old Testament: The Law, the Prophets and the Writings. Luke 24:44 is Jesus' stamp of approval on the Old Testament.

Now the New Testament becomes, as we have alluded to, a more difficult matter in some books. 2 Peter 3:16 is interesting. There is obviously an awareness in the first century, an apostolic awareness, that more Scripture was being written. Paul himself understands what he wrote was the Word of God. Peter, in 2 Peter 3:16, understands what Paul wrote as Scripture.

2 Pet 3:16 As also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand,

When he says, "hard to understand," that is comforting; you are not the only one who thinks some of the things Paul wrote were hard to understand; Peter thought so, too.

2 Pet 3:16 some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.

Paul himself refers to his own writings with language like that.

1 Thess 2:13 For this reason, we also constantly thank God that when you received the Word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the Word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.

6. CHURCH USAGE AND RECOGNITION

These letters circulated and more and more groups of Christian people were edified by these writings and came to witness together that these writings were from God.

The Church used these writings and was deeply edified by them; they were believed over time that they were from God, and so the final acceptance of the recognition of the 66 books of the Bible as Scripture took place at the Senate of Carthage in A. D. 397. That is not to say that prior to that there was not wide recognition of most of the Bible (we are talking here mostly about the New Testament; the Old Testament Books were never in question because of the dominical approval in Luke 24 when Christ says the Law, the Prophets and the Writings). Some of the New Testament books took longer for them to accept, but most of them were accepted by the first century. There were some that took longer: 2 Peter, 2 John, 3 John, Jude, Hebrews. Those took longer. But by 397, at the council of Carthage, they were accepted by the Church and have been ever since as canonical.

C. THE CLOSING OF THE CANON

The church has held for its entire history, that once the apostolic interpretation of the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus was completed, that was the end of inspired writing. The book of Revelation is usually dated the last book written in the New Testament. After that the canon is closed.

1. NO REVELATION CONTRARY TO THE GOSPEL

This eliminates about 98% of the new revelation that has come. The book of Mormon is contrary to the gospels. The Koran is contrary to the gospel. Look at the religious books and the claims that are made of them and the words of Paul just come ringing in our ears.

Gal 1:8 But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!

In terms of practical benefit, this one item rules out the vast majority of any subsequent revelation claims.

2. JESUS IS THE FINAL REVELATION

In Hebrews there is this sense of finality that comes with the revelation of Christ.

Heb 1:1 God, after he spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, Heb 1:2 in these last days has spoken to us in his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom also he made the world.

There is an intended finality to the revelation of Jesus. Everything in the Old Testament points to Christ.

Mt 5:17 Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill.

Rom 10:4 For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

Everything points to Christ; everything is pointing to this climatic revelation of Christ in the last days. That means that the revelation that God brings has to be about Christ. There is a sense in which revelation that is not focused on Christ, his kingdom, his purposes, his mission, or his church is not what God is doing. God is speaking about Christ in these last days.

3. JESUS COMMISSIONED APOSTLES TO CONVEY HIS REVELATION

We ought to think of the Apostolic witness to Jesus that gets recorded as New Testament writings as those commissioned by Jesus to teach and write what he had not finished teaching and writing during his earthly ministry. John 16 is one example; there are other statements of it but this one is particularly forceful. He is speaking to his disciple in John 16:12. Sometimes these words are taken by Christian people as speaking to ourselves, but I don't think that is the point of it. He is speaking to his disciples.

Jn 16:12 "I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.

Why couldn't they bear them; why couldn't they get it now? What happened when he ascended that would help them: The Spirit. This goes back to our discussion on illumination. I have more things to tell you, but you wouldn't get it; you could not comprehend what I was talking about. But in the very next verse he says,

Jn 16:13 But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak...

Remember the context; here is Jesus teaching them. He says, I have more things to teach you and you can't get it now, but when the Spirit comes he will speak. If you are tracking with Jesus you will understand him implying by that, he will speak my words, he will speak the teaching I want to teach you, but you can't get it now. When the Spirit comes he will teach you that.

Jn 16:13 But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own initiative, but whatever he hears,

Presumably from Jesus; I take it that is what is implied there.

Jn 16:13 whatever he hears, he will speak; and he will disclose to you what is to come. 16:14 He will glorify me, for he will take of mine and will disclose it to you.

So here we have Jesus' own testimony to the fact that there will be post-ascension revelation of Christ, by Christ, through the Spirit, to the Apostles. And by that, the church understands in ways we could have never gotten it, ways we could have never seen it, the meaning of the ministry, life, death, and resurrection of Christ. It must be after the Spirit comes because the Spirit works through these people and they teach the truth to us.

It does look like that the Apostles see themselves as having a unique authority in the church.

Gal 1:8 But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!

But this really is the gospel, the authority of the gospel as opposed to another gospel.

1 Cor 14:37 If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment. 1 Cor 14:38 But if anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized.

Here is Paul the Apostle pulling his Apostolic trump card over the prophets. I don't care if you are prophet; if you don't accept what I say, as an Apostle, you are not acceptable.

There really is a clear sense of the finality of Apostolic authority in the Church, and this is directed to Jesus' point. Why did Paul have to defend his Apostleship? Because he wasn't one of the twelve; he wasn't there when Jesus said in John 16:12, "I have many more things to teach you." Paul wasn't present. So how does this guy, who wasn't among the twelve get in? He must defend that constantly. Having defended it, he speaks with full Apostolic authority.

4. WARNING NOT TO ADD OR TAKE AWAY FROM REVELATION GIVEN

I take the warning at the end of the book of Revelation to indicate that in all likelihood that there is no further revelation about Christ that will given to the church.

Rev 22:18 I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; Rev 22:19 and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book.

This warning against adding or taking away was in the law as well. Moses said something very similar to this regard to the law in Deut 4:2. Now it is being said here in the book of Revelation. Obviously it refers to the book of Revelation. That is the clearest, most basic level meaning of this statement. The book of Revelation cannot be added to or taken away from. What is the book of Revelation? Remember how it begins.

Rev. 1:1 The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his bond-servants, the things which must soon take place; and he sent and communicated it by his angel to his bond-servant John,

I think it is arguable that we are view the book of Revelation as the final revelation of Christ.