

5. The Authority of Scripture

I have always liked this note from Kelly: Early Christian Doctrines.

"There is little need to dwell on the absolute authority accorded to Scripture as a doctrinal norm." p. 42

a. As far as we can discern, the New Testament church immediately accepted the Old Testament canon. It saw itself as the continuation of the true Israel and took Her Scriptures for its own. There is, however, a question on the apocryphal books. These were never accepted by the Hebrews but were found useful by the church. It was due,

no doubt, to their mystical and attractive presentations of divine dealings, but whatever the case, the church did make use of some of these. It seems that the fathers up until Augustine, at least, held that usage at a lower level than the Old Testament Scriptures. Irenaeus warns that those arguing with the Jews should be careful to use only the books the Hebrews will accept. By the end of the period, the western church nominally accepted the apocrypha as good reading at least while the east denied it having much spiritual value (period: Ante-Nicene).

b. The first New Testament canon was the errant one produced by Marcion and universally denounced in the church. But in the late second century we find the Muratorii canon, a listing that omitted Hebrews, Peter, James, and 3 John while adding a few others. There is no evidence that it was an "official" canon and probably only indicates some of the confusion that prevailed in those days...and it is also true that our text of it is regarded as corrupt. The first formally stated canon after the form with which we are familiar is that of Athanasius (about 365) AD but the emphasis is that the questions of what books should be listed had obviously been settled long before. As a general rule we think the New Testament canon was complete in writing about 100 AD and complete in acceptance and use by about 200 AD.

c. The exact principle of New Testament canonization is unknown--to me--and the subject is more fully discussed in another course. But it seems the church followed a concept of canonicity that was molded after the Old Testament concept. In the latter agreement with the law, fulfillment of the signs, and a Jehovistic orientation, apparently were the determining points. These seem to have been paralleled in the church age by the concepts of apostolicity, recognition, and conformity.

Eventually you will discover that a large problem in the Biblical authority field was not so much as to whether the Scripture was true or not---as to how it was to be interpreted. Hermeneutics is a much larger part of our total study than many of us realize.

6. The Authority of the Church...and this is subdivided into two sections: