

## **Lesson 5: Characteristics of Revelation** **The Collection and Transmission of Text**

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### **1.) What is at Stake**

Establishing a strong personal conviction that the Old Testament (OT) and New Testament (NT) are a message from God, and are meant to be read, understood, and followed in their directives is essential to addressing most of the modern challenges to our faith. Consider just one example – what if you were asked to explain or defend the role that women should have in public worship. How would your approach and explanation differ under the following two scenarios?

- a. The person who asks you shares a conviction that the NT has a message from God that should be followed.
- b. The person who asks you believes the NT is simply the product of the wisdom and thoughts of a few ancient men.

Would your own beliefs about the roles of women change if you shared the same viewpoint as the person in b. above? What other convictions or beliefs you currently hold would change if you decided the NT was only a man-made work?

### **2.) What the New Testament Claims and the Implications of Those Claims**

One place to start is to consider what the NT actually claims for itself and what are the implications of those claims. Review the scriptures below discussing what the NT writings say of themselves. We will examine the evidence for these claims later, but for now consider the nature of the claims:

- The writers were guided by God (the Holy Spirit) – John 16:13, I Cor. 2:10-13
- The writings are a message from God that can be understood – Eph. 3:3-5, II Cor. 1:13
- They are a consistent message that was taught everywhere – I Cor. 4:17; 14:33
- They are an exclusive and final message – II John 9-10, Jude 3

Among the implications of these assertions if true are:

- Whatever the NT says on a subject is true and should be accepted by the reader
- The NT is the only place to find some truths.

### **3.) Modern Challenges to Viewpoints of Revelation**

We have tried to establish the importance of having an accurate view of the nature of the NT in addressing many modern challenges, but the reality is there are many challenges made specifically against the idea that there is anything special about the NT

*MODERN CHALLENGES TO FAITH*  
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or even about the concept that God is trying to instruct people through a written word. Here is a partial list of a variety of those challenges:

- How can a God (supernatural being) communicate with men and women (natural beings)?
- Is the NT different than all of the other writings that claim to be inspired of God?
- The early Christians were an “oral” society and did not follow or need books.
- Related to the point above – the early Christians were predominantly illiterate and therefore only an oral tradition mattered to them.
- Gentile converts would not know or care about the OT references that are found throughout the NT.
- You (especially members of the Church of Christ) read the NT the wrong way. It doesn’t contain rules and instructions, and no one read it the way you do (like a scientific investigator) until the 16<sup>th</sup> or 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries.
- How can we know we have the right books in the NT? How can I be sure that all 27 books belong there?
- What about (fill in the blank with the name of a book like the Gospel of Thomas)? Wasn’t there a conspiracy to keep it out?
- It was the Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D. or the Council of Carthage in 397 A.D. that actually decided on the 27 books. No one agreed before this time.

Can you think of other similar challenges that are made or questions that are asked?

#### **4.) Answering Some of the Modern Challenges**

Don’t let the length of the list discourage you. There are sound answers to all of the challenges listed above. Yet the number of attacks can be daunting for someone whose faith is new or weak. And for any of us, new challenge we have never hear before, that seems to carry some logic or contain some accuracies, can be intimidating at first. In class, we will examine three challenges:

1. That we read the NT in the wrong manner
2. That the early Christians were only concerned with oral traditions
3. That there are issues with which books should be part of the NT

These may not cover your primary concerns on this large topic. Please send us questions you would like addressed in our upcoming Q&A sessions.

#### **Recommended Resources**

Gary E. Gilley, *Is That You Lord?: Hearing the Voice of the Lord, a Biblical Perspective*,

Michael J. Kruger, *Christianity at the Crossroads*

Michael J. Kruger, *The Question of Canon*