

**Text: various**

Last week I had this quote at the end of the message:

“Thus, according to the earliest Christian conceptions, canonical documents (God’s Word) are understood as God’s building plan, the means by which he structures and molds the community of faith to be his dwelling. If so, then it is clear that they would have viewed the community of faith to be, in some sense, the result of the canon, rather than the canon being the result of the community of faith.”<sup>1</sup>

How did this happen? The believers *accepted* or *received* the Word, and the Word transformed their thinking and ordered their “ecclesiology” [doctrine of the church], or, in modern terms, “how they ‘did’ church.”

The transformation of sinners into saints occurs by building individuals into a body as the “dwelling of God” — *i.e.*, the church.

Ep 2.19-22 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household,<sup>20</sup> having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner *stone*,<sup>21</sup> in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord,<sup>22</sup> in whom you also are being built together into a **dwelling of God** in the Spirit.

“If God has designed canon to transform, organize, and change a people to be the dwelling place for their covenant Lord (2 Tim. 3:16), then the covenant community must rightly recognize these books in order for them to function as God intended.”<sup>2</sup>

With all that in mind, today we are going to think about the Word of God as the starting place for our spiritual life, for the church, for even the formation of the canon itself.

**Proposition:** The Word of God establishes itself as the authority for orthodoxy by forming the very body it rules.

<sup>1</sup> Andreas J. Köstenberger and Michael J. Kruger, *The Heresy of Orthodoxy*, Kindle Edition (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway, 2010), 120–21.

<sup>2</sup> Köstenberger and Kruger, 122.

## I. The living word

Heb 4.12 For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

### A. The word gets its “life” and “power” from God

1. The reference to the “word” here must include
  - a. The OT Scriptures, so prominent in the argument of Hebrews (and formative for Israel in the OT)
  - b. The developing NT Scriptures, the driving formative force for the fledgling NT Church
  - c. The apostolic word (preaching) which, as we’ve seen, forms the basis for the written NT
2. The reference *may* include *any* faithful preaching from the written word
3. The reason for this power is that the word is “of God”
  - a. Subjective genitive
  - b. “God’s word”
  - c. Or, “the word God spoke”
  - d. Could also be a genitive of source: the point is, God’s word has power

### B. The word, being God’s word, bears God’s attributes, esp.

1. Authority
2. Immutability
3. Consistency
4. Transforming power (“the Lord said, let there be light...”)

## II. The familiar word

### A. All saints have the indwelling Spirit

Jn 14.17 *that is* the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, *but* you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you.

Rm 8.9 ¶ However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.

Gal 4.6 Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"

### B. Saints recognize the voice of their master

Jn 10.27 "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me;

1. The Word of God, received, transforms the saints into the church
2. The saints, having received the Word of God, recognize the Word by the Spirit
3. What we are arguing for is the idea that the books of the Bible are *self-authenticating*
  - a. Other factors go into our understanding of the canon
  - b. But the fact is that the canon starts with the Bible, not with the church

"Perhaps, then, we can move beyond the practice of studying the canon simply by starting in the period of the early church and then moving backward toward the New Testament. Instead, we can start our studies of canon with the New Testament itself and then move forward to the time of the early church."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Köstenberger and Kruger, 124.

### III. The received word

A. Paul speaks of this even in the process of revelation:

1 Cor 15.3 ¶ For I delivered to you ... what I also **received**

B. Paul spoke of the process continuing in his disciples:

1Th 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.

C. As the word of God, the Scriptures establish a standard

1. First, the gospel is the “canon:” the rule or standard of faith (Gal 6.16)

Gal 6.16 And those who will walk by this **rule [canon]**, peace and mercy *be* upon them, and upon the Israel of God.

2. This standard [canon] worked in the developing spiritual lives of the church

- a. Early church fathers used the term to describe the standard Christians lived by — “the rule of faith” (Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Eusebius)
- b. Eventually came to refer to the collection of sacred Scriptures held by the churches
- c. Consequently, the church fathers did not “create” or “pick” the authoritative books; they “recognized” or “received” them:

“In their minds, scriptural authority was not something they could give to these documents but was something that was (they believed) already present in these documents...”<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Köstenberger and Kruger, 121.

**Conclusion:**

**Proposition:** The Word of God establishes itself as the authority for orthodoxy by forming the very body it rules.

Your responsibility in this is to receive the word of God yourself.

You receive it by loving it, living it, obeying it, and preaching it.