

# The Origins of the New Testament Canon: Issues, Problems, and Possibilities

## #1: The Definition of the Term 'Canon': Exclusive or Multi-Dimensional?

Introduction: A Growing Scholarly Consensus on the Definition of 'Canon'

### I. The Exclusive Definition

A. The Exclusive Definition: 'Canon' is a Fixed, Final, Closed List of Books

B. Weaknesses of the Exclusive Definition

1. The term 'Scripture' already implies a degree of limitation and exclusion
2. There was never a time where the boundaries of the New Testament were 'closed' in the way the exclusive definition would require
3. This definition gives the impression that books bore a lesser authority prior to the fourth century

### II. The Functional Definition

A. The Functional Definition: 'Canon' is a collection of books used as Scripture

B. Weakness of the Functional Definition: Fails to Address the *Ontology* of Canon (what canon is in and of itself)

### III. The Ontological Definition

A. The Ontological Definition: 'Canon' is the collection of authoritative books that God gave his corporate church

B. All Three Definitions Should be Used in an Integrative and Multi-Dimensional Manner

C. A Multi-Dimensional Approach to the Definition of Canon Brings Greater Clarity to the Issue of the Canon's 'Date'

D. Multiple Definitions of Canon Correspond to Modern Speech-Act Philosophy

1. The ontological definition of canon refers to the actual production of these books and thus refers to a *locutionary* act.
2. The functional definition refers to what the canonical books actually do in the life of the church and thus refers to an *illocutionary* act.
3. The exclusive definition refers to the reception and impact of these books on the church and thus refers to a *perlocutionary* act.