

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

“The whole Bible, properly understood, has this divine purpose and effect: to communicate or display the glory of God. And this pervasive aim of the Scriptures to glorify God, in what they teach and how they teach it, reveals the handiwork of God in the writing of the Bible.”¹ -John Piper

Vox Dei

The Bible is the voice of God (Vox Dei) to his people. Although God used human authors (divine inspiration) to pen the words of Scripture, He alone is the ultimate author of Scripture. “God’s purpose in revelation is to make friends with us”²

The perfections of Scripture:

I. The Authority of the Bible:

Because it comes from God, his Word has ultimate authority over the life and doctrine of the believer. Questioning God’s word is basically questioning his character.

a. What is the Authority of the Bible?

¹ John Piper, [A Peculiar Glory: How the Christian Scriptures Reveal Their Complete Truthfulness](#) (Crossway, 2016)

² J.I. Packer

- i. Since the Bible affirms that it is the very words of God, we are to seek to understand those words, for in doing so, we are seeking to understand God himself.
- ii. We are to seek to trust the words of Scripture, for in doing so, we are seeking to trust God himself.
- iii. And we are to seek to obey the words of Scripture, for in doing so, we are seeking to obey God himself.³

b. On what authority is the Bible based?

- i. If God claims that the words of Scripture are his own, then there is ultimately no higher authority one can appeal to for proof of this claim than Scripture itself. For what authority could be higher than God? So, Scripture ultimately gains its authority from itself. ⁴

c. What are some Scriptures that support the Bible's authority?

- i. "Thus says the LORD" passages (see Ex. 4:22; Josh. 24:2; 1 Sam. 10:18; Isa.10:24; also Deut. 18:18–20; Jer. 1:9).⁵
- ii. "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. ⁶" (2 Tim. 3:16-17)
- iii. "as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction. ⁷" (2 Peter13:16)

³ Wayne A. Grudem, *Christian Beliefs: Twenty Basics Every Christian Should Know* (ed. Elliot Grudem; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 16.

⁴ Wayne A. Grudem, *Christian Beliefs: Twenty Basics Every Christian Should Know* (ed. Elliot Grudem; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 14.

⁵ 3 Wayne A. Grudem, *Christian Beliefs: Twenty Basics Every Christian Should Know* (ed. Elliot Grudem; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 13.

⁶ New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update (LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995), 2 Ti 3:16–17.

⁷New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update (LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995), 2 Pe 3:16

iv. “Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. ⁸” (John 17:17)

d. How does 1 Timothy 5:18 help make the case that both OT and NT writings are to be considered Scripture?

- i. In addition, Paul, in 1 Timothy 5:18, writes that “the Scripture says” two things: “You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain” and “The laborer deserves his wages.” The first quote regarding an ox comes from the Old Testament; it is found in Deuteronomy 25:4. The second comes from the New Testament; it is found in Luke 10:7. Paul, without any hesitation, quotes from both the Old and New Testaments, calling them both “Scripture.” Therefore, again, the words of the New Testament are considered to be the very words of God. That is why Paul could write, “the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord” (1 Cor. 14:37).⁹

e. What are some ways that Scripture says the actual words of the Bible were written?

i. The Bible says there are “many ways” (Heb. 1:1) in which the actual words of the Bible were written.

1. Sometimes God spoke directly to the author, who simply recorded what he heard (Rev. 2:1, 8, 12).

2. At other times the author based much of his writings on interviews and research (Luke 1:1–3).

- a. **They wrote under the influence of divine revelation**, but the sources and basis for their communication came from several factors. Some was from personally observed or experienced events (cf. 2 Pet. 1:16–18; 1 Jn. 1:1). Some was from reading, or researching and questioning of individuals who were eyewitnesses. He used the various writer’s backgrounds, education, and audience to influence what they wrote. God did not dictate what to write, but

⁸ New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update (LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995), Jn 17:17.

⁹Wayne A. Grudem, Christian Beliefs: Twenty Basics Every Christian Should Know (ed. Elliot Grudem; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 14.

rather moved them (influenced them) as they wrote His words.

b. God's providential oversight and direction of the life of each author was such that their personalities, their backgrounds and training, their abilities to evaluate events in the world around them, their access to historical data, their judgment with regard to the accuracy of information, and their individual circumstances when they wrote, were all exactly what God wanted them to be, so that when they actually came to the point of putting pen to paper, the words were fully their own words that God wanted them to write, words that God would also claim as His own.

3. And at other times, the Holy Spirit brought to mind things that Jesus taught (John 14:26).

ii. **Regardless of the way the words came to the authors, the words they put down were an extension of them—their personalities, skills, backgrounds, and training.** But they were also exactly the words God wanted them to write—the very words that God claims as his own.¹⁰

iii. Inspiration of the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 3:2; 1 Cor. 2:13; 1 Thess. 4:15; and Rev. 22:18-19; John 14:26; 2 Peter 1:16-18; 20-21)?

1. The term inspiration identifies that work of the Holy Spirit in which He superintended (controlled and directed) the reception (to the writers) and communication of the divine message to mankind such that the product is verbally (every word) and plenary (all of it) both inerrant and authoritative.

f. What did Grudem mean when he said “New scientific or historical facts may cause us to reexamine our interpretation

¹⁰ Wayne A. Grudem, *Christian Beliefs: Twenty Basics Every Christian Should Know* (ed. Elliot Grudem; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 14.

of Scripture, but they will never directly contradict Scripture.¹¹”?

- i. If scientific or historical facts (and I use the word facts carefully here) arise that seem to contradict the way we interpret the Bible, then since it cannot contain any errors, we must reconsider how we have interpreted that particular area.

- ii. Does anyone have a potential example of this from the past? (Galileo)

II. The Clarity of Scripture:

a. What is the clarity of Scripture?

- i. As we read Scripture and seek to understand it, we discover that some passages are easier to understand than others. Although some passages may at first seem difficult to grasp, the Bible is written in such a way that all things necessary to become a Christian, live as a Christian, and grow as a Christian are clear.¹²

b. Where does the problem lie when individuals disagree on the proper interpretation of Scripture?

- i. When individuals disagree on the proper interpretation of a passage of Scripture, the problem does not lie with the Scriptures, for God guided its composition so that it could be understood. Rather, the problem lies with us. Sometimes, as a result of our shortcomings, we fail to properly understand what the Bible is specifically teaching.¹³

III. The Necessity of Scripture:

¹¹ Wayne A. Grudem, *Christian Beliefs: Twenty Basics Every Christian Should Know* (ed. Elliot Grudem; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 15.

¹² Wayne A. Grudem, *Christian Beliefs: Twenty Basics Every Christian Should Know* (ed. Elliot Grudem; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 16.

¹³ Wayne A. Grudem, *Christian Beliefs: Twenty Basics Every Christian Should Know* (ed. Elliot Grudem; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 17.

a. What does the Necessity of Scripture mean?

i. It is not only true that all things necessary to become a Christian, live as a Christian, and grow as a Christian are clearly presented in the Bible. It is also true that without the Bible we could not know these things. The necessity of Scripture means that it is necessary to read the Bible or have someone tell us what is in the Bible if we are going to know God personally, have our sins forgiven, and know with certainty what God wants us to do.¹⁴

b. How else can we learn some things about God?

i. “General Revelation”

ii. Therefore, this “general revelation” about God’s existence, character, and moral law is given to all people; it is seen through nature, God’s historical works, and an inner sense that God has placed in everyone. It is called “general revelation” because it is given to all people in general. It is distinct from the Bible.¹⁵

IV. The Sufficiency of Scripture:

a. What does the Sufficiency of Scripture mean?

- i. Although those alive during the Old Testament period didn’t have the benefit of God’s complete revelation, which is found in the New Testament, they had access to all the words of God that he intended them to have during their lives. **Today, the Bible contains all the words of God that a person needs to become a Christian, live as a Christian, and grow as a Christian.** In order to be “blameless” before God, we just have to obey his Word: “Blessed are

¹⁴Wayne A. Grudem, *Christian Beliefs: Twenty Basics Every Christian Should Know* (ed. Elliot Grudem; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 17.

¹⁵Wayne A. Grudem, *Christian Beliefs: Twenty Basics Every Christian Should Know* (ed. Elliot Grudem; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 18.

those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the LORD!” (Ps. 119:1). And in the Bible, God has given us instructions that equip us for “every good work” that he wants us to do (2 Tim. 3:16–17). This is what it means to say that Scripture is “sufficient.”¹⁶

b. If something is not forbidden by Scripture either explicitly or implicitly, is it a sin? Why or Why Not?

- i. Not in itself, but the way our hearts view it, could make it sin.
- ii. For example, I don’t believe it is a sin to drink alcohol, but if we know that someone has an issue with alcohol and we drink it in front of them, it could easily be sinful, because we have elevated our selfish desire over love for that individual.

c. Then how could it sometimes be wrong for a Christian to drink Caffeine or attend a particular movie, if these acts are not explicitly forbidden by Scripture?

- i. Just as above, it depends on our heart motivation and whether we violate the new commandment to love one another.
- d. Why should we be content with what God has told us in Scripture in our doctrinal, ethical, moral teachings and beliefs?
 - i. First, there is no higher authority...no books, teachers, pastors, scientists, or doctors then the very words of God, so we should be content with the best information possible
 - ii. Secondly, they give us the real truth...all that is necessary

V. Review Questions:

- a. Why is it important that the Bible be the basis for our beliefs?
- b. Will the Bible definitively answer every question we bring to it? Why or why not?
- c. What is one issue that the Bible speaks clearly on? What is one issue that the Bible does not speak clearly on? How does this affect the emphasis you should place on these issues?

¹⁶ Wayne A. Grudem, *Christian Beliefs: Twenty Basics Every Christian Should Know* (ed. Elliot Grudem; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 18.

Appendix: History of the Canon and the Authority of Scripture (David L. Burggraff, Ph.D., Th.M.)

“The major contributions of the ancient church lies in the development of an authoritative canon. It was during the medieval period that the relationship of tradition to the authority of Scripture became a major issue. Then, in the sixteenth-century era of the Reformation, Luther and other Reformers promoted the view of sola Scriptura, which asserted the authority of the Bible alone over against a Catholic view of authority located within Scripture and tradition. Next, the modern era of the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries was dominated by the breakdown of biblical authority resulting from the demise of supernaturalism and the rise of critical theories regarding the origin of the biblical text. In our own contemporary period, new theories regarding biblical authority have been advanced.” (Johnson and Webber, WCB, 36.)

Canonization of Scripture

I. Development of the Canon in the Early Church (Patristic Period).

A. The concept of the Canon.

From its outset, Christian theology recognized itself to be grounded in Scripture. There was, however, some uncertainty as to what the term “Scripture” actually designated. The patristic period witnessed a process of decision making, in which limits were laid down to the New Testament – a process usually known as “the fixing of the canon.” The term canon, derived from kanon, meaning “a rule” or “a fixed reference point”, came to be used to designate a limited and defined group of writings, which became accepted as authoritative within the Christian church.

For the writers of the NT, the term “Scripture” meant primarily a writing of the Old Testament. However, within a short period, early Christian writers (such as Justin Martyr) were referring to the “New Testament” (to be contrasted with the “Old Testament”), and insisting that both were to be treated with equal authority. By the time of Irenaeus (about 140 AD), it was generally accepted that there were four gospels; by the late second century, there was a consensus that the gospels, Acts, and letters had the status of inspired Scripture. Thus Clement of Alexandria (259 AD) recognized four gospels, the Acts, fourteen letters of Paul (the letter to the Hebrews being regarded as Pauline), and Revelation. Tertullian (late 200’s) declared that alongside the “law and the prophets” were the “evangelical and apostolic writings” (evangelicae et

apostolicae litterae), which were both to be regarded as authoritative within the church.

B. The early attempts to formulate the Canon.

Gradually, agreement was reached on the list of books which were recognized as inspired Scripture, and the order in which they were to be arranged. In 367, Athanasius circulated his thirty-ninth Festal Letter, which identifies the twenty-seven books of the NT, as we now know it, as being canonical.

Debated centered especially on a number of books. The western church had hesitations about including Hebrews, in that it was not specifically attributed to an apostle; the eastern church had reservations about Revelation. Four of the smaller books (2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, and Jude) were often omitted from early lists of NT writings. Some writings now outside the canon were regarded with favor in parts of the church (for example the epistle of Barnabas), although they ultimately failed to gain universal acceptance as canonical.¹⁷

1. The Muratorian Canon dates from the late second century (160-180 A.D.) and represents the first known collection of N.T. books. By this time (late second century) the writings of the apostles were elevated to the level of the O.T. The list did not include I John and I and II Peter, Hebrews and James (the latter two perhaps because of Marcionism). N.B. The "canon" takes its name from its founder, the Italian archaeologist L. A. Muratori in 1740. He found it in the Ambrosian Library in Milan dating his copy from the 8th century.

2. Irenaeus (late 100's) in his writings as the bishop of Lyon (West) alluded to all the N.T. books with the exception of Jude and II Peter, James, Philemon, II and III John and Revelation. N.B. In only two instances does he refer to any other works as authoritative. Once to I Clement and once to Hermas, the most revered books among the Church Fathers.

¹⁷ Examples of this include the first letter of Clement (an early bishop of Rome, who wrote around 96) and the Didache (a how to manual for doing church, no doctrine), a short early Christian manual on morals and church practices, probably dating from the first quarter of the second century.

3. Syriac Version dates from the third century from the distant east (interior of Syria). The only deletion was Revelation. N.B. At this period there is no debate as to the fact of a canon, but merely its extent.

4. Origen, the greatest and most widely traveled scholar in the early church made a list of disputed books which were: Hebrews, II Peter, II and III John, James, Jude, Epistle of Barnabas, Shepherd of Hermas, Didache and the Gospel of Hebrews.

5. Clement of Alexandria disputed James, II Peter and III John. N.B. By the beginning of the fourth century two things emerge.

a. The rejected books were unacceptable because they were unknown.

b. The apocryphal writings were almost non-existent.

6. Eusebius of Caesarea, the ecclesiastical historian, disputed James, Jude, II Peter and II and III John.

C. The early attempts to codify the Canon.

The arrangement of the material was also subject to considerable variation. Agreement was reached at an early stage that the gospels should have the place of honor within the canon, followed by the Acts of the Apostles. The eastern church (Greek speaking world, while “western” means Latin speaking) tended to place the seven “catholic letters” (that is, James, 1 and 2 Peter, 1, 2 and 3 John, and Jude) before the fourteen Pauline letters (Hebrews being accepted as Pauline), whereas the western church placed Paul’s letters immediately after Acts, and followed them with the catholic letters. Revelation ended the canon in both east and west, although its status was subject to debate for some time within the eastern church.

1. In the East.

a. Athanasius of Alexandria is the outstanding figure in the Eastern Church in this regard. In the bishop’s Easter letter of 365/6, a letter to fix the date of Easter for that year after which the other festive dates would be arranged, he lists twenty-seven books as the “only source of salvation and of the authentic teaching of the religion of the Gospel.” With this he made a list of inferior books that included Wisdom,

Ecclesiasticus, Esther, Tobit, Judith, the Pastor and the Apostolic Constitutions.

N.B. This did not settle the issue in the east for Gregory of Nazianus the Cyril of Jerusalem doubted Revelation. Didymus of Alexandria, director of the school in 390, doubted II Peter. Like Athanasius, Epiphanius, bishop of Salamis, accepted the N.T. in today's form and rejected Wisdom and Ecclesiasticus. To Athanasius' opinion came Theodore of Mopsuestia, the "exegete," John Chrysostom and Theodoret.

b. The Council of Laodicea (363) was a provincial, not universal gathering of the church. The sixteen articles from the council recognized all the N.T. books with the exception of Revelation and the fifty-ninth article forbids the use of any other books in the liturgy of the church.

2. In the West.

a. Jerome has given several lists of authoritative books demonstrating the current extent of the canon. Augustine renders the same testimony to twenty-seven books.

b. The Synod of Carthage (397), actually the third in that city, under the direction of the famous bishop of Hippo determined that in the assemblies of the Church, only canonical books should be read under the name "Divine Scriptures."

c. The Fourth Synod of Carthage (419) reaffirmed the results of the previous council and appeal to the bishop of Rome (Innocent I) for his approval.

N.B. The councils at Carthage in the West under Augustine and the Easter Letter of Athanasius in the East are generally viewed as closing the canon issue. This technically is not true for these were regional, not ecumenical events. Innocent I, for example, did not put his approval upon the Synod of Carthage in 397. The issue continued through the Middle Ages into the Reformation era.

D. Criteria for Canonization.

What criteria was used in determining canon? Several criteria were used to determine the worth of the books included in the canon.

1. Generally—the internal witness of the Holy Spirit.
2. Specifically

- a. Apostolic origin or sanction.
- b. Ecclesiastical usage or acceptance.
- c. Intrinsic content.
- d. Spiritual and moral effect.
- e. Attitude of the early church.

The basic principle appears to have been that of the *recognition* rather than the *imposition* of authority. In other words, the works in question were recognized as already possessing authority, rather than having an arbitrary authority imposed upon them. For Irenaeus, the church does not create the canon; it acknowledges, conserves, and receives canonical Scripture on the basis of the authority which is already inherent to it. Some early Christians appear to have regarded apostolic authorship as of decisive importance; others were prepared to accept books which did not appear to have apostolic credentials. However, although the precise details of how the selection was made remain unclear, it is certain that the canon was closed within the western church by the beginning of the fifth century. The issue of the canon would not be raised again until the time of the Reformation.

E. The Battle with Marcion (see Johnson and Webber, WCB, 38).

Marcion, the son of a bishop, was excommunicated for immorality. By 144 he established his own version of Christianity in Rome. He taught that gospel was wholly a gospel of love, which led him to the total rejection of the OT since he saw the portrayal of God as a God of Law, not a God of love. According to Marcion, the concept of love was understood by Paul alone. Consequently, he formed a canon containing ten Pauline epistles (he rejected the Pastoral Epistles) and an edited version of Luke (he took out any portion that was favorable to the OT). It is sometimes argued that Marcion's canon forced the church to define its own. However, the canonization of the NT writings was already in process.

F. Council of Carthage (397 A.D.).

At the Council of Carthage, held in 397, the books that now comprise Scripture, both in the OT and NT, were prescribed as the limit of the canon. In this action the church acknowledged that the apostolic traditions (i.e., interpretations of Jesus and the faith) written in the Scripture and handed down by the bishops of the church constituted

the church's final authority. No other writings, synods, councils, or bishops could assert another or new authority.

“However, since Scripture was related to the church in the sense that it was its most precious possession, its truths were to be guarded, preserved, and interpreted by the church.

Consequently the creeds or the writings of the Fathers were never regarded as being on the same level of authority as the Scripture, though they were highly esteemed and honored. They were merely a summary or an expansion of the truth.” (Johnson and Webber, WCB, p. 40; see also p. 39.)