

“A Survey of Bible Doctrine”
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Chapter 2: Is the Bible Inspired?
Lesson 2

C. The Canon

1. Meaning: The word canon comes from the root word "reed" (English word "cane," Hebrew form "ganeh" and Greek "Kanon"). The reed was used as a measuring rod and eventually meant "standard." The word canon as applied to Scripture means "an officially accepted list of books," the collection of books which have passed the tests of authenticity and authority.

2. Tests for canonicity

It is important to remember that certain books were canonical before any tests were put to them. The tests only prove what is already true. The church did not create the canon, instead, it recognized the books that were inspired from their inception.

a. Authority of the writer: A book had to either be written by an apostle or backed by an apostle in order to be recognized.

b. Verdict of the churches: The agreement among the early churches as to which books were canonical was usually unanimous. No book whose authenticity was doubted by any large number of churches was later accepted.

c. Internal evidence: The books themselves should give some internal evidences of their unique character, as inspired and authoritative. Content should commend itself to the reader as being different from any ordinary book in communicating the revelation of God.

3. The recognition of the canon

a. Many believe that all 39 books of the Old Testament canon were collected and recognized by Ezra in the 5th century B.C.

b. The first church council to list all 27 books of the New Testament was the Council of Carthage in A.D. 397.

c. Individual books of the New Testament were acknowledged as Scripture before this time (1 Timothy 5:18; 2 Peter 3:16).

d. The 12 books of the Apocrypha were never accepted by the Jews or by our Lord as on a par with the books of the Old Testament. They were revered, but not considered Scripture.

D. Understanding the Bible

A proper understanding of the Bible depends on two things: (1) The illuminating work of the Holy Spirit and (2) The interpreting work of the reader.

Concerning the Bible, "revelation" relates to its content or material, "inspiration" to the method of recording that material and "illumination" to the meaning of the record.

1. Illumination: Illumination is the Holy Spirit's work in helping us understand the Bible.

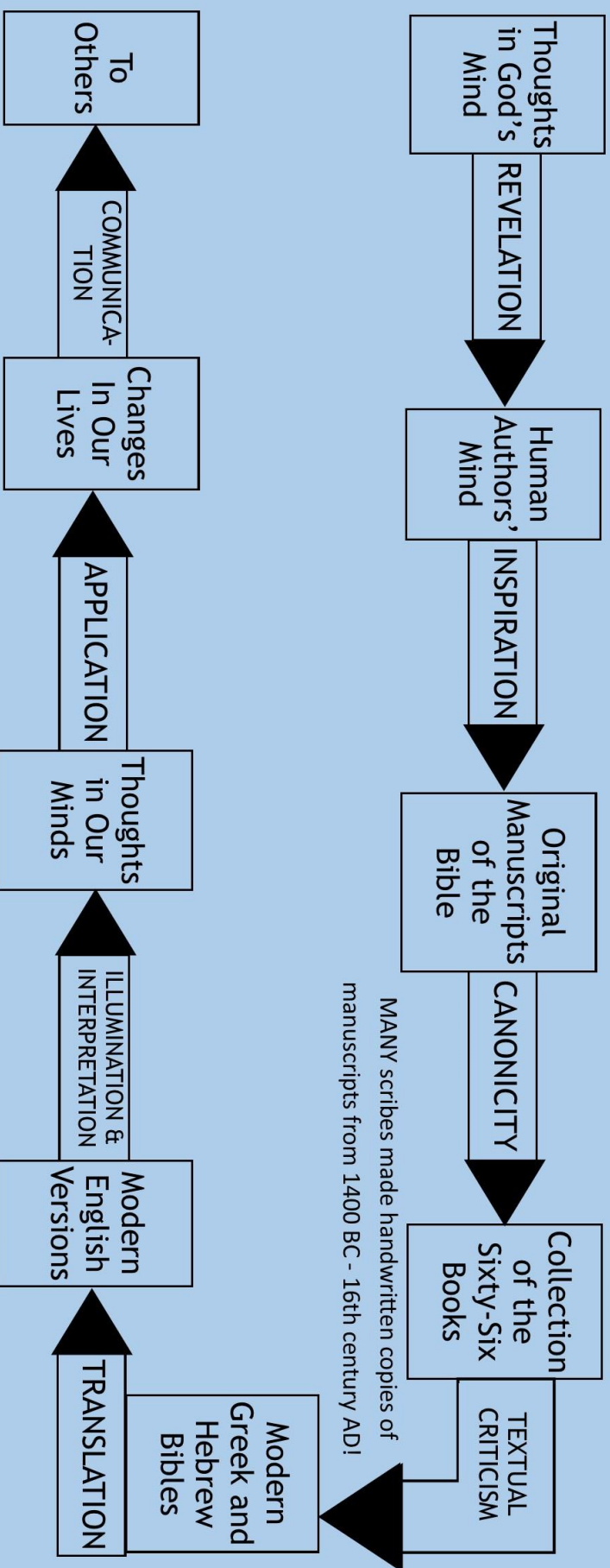
a. Unsaved people cannot experience the illuminating ministry of the Holy Spirit since he is blinded to the truth of God (1 Corinthians 2:14).

b. Christians have been promised this illumination of the text (John 16:13-15; 1 Corinthians 2:9-3:2).

Note from these two passages:

- 1). The Spirit Himself is the Teacher and His presence in the life of the believer is the guarantee of the effectiveness of this ministry.
 - 2). The content of His teaching encompasses "all the truth" (John 16:13 definite article present).
 - 3). His purpose is to glorify Christ, not Himself (John 16:14).
 - 4). Carnality in the believer can hinder (and even nullify) this ministry of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:1-2).
2. Interpretation: Illumination is the Holy Spirit's work in helping us understand the Bible, while interpretation is what we do in trying to understand the Bible.
- The most important principle of interpretation is to interpret normally or plainly. Read the Scripture as you would any other book.
- a. To interpret plainly one must first of all understand what each word means in its normal grammatical and historical sense.
 - b. Plain interpretation includes the use of figures of speech.
 - c. Always read understanding the CONTEXT of a verse or passage. Beware of Proof-texting, where the speaker takes the passage out of its context and gives it his own personal interpretation.
 - d. Recognize that the Bible is progressive revelation.
 - e. Expect the Bible to use what is called phenomenal language which means it often describes things rather than using precise scientific terms (sunrise and sunset).
 - f. Recognize the important divisions of the Bible when interpreting it. Such as Old and New Testament, different kinds of writing: historical, poetic, prophetic, narrative, apocalyptic, Biblical covenants, and the distinction between Israel and the church.

How Our Bible Came To Us



Adapted from Dr. Charles Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, page 117