

Biblical Authority

February 4, 2024

INTRODUCTION

As we seek to become a disciple-making church, we believe it is essential that we clearly articulate the following value:

Biblical Authority—We will obey and teach God’s Word humbly, faithfully, and without apology.

¹⁴ But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, ¹⁵ and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

2 Timothy 3:15-17

How Did We Get the Bible?

The Bible has been given to us from God through a process of revelation, inspiration, and canonization, guided and protected by the Holy Spirit.

Revelation—God has chosen to specially reveal Himself to mankind through His Son and His prophets and apostles.

As we read the Bible, we see that God has revealed Himself to mankind in two main categories:

- General Revelation—God has revealed Himself generally to all mankind through creation (Psalm 19:1-4; Romans 1:20) and through every person’s conscience—that is, our intuitive understanding of what is right and wrong (Romans 2:14-15) because we are made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27).
- Special Revelation—God has specially revealed Himself to His servants through visions and dreams (Numbers 12:6; Daniel 2:19), laws (Deuteronomy 29:29), audible words (1 Samuel 3:21), miracles (John 2:11), and inspiration (2 Peter 1:21). He has most powerfully revealed Himself through His Son (Hebrews 1:1-2).

Specifically, we believe that God has spoken:

- Through His Prophets (2 Peter 1:21; Acts 1:16)
²⁰ Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation of things. ²¹ For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (2 Peter 1:21)

*¹⁵ In those days Peter stood up among the believers (a group numbering about a hundred and twenty) ¹⁶ and said, “Brothers and sisters, the Scripture had to be fulfilled **in which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through David** concerning Judas, who served as guide for those who arrested Jesus. (Acts 1:16)*

- Through His Son (Hebrews 1:1-2; Deuteronomy 18:18)

In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. (Hebrews 1:1-2)

¹⁸ I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their fellow Israelites, and I will put my words in his mouth. He will tell them everything I command him. (Deuteronomy 18:18)

- Through His Apostles (2 Peter 2:16-21; 3:15-16)

For we did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. ¹⁷ He received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."¹⁸ We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain. ¹⁹ We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. (2 Peter 1:16-19)

¹⁵ Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. ¹⁶ He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction. (2 Peter 3:15-16)

Inspiration—God has sovereignly protected the message being spoken through His servants on His behalf to be the very words of God (2 Timothy 3:16a)

Canonization—The process by which the Church has recognized which writings were in fact true revelations and inspired, thus carrying authority over the people of God.

- The word "canon" comes from the Greek word *kanon*, which means "measuring stick". In other words, a standard by which we measure everything else by.
- It's important to note that the Church did not take standard writings and make them sacred, or set apart. It does not ESTABLISH canonicity.
- The process of canonization is the process by which the Church simply RECOGNIZED and AFFIRMED that these writings or messages were in fact sacred or "set apart".

OLD TESTAMENT CANON

There are 39 books considered to be inspired of God and therefore authoritative in our lives in the Old Testament:

| Law | History | Poetry | Major Prophets | Minor Prophets |
|-------------|------------------|-----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Genesis | Joshua | Job | Isaiah | Hosea |
| Exodus | Judges | Psalms | Jeremiah | Joel |
| Leviticus | Ruth | Proverbs | Lamentations | Amos |
| Numbers | 1 & 2 Samuel | Ecclesiastes | Ezekiel | Obadiah |
| Deuteronomy | 1 & 2 Kings | Song of Solomon | Daniel | Jonah |
| | 1 & 2 Chronicles | | | Micah |
| | Ezra | | | Nahum |
| | Nehemiah | | | Habbukuk |
| | Esther | | | Zephaniah |
| | | | | Haggai |
| | | | | Zechariah |
| | | | | Malachi |

Malachi, the last recognized prophet

Josephus, a Jewish historian and contemporary of the early church, wrote: *“From Artaxerxes to our own times a complete history has been written, but has not been deemed worthy of equal credit with the earlier records, because of the failure of the exact succession of the prophets”.*

Generally speaking, the standard for the Old Testament canonicity was the author had to be a proven prophet of God:

- The Old Testament had very strict standards regarding the idea of prophecy, both for the prophet himself, as well as for the people of Israel (Deuteronomy 18:19-20)

That stated, there ARE some books (e.g. Ruth, Esther, 1& 2 Kings, 1& 2 Chronicles) that we don't know who the author or authors were, nevertheless the Jewish community accepted early on and has continued for hundreds of years to recognize these books as inspired.

NEW TESTAMENT CANON

There are three basic standards for recognizing the canonicity of a New Testament book:

1. It had to be written by an apostle or one closely associated with an apostle (e.g. Luke)
2. It teaches the orthodox faith of the apostles.
3. It was widely accepted in the earliest churches as Scripture.
4. It bears evidence of high moral character and spiritual values that reflect the work of the Holy Spirit.

In AD 393, the Council of Hippo affirmed the following books as

There are 27 books considered to be inspired of God and therefore authoritative in our lives in the New Testament:

| Gospels | History | Pauline Epistles | General Epistles | Apocalyptic |
|---------------------------------|---------|---|---|-------------|
| Matthew Mark Luke John | Acts | Romans 1 & 2 Corinthians Galatians Ephesians Philippians Colossians 1 & 2 Thessalonians 1 & 2 Timothy Titus Philemon | Hebrews James 1 & 2 Peter 1, 2, & 3 John Jude | Revelation |

God has spoken. *And God continues to speak...*

Through His Church

¹⁴ Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing you these instructions so that, ¹⁵ if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.

1 Timothy 3:14-15

Questions for Personal Reflection/Group Discussion

1. What is the difference between revelation and inspiration?
2. Consider the Biblical Authority value statement. Why is important that we obey and teach God's Word humbly, faithfully, and without apology? (talk through the various ideas in that statement)
3. What does the word "canon" mean? How did the Jews and then the early church fathers decide whether a book should be included in the canon of Scripture?
4. What does it mean that the Church is the pillar and foundation of truth in this world (1 Timothy 3:14-15)?