

The Canon of Scripture Introduction

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[0:00] Well, I would think that every week when you go to church, one of the last things you do before you go out the door is to pick up your Bible and take it with you out the door.

Or to remind your children, don't forget your Bible. Or to grab it for your children who forgot it this morning, like mine did. And Aaron comes out to the van, you forgot this. And you want to make sure that you have your Bible with you.

I hope every day that you take time to read your Bible, as we often encourage you to do here. Take that Bible and spend time with it. You've heard us say here before that as we worship together, we aim to preach God's Word, to pray God's Word, to sing God's Word, and to read God's Word.

The Bible. When we say that, we're talking about this book. And we've just recited a memory verse together from the Bible.

And I would think that for most people who believe that the Bible is God's Word, that they spend more time over the course of their life with that book than with any other one book.

[1:10] So you all help me out today and tell me what is it about this book, about the Bible, that's so important. That we would center so many things around it, that we would focus on it, that we would read it every Lord's Day and preach from it.

And encourage you to read it every day. All these things. Why is this book, or the copy that you have in your hand this morning, so significant? Help me out with that. Lou.

Lou. Okay. Tells us how to be faithful to the Creator. Good. It instructs us. Why else is it important?

Jim. Okay. Excellent. Inspired by God. It's not just the words of men that we hold in our hands, but the Word of God.

Why else? This isn't a trick question this morning. Tim. Okay. Shows us how we can be saved.

Good. Chuck. Chuck. Stole it. All right.

[2:12] Good. You're thinking the same things. Jim. Jim. Amen.

Amen. It's a living and active Word. It's sharper than any two-edged sword. That's powerful. Good. Why else is it important? It's trustworthy.

Right. We don't have to wonder whether or not it's true or right or accurate. It's trustworthy because it comes from God. Good. Roger. Roger. Through the washing with water in the Word.

We read this Word and we learn from it and we learn how we should be living instead of what we have been doing. And so we can profit from it that way. It makes us more holy.

Good. Who else? Jeanette. Okay. Yeah. Yeah. We discourage in difficulty and we find the truth of God's Word to be a very comforting thing.

[3:37] Good. Okay. Excellent. All sorts of reasons that God's Word is so special, why it's so important. But have you ever asked yourself any questions about God's Word?

Where did it come from? How did we get it? How did it come to be in this form? Why are there 66 books and not 67? Or 65?

Or more or less? Why are these books in it and other books that were around when it was being compiled not in it? Maybe you've asked those questions.

Maybe not. Can I trust this Word? Our sister Cindy has already reminded us it is trustworthy. And then there's a set of different but related questions. Maybe you've been reading along in your Bible and you notice that occasionally it skips a verse.

Everybody turn with me to Acts chapter 8 this morning. Acts chapter 8.

[4:46] Why in the world when you're reading along in Acts chapter 8 the story of Philip and the Ethiopian to whom he ministers? Notice verse 36 of Acts chapter 8.

As they traveled along the road they came to some water and the eunuch said, Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized? And what you normally expect after verse 36 is verse 37.

But in my Bible, there's no verse 37. It goes straight to verse 38. And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. Now there's a footnote and there's a verse 37 down in the footnote. So maybe you've been reading. And that's not the only place that happens. Maybe you've been reading along before and said, Why does my Bible go from verse 36 to 38 with no 37?

Maybe as we've been reading the Scriptures publicly, you've been following along and you go, He skipped a verse. Why didn't he read that? Your Bible has verse 37.

[5:48] Who has verse 37 in the Bible you're looking at this morning? Okay? There's several people that have verse 37. Well, what's up with that? Why do some have it written right into the text and some do not?

In fact, why are there different translations of the Bible at all? And why do they vary so much? Why do the pastors sometimes say when we're preaching, it would be better to translate it this way? And with all of these questions running around in our heads about the book, again, can I trust it? I want to assure you this morning that there's good answers to all of those questions.

And I'll give you the answer to the biggest question right up front, and we've already said it. Yes, you can trust the Bible that you hold in your hands this morning. It's God's Word to men, and you must give it your careful attention.

I trust you know that already from the way we use the Word in this place, from the way we speak about it. But I want us to be rooted and grounded in the truth so that you can know why this book is trustworthy.

[6:52] Why we can read it and learn and profit from it. Why it is all of the things that you just described it as a few moments ago. And to be able to answer some of these other questions.

People take some of the questions we just asked, and they use them as objections against the Bible. They say, your Bible can't be true, because there's this, this, and this that is wrong with it. And there's these discrepancies here and there.

And how do you know that it's God's Word anyway? And so I would like us to be able to answer at least simply some of those questions. And so for a few weeks, probably just the month of September, maybe five weeks, but probably just four weeks, we're going to look at this subject of the Scriptures, particularly the canon.

And you see it there at the top of your handout. Don't shoot the canon. I'll tell you what I mean by that later. But the canon is simply a list of books in the Bible.

Canon can be used, that word can be used for rule, regulation, but here it's describing a list of books in the Bible. What is contained in the canon of Scripture? So we'll be talking about that some.

[8:00] We'll be talking about the history of the canon, and how it was formed, how it came to be, how we came to have this collection of books as the Word of God.

And related to that, we'll talk some about manuscripts, how they were written, how they were transmitted and passed down, how they became grouped into families, and how those become our modern translations.

And maybe at the end we'll talk a little bit about translation philosophy. That's that overview at the top of your handout there. Things that we'll look at over the next several weeks. But today we're going to talk about some foundational issues.

We're going to lay the groundwork. Probably nothing new, nothing shocking this morning. Things that you know, but things that we would do well to remember, be reminded of, as we embark on this brief study of the canon.

And perhaps I should have started here with its importance. The last thing we're going to talk about today is why it matters. Why it's relevant. Why do we need to talk about these things?

[9:04] We'll get there at the end of the lesson today. But it is relevant and important. So here's some groundwork. And the first foundational issue is obvious. God has spoken. And that's number one that you have there.

God has spoken. Hebrews 1, verses 1 and 2. In the past, God spoke to our forefathers, through the prophets, at many times, and in various ways. But in these last days, He has spoken to us by His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, and through whom He made the universe.

God has spoken. He's given His Word to men. And we believe that that revealed Word is contained for us in the pages of the Bible that you're holding in your hands right now.

And as you read through that Bible, it becomes abundantly evident that the men who are writing it don't claim to be writing just their own words. They are. Paul says, I, Paul, write this to you with my own hands.

He's writing it. But they claim that they're speaking for God. It's what we've already heard from 2 Timothy 3. In verse 16, that it's breathed out by God. We find again and again in the Scriptures, thus says the Lord, or the Word of the Lord.

[10:13] It's God's Word, not the Word of men. Turn with me to 2 Peter 1. 2 Peter 1.

And notice with me, beginning in verse 16. You know, Peter was one of Jesus' apostles, and we have two of the letters that he's written here in our Bibles.

2 Peter 1, verse 16. We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty.

For 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. We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with Him on the sacred mountain.

And we have the word of the prophets made more certain. 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.

[11:22] Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophets' own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

So Peter says here, what I'm telling you, what I'm writing for you is not a fairy tale. It's not something I've invented. It's not something that we made up. I was an eyewitness to these things.

And we have the prophets and their word is sure because none of them spoke according to their own interpretation, their own ideas, but they spoke the word of God as they were inspired by the Spirit.

So, first of all, God has spoken. The word that you hold in your hands is not just the words of men.

The second thing that we need to notice at the beginning is that God's Word is self-authenticating.

Well, what in the world do I mean by self-authenticating? Somebody help me out with that. What does that mean? God's Word is self-authenticating.

[12:30] It proves its own authority. Okay, good. Dare? Okay, very good. Is that in one of the quotes there? Good.

Alright. Jim? I want to go past the bottom of this one. God said it. That's right. Yes, sir. That's right. God has spoken and He's spoken to us in His Word.

And as we look at this subject of the canon and how it came to be and how it was formed, we're going to talk about different human factors and elements, but this truth here is foundational to all of that.

The Scriptures themselves attest that they are the very Word of God. It's not because I think it's the Word of God or because the church has put its stamp of approval on it and said, we believe this is the Word of God.

That doesn't make it the Word of God. It is because God says it is. Now, anywhere else, and this is circular reasoning. I'm not going to argue with that. That doesn't work anywhere else except when God is involved.

[13:29] And so, we want to demonstrate that the book is God's Word and so we look to the book and see that it claims to be God's Word. It's why under point number one, we've already been citing Scriptures.

We've been seeing what the Bible says about itself, not just what other men say about it. And so, when we come to the Scriptures, we don't sit in judgment on them.

And it's so important to remember in this whole discussion, the Scriptures sit in judgment on us. It's not we who decide what Scripture. The Scripture is the Word of God because God says it is.

And so, we believe it's God's Word and so we accept its testimony about itself. We believe it's His Word as the Spirit bears witness to that in us. John 16.13 But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all truth.

And so, the Spirit guides us into the truth. Gives us eyes to see that it is the Word of God. I've given you several quotes there. A couple from our confession. The Second London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689.

[14 : 35] Chapter 1. Foundational. It's about the Scriptures. And in paragraph 4, you see, there it says, the Scripture is self-authenticating. Its authority does not depend on the testimony of any man or church, but entirely upon God, its author, who is truth itself.

It is to be received because it's the Word of God. And 1 John 5 and verse 9 says, we accept man's testimony, but God's testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God which He has given about His Son.

Right? The Bible is God's Word because He says so, not because the church says so. The Belgic Confession, which comes from the Dutch Reformed Church, says, we receive, it lists the books of the Bible, and then it says, we receive all these books and these only as holy and canonical for the regulating, founding, and establishing of our faith.

And we believe without a doubt that all things contained in them, not so much because the church receives and approves them as such, but above all, because the Holy Spirit testifies in our heart that they are from God.

And also because they prove themselves to be from God. So, they claim to be from God, so we believe the testimony, but when you read the Scriptures, they also demonstrate themselves that they're not just the words of men.

[15 : 50] Not just that they claim that, but listen to the third quote from Our Confession of Faith, chapter 1 and paragraph 5. But, it's abundantly evident to us as we read that no human could have done this because the heavenliness of its contents, the efficacy of its doctrine, the majesty of its style, the agreement between all its parts from first to last, the fact that throughout it gives all glory to God, the full revelation it gives of the only way of salvation, these together with many other incomparably high qualities and full perfections supply abundant evidence that it is the Word of God.

So, the Scriptures, as you read them, they authenticate themselves. They say, we are the true Word of God. We'll look more next week at how the New Testament talks about the Old Testament. How the writers, when they wrote the New Testament and quoted the Old, they didn't quote it just as some guy said, they quote it as God's Word. They treat it as coming from God.

Third foundational thing that we need to consider this morning is that God's Word has been put into written form. We don't think about that much because as long as you have been alive, and that's longer for some than others, but as long as every one of you has been alive, there's been a written copy of God's Word that you're able to buy, that you can have in your home, and I bet almost everybody here has more than one of these in your home.

We've always had God's Word written down for us. And so, we don't think about it. When we think about God's Word, we think about this. But they didn't always have nice, leather-bound copies of God's Word cross-referenced.

[17 : 40] We didn't always have the Word of God like this. And so, I think it's helpful to look to the Scriptures this morning to see that God wanted His Word to be written down.

So, turn with me to Exodus 17 and verse 14. Then the Lord said to Moses, write this on a scroll. This is a command from God.

Write it down. Write this on a scroll as something to be remembered and make sure that Joshua hears it because I will completely blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven. God told him to write it down and He wrote it down and you're holding the evidence that He wrote it down.

Now, it's been copied and it's been translated into a language that you can understand, but the reason that you're reading that verse this morning is because God told Moses to write it down. That's good grammar.

Okay, He was instructed to write it down and He did. Turn over to Exodus 24. Exodus 24. Notice verses 3 and 4.

[18 : 45] When Moses went and told the people all the Lord's words and laws, the people responded with one voice, everything the Lord has said, we will do.

Moses then wrote down everything the Lord had said. He got up early the next morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain. Set up 12 stones representing the 12 tribes of Israel. Then down to verse 7.

Then He took the book of the covenant and read it to the people. They responded, we will do everything the Lord has said. We will obey. He wrote it down and then He reads it to them to remind them of what God has said.

Earlier they said, what God says we'll do. He reads it again and they affirm it again, what God says we will do. But they had it written down. We could see the same thing in Deuteronomy 31. They write down the law. But it's not just Moses, right? And the Psalms. And again, you don't have to turn there. Psalm 102 and verse 18. The psalmist says, let this be written for a future generation that a people not yet created may praise the Lord.

[19:48] You know what? You're a future generation. Psalm 102 and verse 18 was written for you. God wanted it recorded. Or the prophets also. Isaiah 30 and verse 8.

Go now. Write it on a tablet for them. Inscribe it on a scroll that for the days to come it may be an everlasting witness. He didn't want it just written down. He wanted it preserved that it would be an everlasting witness.

And here we are, thousands of years later, proof that what God wanted is taking place. His providence is unfolding as He planned and desired. His plan. And we have that word that was written down.

Turn over to Exodus 32. Not only did God want it written down and instruct His prophets, His servants to do so, He set the bar Himself.

Exodus 32, verses 15 and 16. Moses turned and went down the mountain with the two tablets of the testimony in His hands. They were inscribed on both sides, front and back, the tablets were the work of God.

[21:00] The writing was the writing of God engraved on the tablets. Shows its importance by doing it Himself, by writing it down. And we have that law contained today in the pages of our Bible.

And if that's so, God's Word is to be written down, it's to be recorded, then at some point, we've got to figure out which words that have been written down are God's and which ones we're going to put in this Bible and which ones we're not going to put in.

If God's Word is to be recorded for us, what belongs in here? And that's why we're going to have this study in the coming weeks on the canon. Alright, another foundational truth for us this morning. God's Word is true and inerrant. God's Word is true. Psalm 119, verse 160, all your words are true. Your righteous laws are all eternal. Proverbs 30, verse 5, every word of God is flawless. He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him. Jesus, in speaking about the Word of God, said in John 10, 35, and the Scripture cannot be broken.

[22:08] God's Word is true and it can't be changed. I've got down there, true and inerrant. Somebody tell me what it means for God's Word to be inerrant.

Okay? There's no mistakes in it. Right, Christine. Good. It's without error. It's flawless, as we read from Proverbs. What the writers wrote is true and it is without mistake.

And we have to remember to take our conception, our understanding of inerrancy from the Scriptures themselves and not impose some man-made standard on them. Some people will say, well, because there's differing accounts in the Gospels.

They're not all the same. They don't all record the events the same way. That means that there's mistakes. Well, they're imposing their definition of inerrancy on the Bible. Part of the way God designed the Scriptures to be written was with diversity.

To be written by men from different backgrounds, with different languages, and different cultures. And so there is a variety in the Bible. And that's how God designed it. He inspired it to be that way.

[23:19] And so when you get accounts that don't record exactly the same detail, that doesn't mean somebody made a mistake or forgot something. He described it in a different way than this guy did over here. And so we don't get our definition of inerrancy somewhere else other than the Scriptures.

God planned the Word to be written in the way that it's been written. And some people will say, it's not the same throughout. It's uneven. It doesn't flow. Well, sure. It was written by Moses and by Isaiah and by Matthew and Mark and Luke and John and Paul.

And these guys were different. Some of them knew their language well. Others of them were rough fishermen. And when you read it, you see that. But that's not a sign that there's mistakes in it. That's how God designed it to be written.

It means, as E.J. Young says, that the Bible and its statements is not contrary to fact. It records things as they actually were. Each author has told the truth.

He has recorded matters accurately. He's given a true picture. Each writer who was born of the Holy Spirit has recorded accurately that which the Spirit desired him to record.

[24:29] And, of course, if we believe that God's Word is inspired, that it comes from God, then of course we believe that it's without mistake.

God is holy. He's perfect. He doesn't make mistakes. And so, it's almost redundant to say the Word of God is inerrant. It's like saying, duh, we know that.

Because if it's the Word of God, of course it won't be with any mistakes or errors. Alright, so it's true and inerrant. Another thing to consider in this subject is God's providence.

God's sovereignty. And again, I want you all to help me out. How is God's providence relevant to this discussion of how the Scriptures came to be collected as we have them today?

How is it relevant to the discussion and how is it comforting to us as the people of God? Give me some feedback on that question. Ed? That's right.

[25:33] Okay, God has protected His Word throughout the centuries against attack and He's preserved it. Good. Jim? That's right.

That's right. And it hasn't. We still have it here. Good. Mike? Mm-hmm. Right. And yeah, that was God's sovereignty guiding all of those different individuals and things to give us the product that we have today as God's Word.

Good. Mark? Okay, excellent. All part of God's plan. Good. Why else is... Are there any other thoughts on why God's providence is a comforting... His sovereignty is a comforting thing when we're thinking about His Word?

Okay. Roger? Okay. All right. He brought it into time. Of course, the Old Testament was written in Hebrew and the New Testament but written in Greek.

A language that if you study it you can find those precise things. Good. There. Okay. Good. Good.

[26:39] Yeah, you all have touched on all the right things here. Again, as we go through this discussion we're going to talk about various human factors and influences as we consider the canon and manuscripts.

We're going to talk about how scribes would copy the manuscripts! And how sometimes they would make mistakes. And in copying they wouldn't copy a word down correctly.

We're going to talk about different things like that. And as we talk about those various human factors it's comforting to know that the word of God that we have in our hands today is the word that He wants us to have.

This is the word that He has preserved the one that He has brought down to us through the centuries that He has protected against attack and that He has given to us. And so as we study these things remember that.

God is sovereign over all things including the writing copying collecting transmission and translation of His word. ultimately we can say that we have the Bible that God wants us to have.

[27:43] Otherwise we wouldn't believe in the sovereignty of God, right? Because if this isn't the Bible that God wants us to have then somebody has slipped up and we would be blaming God.

No, this is the word He wants us to have. And so we believe Isaiah 55 11 so is my word that goes out from my mouth that will not return to me empty but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

And if God is so careful as to watch over His word and govern the sending out of it to bring the desired effect doesn't His control and care extend also to the preservation of that word so that the word when it goes out is the word that He wants to go out and produce fruit and return to Him not empty.

Of course God's care and provision extends to the word of God. And so when the dust settles we trust our Bible because of who God is. And that should speak peace to anyone's heart who's wondering is this really the word of God?

Can I trust it? It might not be satisfactory to an objector to a skeptic. I understand that and that's one of the reasons we're going to have this class so that you'll be able to answer skeptics.

[28:58] But for those who believe that God is sovereign for those who believe that this is His word this is comforting that we have the word God wants us to have.

That's the perspective that we'll be teaching this particular class from. And everything we say here comes from the perspective that God is sovereign. We're just applying it to this in particular this morning.

Alright, the last thing today, why it matters. Why this subject is relevant. Why bother studying it? I think there's several reasons why it's important for us this morning.

One, from a theologian named Herman Ritterbos, a Dutchman. He says, obviously, the Bible is not a heavenly gift that arrived all at once as a finished, divine, revelatory entity. God didn't drop this out of the sky just like this. That's not how it came to us. He says, Scripture has a history.

[30:03] It is a product of God's revelatory activity in the history of redemption. And, think about it in comparison to the history of other things.

If you live in the United States of America, and you don't know the history of this country, you are the poorer for it. You don't know where we've come from.

You don't know the mistakes that have been made in the past. And what we've come out of. And how we don't want to go back to it. And you don't know the mistakes that have been made so that you can avoid making them in the present.

You don't have an appreciation for everything that we have and enjoy in this country. If you don't know the history of it, you're the poorer for it. Or think about it in terms of the church.

If you don't know the history of God's church, there's so much you're missing. You're the poorer for it. You don't know how God's hand is so marvelously worked to bring the church through difficulties.

[31:05] To bring it through doctrinal controversy. To preserve particular individuals and people. You're missing the stories of pillars of the faith that are examples for us and encouragements for us.

And you've missed how God's hand has worked and brought us down to this point today. And how Grace Fellowship Church is the product of all this history of the church back here. A lot of people think history is boring and it's irrelevant.

But if you don't know history, you're missing out. You don't have an appreciation for what's happened. And in the church, you haven't seen those doctrinal controversies or whatever.

The problems the church has faced and how the church solved them. How the church dealt with them. And good things that the church did in dealing with problems. And bad things the church did in dealing with problems.

And saying, you know what? When we face similar problems, let's not do what they did here. Look, that led to the division that destroyed this part of the church over here. But look at how they handled it over here.

[32:03] Let's do that. If we don't know that history, we're the poor for it. That's just a comparison to bring it over now to the Word of God. The Word of God is not given to us in a vacuum.

Again, it didn't come down to us in this form. And if we don't know the history of how it came to us, how it was collected, how it was brought together, we are the poorer for it.

The more knowledge you have about something, the better you'll be able to understand it. And so when you begin to see how New Testament writers treated the Old Testament writers, you begin to think, I've never really given much attention to the Old Testament because it's kind of hard to read and the New Testament has Jesus in it and it's the fuller revelation.

Well, you know what? The Old Testament has Jesus in it too. You have to work a little bit harder to see it there, but you see the New Testament and how it talks about the Old Testament. You think, I need to raise my appreciation for the Old Testament, my attitude towards it.

Because it's not a second class book. It's not less important than the New Testament. It's God's Word too and I need to receive it as such. As you begin to see how this book came to be, you begin to appreciate that.

[33:15] Or when you read the New Testament and you see how people receive the words of the apostles, how they received them as the very Word of God, you begin to see, oh, that's how I should receive the words of the apostles, as the Word of God.

And so as you see how this book was brought together, you begin to see something of its significance, its importance, its usefulness for us. So it pays to know the history, not just of the church, of the place you live, but also of God's Word.

A second reason why it's important to know these things is to be ready to give an answer for the hope that you have. One question unbelievers often have is how can you trust the Bible?

Or they phrase it as an objection. I just don't believe that the Bible is true. I don't want you to be shaken in your faith when you hear those objections. I want you to have an answer for them.

I want to have an answer for them. God wants us to always be ready to give an answer for the hope that we have. And the hope that we have is drawn from the Scriptures.

[34 : 21] And so if you can't defend the Scriptures themselves, then you can't defend the very place where you learn about your hope. And so it's foundational to know these things and to be able to defend them. Again, we just look at them briefly, but I hope in such a way as to make us a little bit more comfortable with some of those objections.

And then, doubt regarding God's Word, is not like doubt about what to wear tomorrow or whether your Labor Day celebration will be rained on or will have sunshine.

When we doubt God's Word, we're calling into question everything about salvation, life, and godliness that He has revealed to us. And I want us to utterly trust the Word of God that we hold in our hands.

Not to be wondering a little bit even. Is this really God's Word? Because then we're wondering, is Jesus really the way of salvation? Do I really need to be living a holy life? Does the church really matter?

When you start to question God's Word, you begin to question everything that it teaches. You undermine the foundation. So I want us to be rooted and grounded in that truth. And so the challenge for us during this brief study is, as the top of your sheet says, don't shoot the canon.

[35 : 33] The canon we're talking about has one end. It's a list of books of the Bible. A canon with two ends is a big gun that you shoot. I don't want you to shoot the canon with one end.

To write it off is irrelevant, boring, or over your head. It's something, again, of great importance because it touches the source material for our faith.

We're talking about the Bible, the most important book that you will ever read. And so, may God give each of us ears to hear, eyes to see, and hearts to understand the truth about His Word and how it's come to us.