

- The NT also speaks of a tradition to be passed down (2 Thess. 3:6ff; 1 Tim. 6:3, 2 Tim. 1:12-14) and guarded from distortion.
- Since we have a God who speaks and wants His church to have his Word, we can approach questions of canon with a presumption that “God will not let his people walk in darkness, that he will provide for us the words we need to have, within our reach.” (Frame, 587).
- Within the 1st century we find quotations of the NT treated as Scripture (Clement), and in the late 2nd century, we see canon lists (Muratorian Fragment) and quotation usage (Irenaeus) consistent with the list of 27 NT books that Athanasius in A.D. 397 wrote as accepted as Scripture in his church (the same 27 books we hold to today).
- The Church gradually recognized the authority of Scripture as awareness spread to the various churches.
- Unlike many other doctrines and church teachings, there is remarkable unity across Greek Orthodox, Eastern/Syriac Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Protestant Churches with respect to the 66 books of the Bible. There remain some questions with respect to a few additional books in what we call the Apocrypha, but all Churches accept the 66 books found in your Bible.

### A Look Ahead at Next Week

- What we can say about the character of Scripture: its clarity and truthfulness.

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**Goal:** Grow in our understanding of the doctrine of Scripture, be equipped to answer objections, and to better learn how to read and understand the Bible.

**Sources:** Quotes indicated as “TDOS” are from Mark Thompson, *The Doctrine of Scripture: An Introduction* (Crossway, 2022); quotes indicated as “SS” are from John Meade & Peter Gurry, *Scribes & Scripture: The Amazing Story of How We Got the Bible* (Crossway, 2022). Lesson 5 draws heavily from TDOS, chapter 3 as well as John Frame’s *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief*, chapter 25 (P&R, 2013).

## Scripture: Theology, Text & Transmission

### Class 5: The Word of God Written, pt. 2

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#### Review

Last week we saw that the Bible itself records and prescribes the role of the written Word for God’s people. God instructed Moses to write and the two tablets of the 10 commandments (words) were written “with the finger of God”. Deuteronomy in particular records the attitude which God’s people are to have toward his Word: Deut. 4:1-8, 6:4-9, 8:11. These verses demand a collective memory of these commandments – one that Moses provided for by establishing public reading of the Word (Deut. 31:9-13). This is the beginning of the keeping of God’s word as a written record to be treasured by His people (Josh. 1:7-8, 23:6).

We reviewed the nature of Scripture as in part a creaturely artifact (words on a page), an historical artifact (specific historical background), a human artifact (a product of named authors and even secretaries) and a product of a variety of processes (dictation, orderly investigation [Luke 1:1-3], pastoral letters, “word of exhortation” [Heb. 13:22]) – yet it is also of divine origin: it is God’s word to us. How this can be true is explained by what we refer to as “inspiration.”

#### I. The Inspiration of Scripture

##### A. Inspiration “God-breathed” – 2 Tim. 3:16

- literally “God breathed” – the text has come from “God’s breath”
- God controls all things (sovereignty), so as B.B. Warfield said:

“If God wished to give His people a series of letters like Paul’s He prepared a Paul to write them, and the Paul He brought to the task was a Paul who spontaneously would write just such letters.” ~ TDOS, p. 101

- Yet more than that, God so moved so that the very words that Paul spontaneously wrote are God’s words that he speaks to us.

“...to breathe out words is simply to speak them. Paul is saying that the OT words are the speech of God, his personal utterances....The written Word is,

of course, expressed on a created medium, whether stone tablets, papyrus, paper, or digital media. But the word that is written on these media is divine. It is the personal word of God himself. So ‘breathed out by God’ means ‘spoken by God.’” ~ John Frame (Systematic, 579)

- Specific OT texts are ascribed to the Spirit – these words are the Spirit’s words: Matt. 22:43; Acts 1:16, 4:25, 28:25; Heb. 3:7, 9:8.

### B. Verbal Inspiration

- Not just the thoughts but the very words are inspired – 1 Cor. 2:13

“Roger Nicole observed [that Jesus & his apostles] ‘did not hesitate... to base their whole argumentation upon one single word of the [OT] Scripture... or even on the grammatical form of one word.’” ~ TDOS, 102

- Jesus appealed to the word “my” in Ps. 110:1 (Matt. 22:41-45)
- Paul noted the singular “offspring” in Gen. 22:18 (Gal. 3:16)
- The author of Hebrews focuses on “today” in Ps. 95 (Heb. 4:7)
- Inspiration is properly applied to the original language and writings, but the authority does extend to correct translations.
- Greek translations of the OT are regularly quoted and read by the NT authors and Jesus – yet no distinction in authority is seen.
- NT translations of terms and the use of transliteration is seen – Matt. 1:23, 27:33; Mk. 5:41, 15:34; Jn. 1:41, Acts 9:36.

### C. Plenary Inspiration

- 2 Tim. 3:16 has “all scripture” not “each scripture” – the idea is that all of Scripture is inspired, all parts equally – no degrees of inspiration “plenary” means “full” or “complete”
- We can’t pick and choose what is inspired to us
- No red letters – Jesus’ words and the Gospel authors’ are equally authoritative.
- While different genres function differently, it remains true that legal material, proverbs, genealogies and historical records, are just as inspired as pastoral epistles (letters).
- How we apply and understand Scripture will change by genre (and the use of metaphors or phenomenological language – the sun setting, corners of the earth, etc.)

## II. The Canon of Scripture

- “Canon” refers to a “rule” or “standard,” applied to Scripture it means which books are to be included in the Bible.

### A. Old Testament

- In the Bible we see God’s people collecting books they use as a standard. Later Scripture quotes/alludes to earlier Scriptures.
- By Jesus’ time, there seems to have been agreement among Jews on the majority of the Hebrew 22 (or 24) books in the canon.
  - *12 Minor prophets; Judges-Ruth; 1-2 Samuel; 1-2 Kings; 1-2 Chronicles; Nehemiah-Ezra; Jeremiah-Lamentations + the rest of the Christian OT books = 22; Ruth + Lam. separate = 24 ~ SS, 113*
  - It is possible that the three-fold structure of the Hebrew Bible may have been known in Jesus’ day (Law/Torah, Prophets/Nevi’im, Writings/Ketuvim = Tanak): Luke 24:44.
- Jesus did not disagree with his opponents over what books are Scripture, and the early church accepted the Jewish canon.

### B. New Testament

- The early church had a “canon consciousness” from its beginning
- The New Testament testifies to an understanding that its character is that of an apostolic word to be obeyed and kept in the same sense as the OT prophetic writings:
  - Jesus taught that people will keep his disciple’s word (Jn. 15:20), the Spirit will help them remember his words (Jn. 14:26), and people would be won through their word (Jn. 17:20).
  - Church built on both (OT) prophets and (NT) apostles: Eph. 2:20
  - Reading the apostle’s words is mandatory: Col. 4:16, 1 Thess. 5:27
  - Obedience to Paul’s letter is a matter of discipline: 2 Thess. 3:14-15, 1 Cor. 14:37-38
  - Paul’s readers needed a way to verify the authenticity of his letters (against spurious letters): 2 Thess. 3:17, Gal. 6:11
  - NT and OT quotes together called Scripture: 1 Tim. 5:17-18 (quoting both Deut. 25:4 and Luke 10:7)
  - Peter calls Paul’s letters Scripture: 2 Pet. 3:15-16