

08.25.24
Stand Alone Sermon
How the Canon was Formed
2 Peter 1:12-21

Welcome, and thank you for being here. This Sunday, we returned to 2 Peter 1, which I believe is the perfect starting point for the message I have on my heart. As I read Peter's words, I see the heart of a true pastor—someone deeply in love with his flock. Peter, aware that his time is short, is driven by the urgency to make the most of his remaining moments to encourage and strengthen fellow believers. This is the same man who once denied Jesus, now determined not to waste any more chances to help the church grow in their love for Christ. His desire to leave behind something valuable speaks to the kind of legacy we should all aim for—one rooted in love and a deep commitment to the truth of the Gospel.

As we read Peter's introduction it is clear to me that the heart of what he hopes for the church is that it would live with confidence. Jesus is no myth, his story was not "cleverly devised" but true and he states three reasons to have confidence in following Jesus...

1. Eyewitnesses
 - a. The life of Jesus was documented through eyewitness accounts, written down while those witnesses were still alive. This gives the Gospel a unique reliability, as the events they recorded were not hearsay but direct observations. We can trust that the story of Jesus is not a myth or legend—it actually happened. What we do with this truth is another question but no one can legitimately doubt that it happened in history.
2. "A prophetic word more fully confirmed."
 - a. Jesus didn't just live an ordinary life; He fulfilled specific prophecies. I emphasize "specific" because His life wasn't a series of random events. The details of His birth, life, death, and resurrection were foretold in the Old Testament, and Jesus fulfilled these prophecies down to the smallest detail, proving that His coming was intentional, planned, and divine. Nothing was accidental and even the details that he could not have controlled the Father oversaw and ordained.
3. Scripture that claims to be God's Word.
 - a. Jesus' life didn't just change history—it sparked the writing of a new addition to God's Word. Alongside the Old Testament, the New Testament claims divine authority, revealing God's purpose for humanity. This collection of writings is not a product of human imagination; it is the inspired Word of God, carrying the weight of eternal truth.

In the same spirit that Peter shows, I feel compelled to address four major questions the world often asks about our view of Scripture. My goal is to strengthen our understanding so that we can stand firm in the same confidence Peter displayed. I'm tired of feeling hesitant when confronted with certain questions, fearing that I might struggle to answer them. It's time to confront these uncertainties head-on, to explore the implications of our Scriptures, and to let our hearts rest in solid, biblical answers. This way, we can speak boldly and clearly about what we believe, sharing our faith with anyone who asks. Here are the questions we tackled...

1. Why did Jesus' life spark a new addition to Canon?
2. Does the New Testament see itself as God's Word?
3. When is the New Testament recognized as Scripture?
4. Wasn't the Bible put together?
 - I don't intend to just answer what I already preached on, instead I want to focus more on laying out the heart of why this question matters and how our faith can be strengthened when we investigate these questions.

1 Why did Jesus' life spark a new addition to Canon (and why do we believe it was closed after the NT writings)?

If we take a moment to really think about this, it's a question that many of us may not have fully considered. We assume that the Bible was always meant to have two testaments, but have we ever stopped to ask why? For instance, what if someone from a Jewish background approached you and asked why the Old Testament isn't enough on its own? How would you respond? Or, consider the other end of the spectrum: What if someone from the Mormon faith questioned why their extra-biblical writings shouldn't be regarded as a legitimate new revelation from God? What would stop Joseph Smith's story from being considered an addition to the biblical canon? These are serious questions that require thoughtful answers.

It's crucial that we understand why the New Testament exists and why we believe Scripture is complete and cannot be added to. The answer, in short, revolves around God documenting His covenants with humanity (you can hear the sermon for more context to this answer). The Old and New Testaments work together to tell one complete and unified story. As 1 Peter 1:10-11 reminds us, the Old Testament was given to predict the sufferings and glories of Christ, laying the groundwork for the world to see what Jesus has done. Together, the two testaments form a cohesive narrative, and nothing more can be added because the final chapter—the return of Christ—is the only event we now await. When He returns, we won't need further revelation, for we will have the fullness of God's truth in Jesus. We will be with God and need no further revelation about Him because we will be with Him.

The New Testament, therefore, is not an arbitrary addition; it is the logical continuation of Scripture, documenting the New Covenant by which we are saved. If you want to explore more about this New Covenant, passages like Jeremiah 31:31-34, Hebrews 8:6-13, and Ephesians 2:8-9 are key. Each new covenant in Scripture brings with it a new testament, and now we await Christ's return to complete God's redemptive plan.

To my Jewish brothers and sisters, I would explain that we believe the Messiah has already come and has established a New Covenant. To my Mormon friends, I would point out that their additional writings represent false revelations that go against God's warning not to add to His Word, as clearly stated in Deuteronomy 4:2, Proverbs 30:5-6, and Revelation 22:18-19. Scripture stands complete as God's final and perfect revelation, pointing us toward the fulfillment of all things in Christ.

2 Does the New Testament see itself as God's Word?

This question is vital because if the New Testament letters did not view themselves as God's authoritative Word, then any authority we attribute to them would be an imposition that is

both improper and unsupported by Scripture itself. If the New Testament writings don't claim to be God's Word, we would be falsely elevating them to a status God never intended. As Paul warns in 1 Corinthians 15:14-19, our faith in Jesus would be on shaky ground, and we would risk misrepresenting God, casting doubt on the truth of what Jesus accomplished.

However, the New Testament writers did view their words as a continuation of God's revelation, and this is evident in several ways:

1. The NT Accepts the OT as God's Word
 - The New Testament consistently affirms the authority of the Old Testament, seamlessly uniting both testaments. NT writers frequently refer to and quote the OT, with Peter explicitly acknowledging this connection in 1 Peter 1:10-11.
2. The NT Shares the Same Authoritative View of Scripture as the OT
 - Passages like 2 Timothy 3:16-17 and Galatians 1:11-12 affirm that the New Testament writers viewed their writings as equally inspired and authoritative as the Old Testament, recognizing them as the Word of God.
3. The Apostles Believed Their Gospel Message Came Directly from God
 - The apostles were certain that their words about Jesus were divinely inspired. Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 2:13 that the believers received his message not as human words but as God's Word, confirming its divine origin.
4. Paul Claims His Words as God's Commands
 - In 1 Corinthians 14:37, Paul boldly states, "The things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord," directly claiming that his teachings carry the weight of divine authority.
5. NT Writers Recognize Each Other's Writings as Scripture
 - Remarkably, the New Testament writings already acknowledged each other as Scripture. In 2 Peter 3:15-16, Peter refers to Paul's letters as Scripture, and in 1 Timothy 5:18, Paul quotes both Deuteronomy 25:4 and Luke 10:7, treating them as equally authoritative.

To suggest that the New Testament was never intended to be God's Word is a claim that simply doesn't hold up under scrutiny. The NT writers were fully aware that they were transmitting God's Word when it came to the life and teachings of Jesus. Their writings reflect the certainty that they were speaking on God's behalf. The New Testament wasn't later "made" into God's Word by others—it claimed that authority from the very beginning. Only a shallow and already determined critical view of the NT writings could accept that these writers simply believed they were writing "helpful" information about Jesus.

3 When is the New Testament recognized as Scripture?

Similar to the previous question, there is a common claim regarding the timing of the New Testament's acceptance as Scripture. Critics argue that the New Testament writings were not regarded as Scripture for centuries, and that the early church only later elevated these documents to "scripture" status. According to this view, official decisions like the Council of Carthage in 397 and Athanasius' Festal Letter in 367—which provides the earliest known list of all 27 New Testament books—imposed an authority on these writings that the church had not upheld for centuries. The argument implies that these decisions were made to legitimize the

faith and consolidate power, rather than reflect an organic acceptance of these texts as Scripture.

This question matters because it, too, seeks to undermine the authority that the New Testament writings claim for themselves. It suggests that the church imposed a status on these writings that God did not intend or that the early church did not naturally recognize. However, we can confidently answer this claim with several key points.

First, the idea that the New Testament was not recognized as Scripture until centuries later is inaccurate. For example, the Muratorian Fragment, discovered in 1740 and dated to 170-200 AD, provides a clear glimpse into the early church's view of the canon. This document reveals that the core of the New Testament was already widely confirmed and accepted within the second century. This is especially remarkable considering the challenges of the ancient world—no printing press, hand-copied manuscripts, and slow transmission of information. Despite these obstacles, the New Testament writings spread rapidly, and the church's recognition of their authority came astonishingly early.

While it is true that official lists like those from the Council of Carthage and Athanasius came later, the evidence shows that the process of recognizing these writings as Scripture began much earlier. By the middle of the second century, the core of the New Testament had already risen to prominence and was accepted by the church as authoritative. The slow pace of copying and distributing these documents across the Roman Empire should not be mistaken for hesitation or doubt; rather, it reflects the logistical realities of the time. In fact, for a world without modern technology, the rapid spread and acceptance of these writings are unparalleled in the ancient world.

Though it may seem slow by our modern sensibilities, the recognition of the New Testament as Scripture was a natural and widespread development, not an imposition by later councils but recognized as the church received these writings. The authority of these writings was recognized by the early church and affirmed over time, showing that the New Testament wasn't forced into its position, but acknowledged as God's Word from the beginning.

4 Wasn't The Bible Put Together?

Many people hold the idea that the Bible was pieced together by the church in a kind of closed-door, smoke-filled, agenda-driven process—like a fantasy draft where books were accepted or rejected to fit a particular narrative. This portrayal suggests the Bible is a man-made, agenda-filled collection, curated to serve the interests of the church. I wonder how many of us, even subtly, have a similar view. This is an important question because the Bible is either the product of human imagination or the result of divine revelation from a God who actively reveals Himself. So, which is it: propaganda or revelation?

To answer this, we need to briefly discuss the nature of revelation. Revelation isn't ever created—it's something discovered. As the biblical writers encountered God, they uncovered and recorded revelations about who He is. Over time, these revelations were recognized as special, distinct from other writings. As these documents circulated, people recognized God's voice in them, and that recognition spread. The authority of Scripture wasn't imposed by the Jewish or Christian people—it was discovered and affirmed by people who would then become believers.

The Bible wasn't assembled in a backroom with an agenda; it came together over a span of 1,500 years through a process of recognizing divine truth. The councils that later affirmed the books of the Bible didn't pick or create the canon—they simply acknowledged what had already been accepted as Scripture by the church. They confirmed what believers already recognized: that these 66 books were inspired by God, not man. They rejected writings that were not of the same standard (Authorship, Content and Acceptance). Google and then actually read some of the "Lost Gospels" and you'll see how different they are and how they do not fit the content of the Canon.

The Bible isn't a carefully curated narrative designed to fit a particular agenda. Rather, it is a cohesive narrative because it was produced by a perfect God who reveals Himself through history. The reason the Bible fits together so seamlessly is not because humans crafted it to do so, but because God, in His perfection, revealed His story in a way that naturally forms a unified, divinely-inspired whole. God chose to bring the Bible through human means. It stands as a testament of how capable He is at teaching us who he is.

This is my heart for you: a life anchored in Christ is not built on shifting sands but on the unchanging rock of His truth. Just as Peter testified in his letter, we have the assurance of the Spirit's guidance and the solid foundation of God's Word. Let this be the bedrock of your faith, a source of unwavering confidence and strength as you walk with Jesus each day.

12 Therefore I intend always to remind you of these qualities, though you know them and are established in the truth that you have. 13 I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to stir you up by way of reminder, 14 since I know that the putting off of my body will be soon, as our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to me. 15 And I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things. 16 For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.

If you are a Christian, stand firm in your decision for Jesus because nothing makes more sense than following him. If you are exploring let me encourage you to keep on exploring Jesus because he is able to reveal himself to you.