

Title: “The Authoritative Word of God – The Canon of Scripture” (OIC Statement of Faith series)

Key verse: Luke 24:44-45 (NASB) – “These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all the things that are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”⁴⁵ Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.

Good morning, everyone. It is good to see you all again. Last month I started a series of sermons on our church’s Statement of Faith, beginning with the first paragraph of the statement which affirmed our belief that the Bible is the inspired, inerrant Word of God. Let me quote once more the first paragraph of the Statement of Faith of Osaka International Church:

We believe the Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments, to be the inspired Word of God without error in the original writings, the complete revelation of His will for the salvation of men, and the Divine and final authority for all Christian faith and life. II Timothy 3:16.

During last month’s message, I outlined for you the doctrines of inspiration, inerrancy, and the Bible as the final authority for Christian doctrine and practice. I briefly mentioned the topic of the “Canon of Scripture” and I told you that this word “canon” refers to the list of books that the community of faith recognize as the authoritative books which belong in the Bible, the Word of God. Today, I wish to continue with this theme on the authority of Scripture, and I have entitled my message “The Authoritative Word of God – The Canon of Scripture.” In the latter part of today’s message, I would like to finish my discussion on the Canon of Scripture, but before that I would like to introduce some material I have been learning from a theology course I’m taking at seminary right now. Foundational to our understanding and acceptance of the Word of God are three key doctrines on how we view the Scriptures. These foundational doctrines are Revelation, Inspiration, and Illumination. And so today’s message is divided into four parts:

Part 1: Revelation

Part 2: Inspiration

Part 3: Illumination

Part 4: The Canon of Scripture

Let’s begin with Part 1: Revelation

We won’t really know much about our God unless He reveals Himself to us ... *unless He reveals Himself to us.*

Psalm 19:1 (ESV) – “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.”

Theologians speak of two kinds of revelation. The first type is called General Revelation. As we see here in Psalm 19, by looking up at the heavens we get a sense of the glory of God. He is the creator and designer of the universe, and you can’t help but be awed at the heavens above and at the earth below as you see the scale of this intricate design.

This is called “general” revelation because anybody can see this marvelous creation and get some sense that there must be a grand designer behind of all of this.

Psalm 8:1 (NASB) – “O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth, who have displayed Your splendor above the heavens!”

God has displayed his splendor and majesty in the creation, in earth and heaven. All human beings can see this. And there's something more.

Psalm 50:6 (NASB) – “And the heavens declare His righteousness, for God Himself is judge.”

Deep down, we realize there is Someone out there who is greater than ourselves. That's something we notice by our observation of the world around us. But how about inside ourselves, inside our hearts? Not only do we see this awesome created world, but inside ourselves we have a sense ... a sense of what is right and wrong. Actually, did you know that God holds us accountable for both these kinds of knowledge (what we see with our eyes and what we sense in our hearts)?

Romans 1:19-20 (NASB) – “Because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. ²⁰ For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.”

My seminary professor says this: “General revelation is what can be known about God from the creation; that is to say, you can know a lot about God—His wisdom, His power, His eternity—just by looking at the awesome creation in which we live. ... We all have a conscience. It's not only the stars above us that speak of God. There is a conscience where children argue “this is right; this is not right; this is not fair; this is not just.” That's right within us; there's a law within us, so we have general revelation.”

(Bruce K. Waltke, *OT300 Old Testament Theology*, Logos Mobile Education. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018).

Let's look again at Psalm 19:1. Notice what the heavens do and what the sky does. The heavens *declare*. The sky *proclaims*. Declare ... proclaim. Those verbs describe speech acts. God is the Speaking God, and even His creation is described as speaking to us to reveal God to us.

This is General Revelation. These truths are evident to anyone.

The second type of revelation is called Special Revelation. This is God revealing Himself with specific words to specific people. Simply put, this is the Scripture, God's self-disclosure to His covenant people. God desires a relationship with His people, and so He reveals Himself to them. And in order to communicate with us, He has to speak our language. His Bible is composed in literary patterns that are familiar to we human beings. When God chose to speak to us through the written word, He used particular authors to communicate with His people at a particular time and place in a manner they could relate to. And yet, the message isn't limited to just that historical period. The main message of the Scripture has a certain transcendent quality about it so that it speaks to us even today. Let me quote my theology professor once more, describing the Bible: “So it's not just something historical in particular; it has this transcendent application so that the whole Word of God is God's Word to you; it's His personal communication to you.”

God's personal communication to you.

One of my textbooks makes some interesting comments which I would like to quote. This is from the *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*:

“The claim of the Bible, from beginning to end, is that God has spoken. The repeated refrain, “And God said” tells how he called the universe into being and instructed his creatures to live. In Genesis 1 we read his mandate to the first humans, then in chapter 2 his specific instructions for life in Eden, and in chapter 3 his discovery of and response to the sin—in all of which we read of this characteristic divine activity in *speech*. And the pattern established in the opening chapters of Scripture is repeated, with a dramatic range of variation, right through to the Book of Revelation. In law, prophets, and history we read the speech of God ... That is why the Bible's own statements

about the speaking God are in sharp focus when we address the question of the authority of “the books.” For its religion is the religion of the speaking God ...”

(Nigel M. de S. Cameron, “Revelation, Idea Of,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, electronic ed., Baker Reference Library; Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996; p. 679.)

The religion of the Bible is the religion of the speaking God. He has revealed Himself to us, and it is through that revelation that we come to know Him and come into relationship with Him. One of my favorite verses is John 6:68. When some of the followers of Jesus were turning away from Him, Jesus asked the twelve disciples if they, too, wanted to leave Him. John 6:68 (NIV) – “Simon Peter answered him, ‘Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.’”

It is through Jesus ... it is through the Word of God ... it is through God’s revelation of Himself ... that we are shown the path to eternal life.

God is the speaking God. In General Revelation, the heavens are declaring to us the glory of God. In Special Revelation, God speaks specific words to specific people at particular times and places. His words are recorded here in the Scripture so that they continue to speak to God’s people today. And through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, God also speaks. In fact, in the Incarnation, God becomes man and dwells with us. My theology professor said something interesting which I’d like to share with you. He pointed out that God’s words were incarnated when they got written down in the pages of Scripture, and then God Himself was incarnated when God took on human flesh and was born in this world as a man, the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus is the ultimate revelation of God to us.

Hebrews 1:1-2 (NKJV) – “God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, ² has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds.”

Through the Son, God made this wonderful creation. Through the Son, God speaks to us. It is through the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ that our salvation is provided. That is the heart of the Christian message.

Let’s move on to Part 2: Inspiration.

I spoke of this at great length last month. Today, I’ll say just a few brief words.

The key verse for the doctrine of inspiration is 2nd Timothy 3:16 (NASB) – “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.”

This phrase “inspired by God” literally means “breathed out by God.” The words of Scripture are God’s words, spoken with God’s authority. Of course, there is also a human author for each book of Scripture, and that author is writing in a particular time and place to a particular audience, but the words he writes are imbued with God’s power and authority – they are God’s message to us.

2nd Peter 1:20-21 (NASB) – “But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, ²¹ for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.”

In describing how the divine author and the human author worked together to produce Scripture, the distinguished theologian Benjamin Warfield wrote this: “The whole of Scripture is the product of divine activities which enter it, not by superseding the activities of the human authors, but by working confluent with them, so that the Scriptures are the joint product of the divine and human activities, both of which penetrate them at every point, working harmoniously together to the production of a writing which is not divine here and human there, but at once divine and human in every part, every word and every particular.”

(B. B. Warfield, “The Divine and the Human in the Bible,” in *Presbyterian Journal*, 3 May 1884).

Let's go on to Part 3: Illumination

First, God reveals Himself to us so that we can be in relationship with Him.
Second, God inspires a person to present His message to us.
Third, God prepares our hearts to receive and understand that message.
This third step is known as Illumination.

Both inspiration and illumination are primarily the work of the Holy Spirit. However, all three members of the Trinity have been said to be involved in this work.

On the night before the crucifixion, Jesus said this to His disciples, John 14:16-17 (NASB) – “I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, so that He may be with you forever; ¹⁷ that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him; but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you.”
Verse 26 (NASB) – “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance of all that I said to you.”

Jesus will soon leave His disciples, but He promises that the Father will send the Holy Spirit to them to dwell with them and to remind them of the things Jesus had taught them.

After the resurrection, Jesus says to His disciples these words in Luke 24:44-45 (NASB) – “These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all the things that are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” ⁴⁵ Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.”

He opened their minds to understand the Old Testament prophecies that had pointed to the Messiah, prophecies fulfilled in Jesus. A few moments later, He says in verse 49 (NASB) – “And behold, I am sending the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city [Jerusalem] until you are clothed with power from on high.” That “promise of the Father” is the Holy Spirit, and we see these statements repeated and expanded upon in Acts 1:4-8.

The Apostle Paul says this in 1st Corinthians 2:10-13 (ESV) – “These things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. ¹¹ For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. ¹² Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. ¹³ And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.”

The Protestant Reformer John Calvin said this:

“The Word will not find acceptance in men's hearts before it is sealed with the inward testimony of the spirit. The same Spirit, therefore, who has spoken through the mouths of the prophets must penetrate into our hearts to persuade us that they faithfully proclaimed what had been divinely commanded....

“Even if it wins reverence for itself by its own majesty, it seriously affects us only when it is sealed upon our hearts through the Spirit. Therefore, illumined by his power, we believe neither by our own nor by anyone else's judgment that Scripture is from God; but above human judgment we affirm with utter certainty ... that it has flowed to us from the very mouth of God by the ministry of men. (John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeil, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977), 1.7.4–5.)

That is all I will say today on this doctrine of Illumination.

Let us now go on to Part 4: The Canon of Scripture.

Fundamental to our doctrine of Scripture is the belief that the 39 books of the Old Testament and the 27 books of the New Testament comprise the books we consider to be the inspired Word of God. These are the books that comprise the Canon of Scripture.

The word “canon” means the list of books officially recognized by the community of faith as being the authoritative books of Scripture. The original Greek word is *kanōn* (κανών), and it means a “measuring stick” or a “ruler.” When speaking of Scripture, this word refers to those books of the Bible that are recognized as the authoritative books inspired by God. That means that these are the books which are the proper measure by which any teaching or any behavior is evaluated. As is said in our Statement of Faith, the Bible is “the Divine and final authority for all Christian faith and life.”

Sometimes people ask me why Protestants and Catholics have different books included in the Old Testament portion of their Bibles. The Catholics recognize some extra books as authoritative in their Old Testament. The extra books included in the Old Testament of some Bibles are often called “The Apocrypha,” though in the Eastern Orthodox context they refer to these extra books as “Deutero-canonical” books, meaning a “second canon.” Why do some Christian denominations have these extra books in their Bibles? Are the books authoritative? Why don’t Protestants accept these extra books?

To answer these questions, I would like to spend a few minutes describing for you the development of the list of authoritative books of both the Old Testament and New Testament. This part of today’s message will probably feel more like a lecture than a sermon, but I think you’ll find that this is useful information to know.

Let’s begin with a description of the Old Testament books. I have on the PowerPoint screen a chart listing the books of the Old Testament in a sequence that I think is familiar to most of you.

Pentateuch	Historical books	Poetic books	Major Prophets	Minor Prophets	
Genesis	Joshua	Job	Isaiah	Hosea	Nahum
Exodus	Judges	Psalms	Jeremiah	Joel	Habakkuk
Leviticus	Ruth	Proverbs	Lamentations	Amos	Zephaniah
Numbers	1&2 Samuel	Ecclesiastes	Ezekiel	Obadiah	Haggai
Deuteronomy	1&2 Kings	Song of Solomon	Daniel	Jonah	Zechariah
	1&2 Chronicles			Micah	Malachi
	Ezra				
	Nehemiah				
	Esther				

First, we have the five books of Moses, which we often call the “Pentateuch.” The word “Pentateuch” is a Greek word meaning “five scrolls.” In Hebrew, these books are referred to as the “Torah,” meaning “law” or “instruction.” Second, we have the Historical books, from Joshua to Esther. After these come the Poetic books, then we have the Major Prophets, and finally the twelve Minor Prophets. This is the arrangement that is familiar to us, but the ancient Hebrews arranged these books in a different manner.

A few minutes ago I quoted for you the words of Jesus in Luke 24. Let’s look again at verse 44: “Now He said to them, “These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all the things that are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” These were the three main categories that the Hebrews used to arrange their Scriptures: the “Law” ... the “Prophets” ... and the third category was the “Writings” ... and the first book in the “Writings” was the book of Psalms, so it was very common to call this third grouping the “Psalms,” as we see Jesus doing here in verse 44.

On the PowerPoint screen, I have a chart showing how the Hebrew Bible is divided into these three categories. You will see all of the same books as my previous chart, but in quite a different order, except for the books of Moses.

The Law (Torah)	The Prophets	The Writings	The "Apocrypha"
<i>Books of Moses (from the Creation of the world to the death of Moses):</i> Genesis Exodus Leviticus Numbers Deuteronomy	<i>Narrative Books (from the entry into the Promised Land to the Babylonian exile):</i> Joshua Judges Samuel Kings <i>Prophetical books:</i> Jeremiah Ezekiel Isaiah The Twelve	<i>Lyrical & Wisdom books:</i> Psalms Proverbs Job Song of Songs Ruth Lamentations Ecclesiastes <i>Narrative books (from the Babylonian exile to the return to the Land):</i> Daniel Esther Ezra-Nehemiah Chronicles	<i>Books composed during the Inter-testamental period:</i> 3 Esdras 4 Esdras Tobias Judith Additions to Esther Wisdom of Solomon Sirach (Ecclesiasticus) Baruch the Prophet The Song of the 3 Children The Story of Susanna Of Bel and the Dragon The Prayer of Manasses 1 Maccabees 2 Maccabees

You can see the three categories here: the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. Within the category of The Prophets, you see two groups of books. The Narrative books: Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings. Originally, Samuel and Kings were large books, but these days we divide those books into two: 1st and 2nd Samuel, 1st and 2nd Kings. Under the Narrative books, you see a list of Prophetical books: Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, and The Twelve (these are the twelve minor prophets collected into a single book). In the category of The Writings, you see the Lyrical and Wisdom books, beginning with Psalms. Below those, you see more Narrative books: Daniel, Esther, Ezra-Nehemiah (together as one book), and Chronicles. Today, we divide Chronicles into two: 1st and 2nd Chronicles. The Hebrews count 24 books in their Bible, but we count 39 in the Old Testament – it's a different number, but the books are the same.

I would like to highlight something more in this chart: the historical time frame which certain categories of books cover. I put that information in italic print.

The Books of Moses: *from the Creation of the world to the death of Moses.*

The Narrative Books under The Prophets: *from the entry into the Promised Land to the Babylonian exile.*

The Narrative books under The Writings: *from the Babylonian exile to the return to the Land (the Promised Land).*

This time frame is actually pretty important. The history of the Hebrews is marked by certain major turning points: the entry into the Promised Land ... the exile to Babylon ... the return from exile. The exile was a national disaster that long stayed in the minds of the people. And the return to the Land was a wonderful thing for those who participated in it. And we have some Scriptures from that time: Ezra-Nehemiah and Esther, including the last three of the minor prophets. The book of Chronicles does an overview of the whole of history from Adam until the return from exile. But in the centuries after the return from exile, many of the Jews felt that the prophetic voice had ceased, that God was not speaking to the people anymore.

But some books were still being written. Some of these books we now call "The Apocrypha." I have put a list of them on the screen. The period of time when these books were written is often referred to as the "Inter-testamental period," the time between the Old Testament and the New Testament. These books give us some useful historical information and some insights into the religious life of the people at this time. But the books of the Apocrypha are qualitatively different.

The famous Jewish historian named Josephus, who lived in the first century A.D. makes a very interesting comment on the historical writings of the Jews. He references the Persian king Artaxerxes who lived in the fifth century B.C. (he is mentioned in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah). Josephus says this: "From Artaxerxes to our own times a complete history has been written, but has

not been deemed worthy of equal credit with the earlier record, because of the failure of the exact succession of the prophets” (*Against Apion*, 1.41). What he calls “the earlier record” is the books of the Hebrew Bible that I showed you earlier, and he says that the “complete history” written later is not of equal worth. Indeed, there are several other statements in ancient Jewish literature that say much the same thing. It seemed that God was no longer sending prophets to His people and words of authoritative scripture were not being composed.

Many of these books of lesser worth are among the Apocrypha. This Greek term *apocrypha* means “those having been hidden away.” The ancient Christian writer Origen says the Jews used this term for those *books which were esteemed as valuable but were not up to the standard of canonical Scripture* and were therefore “hidden away” and not used often. Indeed, in both Jewish and Christian tradition, these books were seen as having some value as religiously edifying literature, but should not be used to establish any doctrines. This was the opinion of Saint Jerome, the ancient scholar who produced the translation known as the Latin Vulgate. Unfortunately, as the Middle Ages progressed, the church drifted farther from its Jewish roots, and the Apocryphal books were increasingly used by Christian writers to support certain doctrines and practices. The Protestant Reformers generally rejected the Apocrypha as Scripture, following the guidelines set by Saint Jerome, but the Roman Catholic Church finally ratified many of those books as being a part of their canon of Scripture. That happened at the Council of Trent in the mid-16th century.

I have probably given you more details than I needed to, but I wanted to explain why some Christian traditions have these extra books and why other traditions reject them. We should remember the testimony of the historian Josephus and the ancient Jewish tradition that the Apocryphal books do not measure up to those books accepted as canonical in the Hebrew Bible. We say that the canon of Scripture was “closed” at the time of the return from the Babylonian exile in the fifth century B.C., meaning no new books should be added to the Old Testament.

Let me say a few words on the canon of the New Testament. God’s prophetic voice returned with the preaching of John the Baptist and coming of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. As I described to you last month, even during the lifetime of the Apostle Paul, his letters were being copied and circulated among the churches, held in high esteem as sacred writings. In the following centuries, a few different lists of books for a *New Testament* were compiled, and in the end it was decided that the books that should be included in the canon were those writings that were either composed by an apostle (e.g., Matthew, John, Paul, etc.), or composed by an associate of an apostle (e.g. Mark, Luke). Writings that were either composed by an apostle or by an associate of an apostle – that’s the standard by which it was decided which books should comprise the New Testament. On the screen, I have put the books of the New Testament.

<u>Gospels:</u>		<u>Epistles of Paul:</u>		<u>General Epistles:</u>	
Matthew	Acts of the	Romans	1 Thessalonians	Hebrews	Revelation
Mark	Apostles	1 Corinthians	2 Thessalonians	James	
Luke		2 Corinthians	1 Timothy	1 Peter	
John		Galatians	2 Timothy	2 Peter	
		Ephesians	Titus	1 John	
		Philippians	Philemon	2 John	
		Colossians		3 John	
				Jude	

That completes my discussion of the Canon of Scripture. I have said a lot about the Scripture, but what are we to do with it? I want to close today’s message with a few of my favorite Scripture verses about what we should do with God’s Word.

Part 5: Some Favorite Verses

Psalm 119:11 (NASB) – “Your word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against You.”

By reading and meditating on God's Word and treasuring it in your heart, you transform your mind and your heart, and in this way you learn what displeases God and you build a practice of forsaking sin in your life.

Psalm 119:9 (NASB) – “How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to Your word.”

While a young man, I memorized these two verses and I found them very helpful in building a practice of turning away from sin and living a life that pleases God.

Colossians 3:16 (NASB) – “Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”

We should let God's Word thoroughly indwell us, to transform our hearts and minds. And when we do so, we are able to share God's Word with others and encourage one another and admonish one another. This is an important aspect of living in the Christian community, in the local church.

My favorite New Testament book is the Epistle of James. This book has a lot very practical things to say about living out our Christian lives. James 1:22-25 (NASB) says this – “But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. ²³For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; ²⁴for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. ²⁵But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man shall be blessed in what he does.”

Do you want to be blessed? Do you want to be a blessing to others? Be a doer of God's Word, not just someone who hears or reads without putting the words into practice. Verse 25 again: look intently at the perfect law (which actually is a law that frees us, not binds us, it's called the law of liberty), look intently at God's Word, and abide by it, be an effectual doer who puts it into practice.

Here is the last verse for today, 1st Timothy 1:5 (NASB) – “But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.”

The goal of Christian instruction is not to fill your mind with Bible knowledge. The goal of Bible study is to be a transformed person. To love others from a pure heart. To have a clean conscience. To live by a sincere faith.