

## The Canon of the Bible

**PPT:** <https://drive.google.com/open?id=1QfnhDrv0kCl8G2A9vCCpXtCjktgdg0Gtl>

### Introduction:

**Example 1:** Here is an actual e-mail from a college student: “The Bible was written by men who wanted to control society a certain way; if they didn’t like gays then of course they would say God said it. God says love all, but gay is an abomination? That is a huge contradiction! So I believe that it was written by men who wanted to control society. The Bible has been edited from its original form. There are books thrown out and books written by men who wanted society run the way they wanted to. I am a history major and what I am saying has been proved.”

**Example 2:** A college professor wrote this FaceBook post: “The Church, while it was still one entity, had several councils of the religious hierarchy get together and decide on what Holy Scriptures and Accounts went into the ‘official’ Bible and what was left out (please see ‘The Apocrypha’). So for millennia, we really have not had the ‘whole set’ of information.”

Where did the Bible come from? Sometimes people act like the Bible just magically fell from the sky: “Wow! Look a book from God, fallen from heaven!”

Why are there 66 books in the bible and not 67? Or 65? What was the process? How did we get these 66 books?

Today we will explore:

*What motive did the early church have in deciding which books made it into the Bible?*

*Who decided what books would be included in the Bible’s table of contents?*

*What determined which writings were considered inspired and which were not?*

*When was this collection completed?*

The answer to these questions lies with something called the canon of the Bible. I don’t mean the cannon of the Bible (a big gun), but rather the “one N” canon. The word canon means “list.” It is the list of books that the Church recognizes as inspired by God. We are going to study the formation of the canon of Scripture.

**Word Study:** “canon” is from a Greek word (*kanon*), and literally means “reed”, a plant that was used to make a measuring stick, so it then came to mean a “ruler.” Then, it came to refer to a column drawn on papyrus using a ruler, and then finally to the list items of written in the column. Since the 4<sup>th</sup> century, the word canon has been used by the church to refer to the authoritative *list* of books that comprise the Bible.<sup>1</sup>

## The Old Testament Canon

ESV **Romans 3:2** . . . the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God.

**Fact:** There are 39 books in the English Old Testament. The first is Genesis and the last is Malachi. There is a 400 year gap between Malachi and Matthew.

<sup>1</sup> J.D. Douglas, Editor, *New Bible Dictionary*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1982), 166, 171.

The discovery of the Dead Sea scrolls at Qumran (1946) shows that the Jews accepted as Scripture the same Old Testament as we have today as early as 100 B.C.

The Jews translated the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek (Septuagint) sometime before 200 B.C. This shows that the Jews accepted the same Old Testament we have today as far back as 200 B.C.

We should accept the same Old Testament books as inspired that our Lord Jesus did.

**Which Old Testament books did Jesus consider to be a legitimate part of inspired Scripture?** We can tell which books Jesus considered to be inspired from something he said:

ESV **Luke 11:51** . . . from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who perished between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I tell you, it will be required of this generation.

Able was the first person in the Bible who was killed by someone else, and this of course is recorded in the first book of the Bible, Genesis:

ESV **Genesis 4:8** Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him.

Zechariah is not the same Zechariah who wrote the book of Zechariah. There were numerous men in the Bible named Zechariah. The record of the death of the Zechariah Jesus spoke of is recorded in 2 Chronicles:

ESV **2 Chronicles 24:20-21** Then the Spirit of God clothed Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest, and he stood above the people, and said to them, "Thus says God, 'Why do you break the commandments of the LORD, so that you cannot prosper? Because you have forsaken the LORD, he has forsaken you.'" But they conspired against him, and by command of the king they stoned him with stones in the court of the house of the LORD.

**Why is this significant?** In the time of Jesus, the Hebrew Scriptures were not arranged in the same order as our English Old Testaments. Same material, same content, but different order:

1. The Hebrew Bible has only 24 books (ours has 39), but is same length as our Bibles. Some of their books were combined into one book.
2. The Hebrew Bible is in 3 parts: The Law, the Prophets, and the Writings (ours is history, poetry and prophecy).

**Very Important:** The last book in the Hebrew Bible of Jesus' day was not **Malachi**, it was **2 Chronicles**. **Genesis** contains the account of Abel's death, and it is the first book in the Hebrew Bible. **2 Chronicles** contains the account of Zechariah's death, and it is the last book in the Hebrew Bible, and the last recorded martyrdom of the righteous by the unrighteous. Based on the way our Bibles are arranged, it is as if Jesus said, "Your guilt is recorded all through the Bible, from Genesis to Malachi."

**Application:** The church has always accepted the Old Testament as Scripture because of Jesus' acceptance of the Old Testament as Scripture, from A (Abel) to Z (Zechariah)!

## What about the Apocrypha?

There is a set of historical books called Apocrypha that cover the history of what happened between Malachi and Matthew.

The Apocrypha existed when Jesus was alive. Significantly, though the Apocrypha existed during Jesus' lifetime, Jesus stopped short of including the martyrs whose deaths were described in the Apocryphal writings. Also, neither Jesus nor the Apostles ever directly quoted from the Apocrypha (a case could be made that allusions are made to it, but then again Paul directly quoted a pagan poet whose writings clearly were not inspired).

First century Judaism did not accept the Apocrypha as inspired. For example, the ancient Hebrew historians, Philo and Josephus, both rejected the Apocrypha as inspired.

Jesus left out the Apocrypha but agreed with the three-fold division of the Hebrew Scriptures:

ESV **Luke 24:25, 27** And he said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! . . . And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

ESV **Luke 24:44** Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled."

Like the Judaism of Jesus' day, the early church accepted the Apocrypha as useful reading, as helpful to understanding the inter-testament period, but not as inspired, not as Scripture.

**Example:** Jerome, who translated the Bible into Latin, did not believe the Apocrypha to be inspired. Furthermore, early church fathers like Origen, Cyril of Jerusalem, and Athanasius spoke out against the Apocrypha's inspiration.<sup>2</sup>

**Key Point:** The Roman Catholic Church did not canonize the Apocrypha until the Council of Trent (1546-1563) as part of their Counter-Reformation effort to deflect criticism.

**Example:** II Maccabees 12:38-46, exhorts Jews to pray for the souls of fallen soldiers who had worn idolatrous amulets under their tunics. Catholics cite this passage as support for the doctrine of purgatory and praying for the dead.<sup>3</sup>

**Helpful Article:** [www.blueletterbible.org/faq/don\\_stewart/don\\_stewart\\_395.cfm](http://www.blueletterbible.org/faq/don_stewart/don_stewart_395.cfm)

## The New Testament Canon

As you can easily imagine, the early church readily accepted the words of Jesus to be Scripture.

### 1. The Words of Jesus were accepted as Scripture by the early church.

<sup>2</sup> Matt Slick, "The Apocrypha: Is it Scripture?", Carm.org. Accessed December 13, 2018.

<sup>3</sup> "Did Jesus or the apostles ever quote the Apocrypha?", ExCatholic4Christ.wordpress.com. Accessed December 13, 2018.

**Example:**

ESV **1 Timothy 5:18** For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain," and, "The laborer deserves his wages."

**Based on 1 Timothy 5:18, what did Paul consider to be Scripture?** Paul considered both the Law of Moses and the words of Jesus to be Scripture.

ESV **Deuteronomy 25:4** You shall not muzzle an ox when it is treading out the grain.

ESV **Luke 10:1, 7** After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others . . . And he said to them, ". . . remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide, for the laborer deserves his wages."

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**2. What promise did Jesus make that serves as the basis for accepting the writings of the Apostles as inspired Scripture?** Speaking to the Twelve (Mt 10:1), Jesus said:

ESV **Matthew 10:27** What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops.

ESV **Matthew 10:40** Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me.

ESV **John 14:26** 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 all that I have said to you.

ESV **John 16:12-15** I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

**Apostle:** In secular Greek, "apostle" meant "chosen emissary, the bearer of another and higher authority, the herald of a given message." The apostles were promised special guidance by the Holy Spirit; this looked forward to the writing of the gospels and epistles. Because of what Jesus said about Holy Spirit and the Twelve, the early church accepted the writings of the Apostles as Scripture:

ESV **Acts 2:42** And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

The apostles uniquely represented Jesus, carried His authority, and were the norm for doctrine in the early church.

**The Point:** The early church accepted the apostle's writings as inspired.

Furthermore, the apostles were conscious that they uniquely represented Jesus:

**ESV 1 Thessalonians 2:13** And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.

**ESV 1 Corinthians 14:37** If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord.

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**Further Evidence: What can we learn about what Peter considered to be part of the New Testament canon from 2 Peter 3:14-16?**

**ESV 2 Peter 3:15-16** . . . our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.

Paul's letters were considered to be part of the "other Scriptures".

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**4. What does Jude 3 and Eph 2:19-20 teach us about the need for further, new revelation beyond the New Testament?**

**ESV Jude 1:3** . . . contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.

The faith has been delivered "once for all."

**ESV Ephesians 2:19-21** . . . are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.

The "foundation" has already been laid.

**Furthermore:** One requirement by the church for inclusion in the canon was that a letter had to be written by either an Apostle or a close associate of an Apostle. Those people have been dead for 2,000 years; no one since is qualified.

## The Problems

### What motivated the church to eventually draw up an official list of inspired New Testament books?

**Early Developments:** Early on, there was no need for an official list of inspired books to be compiled. This was due in large part to the actual presence of the original Apostles themselves.<sup>4</sup> As time passed, groupings of New Testament writings began circulating in sets: The Gospels, Paul's writings, and the General Epistles.

Three problems contributed to the need for a canon:

**1. A False Canon:** About A.D. 140, a false teacher named Marcion promoted his own canon of Scripture. The problem was that Marcion rejected all 66 books of the Bible except Luke and ten of Paul's letters! His misguided effort was the first known attempt to form an authoritative list of New Testament writings. Thus, the church needed to offset his influence and end the confusion.

**2. False Writings:** Confusion resulted with the proliferation of non-inspired gospels, histories, letters and apocalypses. The church needed to clear up the confusion.

**Modern Example:** The Mormons today promote the *Book of Mormon* as inspired. They claim it is "another testament."

**3. Persecution:** Around A.D. 303, the Roman Emperor Diocletian called for the complete destruction of Christian writings. No one wanted to die defending uninspired writings, so the churches need to know what was alright to hand over to the Romans versus what was worth hiding and risking your life over.

## The Process

**Early A.D. 100's:** The first informal steps by Christians to draw up an authoritative list.

**Mid A.D. 100's:** Agreement is reflected in the casual writings of various early church leaders about which books were considered inspired. **Example:** Irenaeus of Lyon (A.D. 130-200) mentioned 24 of the 27 books.

**Muratorian Canon:** The earliest known list of New Testament books that was drawn up by the church dates from around 170 A.D. It is called the Muratorian Canon. It includes 20 of the 27 New Testament books (except James, Peter's epistles, 3 John, James, Jude and Hebrews).

**Origen** (185-254 A.D.): wrote that most of the books were accepted by all, with a few still questioning Hebrews, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, James and Jude.

**Eusebius** (265-340 A.D.): mentions as generally acknowledged all the books of our New Testament except James, Jude, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, which were disputed by a minority.

**Athanasius**, in A.D. 367, lists all 27 New Testament books.

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<sup>4</sup> Douglas, 172.

**Council of Carthage**, A.D. 397, agreed upon the canon we have today.

**F.F. Bruce:** “One thing must be emphatically stated. The New Testament books did not become authoritative for the Church because they were formally included in a canonical list; on the contrary, the Church included them in her canon because she already regarded them as divinely inspired, recognising their innate worth and general apostolic authority, direct or indirect. The first ecclesiastical councils to classify the canonical books were both held in North Africa—at Hippo Regius in 393 and at Carthage in 397—but what these councils did was not to impose something new upon the Christian communities but to codify what was already the general practice of those communities.”<sup>5</sup>

### Three Rules

**What three criteria were utilized to establish which written documents are the true record of the voice and message of apostolic witness?**

1. Apostolic Authorship (Paul, Peter, John, etc. ) or A Close Associate of an Apostle (Luke, Mark).
2. Widespread and Long Acceptance by the Churches.
3. Congruence with the Standards of Sound Doctrine: “When it doubt, throw it out.”<sup>6</sup>

**Perspective:** The 27 books were already inspired before any tests were put to them. Like an IQ test, the tests only revealed what was already intrinsically true.

### Table of Contents

**Did you know that there is a man made, uninspired creed in every Bible in this room?**

There is! It is called the Table of Contents. An ecumenical church council drew up your Table of Contents as a creed.

Creed is from the Latin, *credo*, and means “I believe”. The Table of Contents is a statement of what the church of history believes about which books belong in the Bible.

At this point we might discuss the true nature of *sola scriptura*. Martin Luther’s writings sparked the Protestant Reformation. Famous was his commitment to *sola scriptura* (Scripture alone). What did he mean by that? Before we understand *sola scriptura* we must understand something called the *regula fidé*.

*regula fidé*— The New Testament means what the apostles said it meant. However they are not here to tell us what they meant by what they wrote. In the early church interpreted the New Testament letters based on the oral teachings of the apostles themselves. They actually knew the authors. The apostles had spent time in the various places to which the letters were written. Over time, the church universal retained a living memory of what the Apostles taught about certain basic doctrines. This is called the *regula fidé*, the rule of faith. It simply means that the Bible must be interpreted according the verbal teaching of the apostles.

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<sup>5</sup> F.F. Bruce, “The Canon of the New Testament”, [www.Bible-Researcher.com/bruce1.html](http://www.Bible-Researcher.com/bruce1.html). Accessed 12/14/2018.

<sup>6</sup> Douglas, 176.

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**Real Life Historical Example:** A church leader, Arius, in the A.D. 300s, taught that Jesus was *not* god. He used the Bible to support his belief. He had Bible verses! (Beware a man bearing verses!). The church met to deal with this. Church leaders from all over the Roman Empire came. These elders were the real deal, not denominational fat cats. Christianity had not been legalized long; these men had endured years of persecution. In dealing with Arius, they of course used Scripture to show Arius his error, but he always had a comeback, some unique, individualistic interpretation. They had verses; he had verses. Finally they asked, “Who in the church, before you, back through the past two hundred years and closest to the time of the apostles, can you site to support your views?” They wanted to examine the *regula fidei* on this issue. Arius had a hard time coming up with a credible tradition of his view. In contrast, all the churches in the cities that the elders had come from had a living memory of the apostles’ teaching that Jesus is indeed God in the flesh. Finally, the church declared Arius to be in error, and they drew up the Nicene Creed. In drawing the creed up, they were careful not to say, “We have decided”, but rather “Here is what the church has always believed.” Therefore, they reasoned, Arius could not be correct (based on Scripture and the rule of faith; that is, based on the written teachings of Scripture and the oral tradition of the apostles, and the general consensus of the churches everywhere).

**Fact:** Both the early church and then later the medieval church held to the “rule of faith,” or the *regula fidei* as the right way to interpret the Bible. What this meant was that the correct interpretation of the Bible is what the apostles orally said that it meant (as reflected in early church ecumenical councils and creeds), and by looking at all the churches everywhere to see what they all agreed upon as Christian theology. It was the consensus of the whole church. This is partially represented in such ecumenical creeds as the Apostle’s Creed and the Nicene Creed. This has been called **Tradition I**.

**PPT>>> Tradition I.** *If* the Holy Spirit is working in the lives of God’s people guiding them into all the truth, and *if* the Holy Spirit has gifted pastor-teachers for the equipping and maturing of God’s people, *then* whatever the corporate church agrees upon is sure evidence of the Spirit’s work. Universal consensus was seen as a secondary and uninspired authority (the primary authority is the inspired Bible), but an authority none-the-less.

It is obvious that the early Christian writers (during the time of the imperial Roman Empire) held to this idea and also the Church of the Middle Ages held to it (Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Hippolytus, Cyprian, Athanasius, Hilary of Poitiers, Cyril of Jerusalem, etc).

**Drawing Example, Phase A:** Years after my son had left home and married, we found what appeared to be a drawing of a cat that he had made when he was very young. This drawing could be compared to one of the letters of the New Testament and my son would correspond to one of the apostles. We would be the church trying to interpret the letter. The next time he was back home visiting, we asked him about the drawing. He said he remembered drawing it, but that it was not a cat, but rather a dinosaur! Now we had the correct interpretation of the drawing. In a similar way, the early churches not only had various New Testament letters (the drawing), but they had the apostles (my son) there with them to explain what the letters meant. This is Tradition 1, the *regula fidei*.



**PPT>>> Tradition II.** This view of *Tradition I* did not change until the **late** Middle Ages when the Roman Catholic Church erroneously began to claim that the later teachings of the Roman Catholic Church, and in particular the Pope, were **equal to Scripture** as a source of inspired authority. This has been called *Tradition II*. They elevated church tradition to the level of Scripture. They said there were **two sources of divine revelation**.

**Drawing Example, Phase B:** Using the same drawing example as above, now imagine our next door neighbor came over, saw the drawing, and asked what it was, whereupon we explained how our son told us it was a dinosaur. The neighbor accepted our interpretation, but then insisted on his own that the background color represented the coming ice age and the extinction of the dinosaur, and that his explanation of the background was equally as valid and authoritative as our explanation that the animal was a dinosaur rather than a cat.

At this point, a number of loyal Catholics balked. They protested. We call them Protestants. The Reformers (Calvin, Luther, etc). rejected *Tradition II* and called for a return to universal consensus of the whole church of the ages (not just the Pope), *Tradition I*. They denied that church tradition is equal to Scripture and they denied that church tradition is inspired.

**PPT>>>** This was called *sola scriptura*, meaning **only scripture** was inspired and infallible. But the Reformers did not reject the oral tradition of the apostles as it had been preserved by the universal church in such statements as the Apostles Creed or the Nicene Creed. They still held to *Tradition I* as an interpretive basis. *Sola Scriptura* means that only the **Bible** is inspired and infallible, yet it still holds *Tradition I* as a secondary authority (the general interpretations of the community of faith).

**PPT>>> Summary:** The Protestant Reformers emphasized that “Scripture was the sole source of revelation and the sole infallible authority. However, they continued to teach that this authoritative Scripture must be interpreted in and by the Church within the hermeneutical context of the rule of faith.”<sup>7</sup>

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**When was the printing press invented?** It was invented by Johannes Gutenberg in 1450. (Lay down copy of printed Bible.) Before that, you almost certainly would *not* have had your own copy of the bible.

**PPT>>> Tradition 0.** About the time of the Reformation (1500s) a new way of interpretation developed: **Tradition 0**. Those who advocated *Tradition 0* ignored over a millennia of church theology. Their approach was:

**PPT>>>** “Just me and my Bible.”

The general consensus of the church gave way to the judgments of the individual believer.

<sup>7</sup> Keith Mathison, *The Shape of Sola Scriptura*, 151.

**Drawing Example, Phase C:** Now, suppose next that a thief broke into my home and stole the drawing. The thief took it home, framed it, hung it on his wall, and announced it was a drawing of a cat. The thief didn't know my son to ask him what it was. The thief didn't care what we, his parents, remembered what our son said about it (Tradition 1), or what our neighbor added to it (Tradition 2). Instead, he just acted as if the drawing had no history. He was sure the drawing represented what he thought it represented. That is Tradition 0.

The philosophy of the Enlightenment (1600s) was this: "Dare to use your own understanding."

**PPT>>>** This applied especially to religion, summarized by author James Byrne: "No generation should be bound by the creeds and dogmas of bygone generations." — James M Byrne, *Religion and the Enlightenment*

Instead of the **general consensus** of the universal church being the final interpreter (Tradition I), instead of the **Pope** being the final arbiter (Tradition II), the **individual believer** was held up as the final judge (Tradition 0). The Pope was replaced by the individual believer. *All you have done is to trade one Pope for another (you!).* Is that really any better?

This was originally popularized by the Anabaptists. The Protestant Reformers argued against the Roman Catholics for making their recent church traditions equal to Scripture but they also argued against the Anabaptists for rejecting all tradition from the previous 1500 years.

Today we take it for granted that we all have Bibles. It is a tremendous blessing! But, for most of history, the average Christian has not had a Bible (it was practically impossible before the printing press).

**PPT>>>** Today modern American Evangelicals have **redefined** Tradition I's *sola scriptura* into Tradition 0's **SOLO scriptura** (just me and my Bible).

Yes, we should study our bible as individuals, but we should not study it individualistically.

**Is SOLO scriptura really what God intended?** Most of God's people throughout history have been without their own copies of the Bible, so *solo scriptura* would have been impossible.

Sometime we act as if the Bible just dropped out of the sky (Poof!) and that the church had nothing to do with it.

**Did you know there is a man-made creed printed in every Bible in this room?** (Guaranteed). There's a creed in your English bible! Before the Word of God in Genesis 1:1 is the word of the church in The *Table of Contents*. It dates from the A.D. 300s.

**Do you know what the word 'creed' means?** From *creedo*, which is Latin for "I believe." A creed is merely a statement of what the church believes.

The TOC is a creed that you probably all accept. **How can we trust the church's judgment for what Books belong in the bible (TOC is a credal statement) and not accept the church's essential theology?**

**The Reality of the Matter:** Creeds are unavoidable. Either you'll accept the creeds of the historic church or you'll make up your own.

The Question is, **Do you really have the authority to do that alone? How wise is that?**

*Tradition 0* seeks to interpret the bible **apart** from the church of history, **apart** from the ancient rule of faith (*regula fidei*).

*Tradition 0* says it is wrong to adhere to the creedal formulations of historic Christianity.

*Tradition 0* elevates private judgment above the corporate judgment of the church. It is pure individualism, and IMHO is a recipe for theological chaos.

Now factor in **American individualism**. The typical American evangelical finds it self-evident that the priesthood of the believer means religion **of** the people, **by** the people and **for** the people. They call for a populist hermeneutic premised on the inalienable right of every person to understand the New Testament for himself.

Thus we have enlightenment rationalism combined with democratic populism giving rise to *SOLO scriptura*.

This, it seems to me, is a dangerous position to be in. You are loosed from the moorings of historic theology, you have cut yourself off from 2000 years of the Spirit's leading in His people, you essentially discount the ministry of pastor-teachers over the past millennia, and it disregards the early oral tradition of the apostles.

**PPT>>>** When you do this, you are out in the woods with the wolves. This is not good company to keep. (Bad company corrupts good morals).

**The Problem:** Every cult will try to divorce the Bible from the creeds and the church of history. Every cultist claims to go by the Bible and the Bible alone.

#### **Examples:**

**PPT>>>** A.B. Grosh, **Unitarian Minister**: "In religious faith we have but one Father and one Master, and the Bible, *The Bible*, is our only acknowledged creed book." *Grosh had disconnected from historic orthodoxy*

**PPT>>>** The **Jehovah's Witness'** in *Let God Be True* wrote:

"To arrive at truth we must dismiss religious prejudices from heart to mind. We must let God speak for himself . . . To let God be true means to let God have the say as to what is the truth that sets men free. It means to accept his word, the Bible, as the truth. Our appeal is to the Bible for truth" This same publication spurns creeds as "man-made traditions," "the precepts of men" and "opinions".

**Sum:** The most zealous opponents of the creeds have generally been heretics. Their first goal will be to convince potential converts that there are no binding doctrinal boundaries within Christianity.

**Example:** A wily young man wants to have his way with a young woman, but the father is there to protect her from guys like him. So what is his task? To get dad out of the way: "Is Dad perfect? Does Dad ever make mistakes? Is Dad ever wrong? Then dad is not qualified to be an authority in your life." He tries to cull her out, away from dad's authority.

Similarly, the church is not perfect, the church makes mistakes, but the church is God's appointed authority. The scripture is the final, infallible authority, but the church is a secondary authority none-the-less. Cults always try to separate the Bible from the church of history, to drive a wedge between the two.

**Key Point:** The Spirit-inspired Scriptures and the Spirit-indwelt church exist together in a reciprocal relationship. The Bible was not compiled in a vacuum.

**PPT>>>** "A creedless church, like a creedless Christian, is a ship tossed to and fro, carried about by every wind of doctrine, compelled to consider every contradictory theological fad and novelty that comes along as long as the one proclaiming it assures his audience that it is simply what the Bible teaches." (Keith Mattison, p 342)

**Smoke Detector:** Every heretic in Christendom is ready to declare his simple allegiance to the Bible, and he'll do it as loudly and as frequently as the most orthodox church. The ecumenical early creeds help us to define and detect heresy. The creeds are like smoke detectors; they'll help sniff out heresy.

**Rhetorical: Who is the ultimate arbiter for interpreting Scripture?** A single Church (Catholic/Pope), each individual believer (*SOLO scriptura*) or the corporate consensus of the church as a whole throughout the world and across time (*sola scriptura*)?

"If the Scriptures be a plain book, and the Spirit performs the functions of a teacher to all the children of God, it follows inevitably that they must agree in all essential matters in their interpretation of the Bible. And from that fact it follows that for an individual Christian to dissent from the faith of the universal Church (i.e. the body of true believers), is tantamount to dissenting from the Scriptures themselves."

— Charles Hodge

### Conclusion

Creed is from the Latin, *credo*, and means "I believe". The Table of Contents is a statement of what the Church of history believes about which books belong in the Bible.

That's Why There Are 66 Books in the Bible and How They Got There!

Stephen E. Atkerson

NTRF.org

06/24/2020 (note: does not correspond exactly with the PPTs)