

Belgic Confession 4 – The Bible Has Sixty-Six Perfect Books

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ: You have heard that God reveals himself generally in nature so that men are without excuse for not trying to find him. You then heard that God spoke to man specially, filling in what nature doesn't. In this special revelation you learn how you can be saved and sanctified.

But how do you know which books make up special revelation? Which books should be in the Bible? Which books are true? Today you will hear which books rightly make up the Canon and why.

Our headings are:

What is the Canon?

Which Books should be in the Canon?

Why is it dangerous to attack the Canon?

Our goals are: That you will **know which books are in the Bible**, that you **study them, obey them, and teach them to all.**

We believe that the Holy Scriptures are contained in two books, namely, the Old and the New Testament, **which are canonical**, against which nothing can be alleged. These are thus named in the Church of God.

The books of the Old Testament are the five books of Moses, to wit: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy; the book of Joshua, Judges, Ruth, the two books of Samuel, the two of the Kings, two books of the Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther; Job, the Psalms [of David], the three books of Solomon, namely, the Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs; the four great prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, {Lamentations,} Ezekiel, and Daniel; and the twelve lesser prophets, namely, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

Those of the New Testament are the four evangelists, which are: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John; the Acts of the Apostles; the thirteen epistles of the apostle Paul, namely, one to the Romans, two to the Corinthians, one to the Galatians, one to the Ephesians, one to the Philippians, one to the Colossians, two to the Thessalonians, two to Timothy, one to Titus, one to Philemon; Hebrews; the seven epistles of the other apostles, namely, one of James, two of Peter, three of John, one of Jude; and the Revelation of the apostle John.

What is the Canon?

1. The word “canon” comes from a Latin word which does not mean “big gun” but means “rule, norm, or standard.”

2. We begin with the confident assertion that the 66 books we have in the Bible make up the complete Canon.

We assert that these 66 books are the **rule, norm, and standard of what you must believe and must practice.**

We assert that there are **no other standard that you need.**

We assert that because God loves you so much he was careful to give you in the Bible **everything you need to save you** from your sins and **to guide you in your sanctification.**

We assert that **all men are bound to every word of the Canon, even if they don't like it or even if they don't believe it!**

3. If you don't believe and practice every word of the Canon it will have a devastating effect on your life.

You not know how to be saved and sanctified.

You will try wrong ways of being saved and sanctified.

You will easily be deceived by those who promote false writings – like Mormonism or the Koran or the Gita.

4. If you accept other writings alongside the Canon you will become weak and inconsistent in what you believe and how you live.

E.g. The Roman Catholics added the Apocrypha to the Canon. As a result they believe and teach that it is okay to baptize the dead. They also believe that man will never be condemned to hell forever but will go to and get out of purgatory after a time. So they don't have a proper sense of God's justice. They will **never be able to be grateful enough for what God has done and rob him of his rightly glory.**

Which Books Should be in the Canon?

1. Who decided which books should be in the Canon—which books are the standards for your believe and action (your faith and practice)?

If someone says a certain book must be included and another says it shouldn't be in the Canon, how should you choose? I have an old illustration: *The parent of one of my students once called me when I was administrator of a school and said: Who wrote this letter in your name? He knew I didn't write it! How did he know I didn't write the letter? (I was busy and didn't write it.) He knew me. He knew my simple style. He knew words I used. Maybe the lady who wrote it used lots of big words.* Similarly if you want to know which books should be in the Bible **you have to know the speaker.** If the words are God's Words, then they should be in the Canon. **God and only God decides. And God confirms which books are parts of the Canon!** How does God confirm the Canonical books?

2. Jesus clearly inferred (and confirmed) that all 39 books of the Old Testament were part of the Canon.

Luke 11:51 "from the blood of **Abel to the blood of Zechariah** who perished between the altar and the temple. Yes, I say to you, it shall be required of this generation.

Abel was mentioned in the first book of the OT, Genesis 4. Zechariah was mentioned in the last written book of the OT, 2Chronicles 24: 20-24. (The Jewish Old Testament was put together differently from ours. 2Chronicles was the last book. Our Old Testament is organized with broad themes (Pentateuch, historical writings, Psalms, Major Prophets, and Minor Prophets). Further, Jesus and the writers of the New Testament frequently quoted Old Testament books as part of the Canon. You can read about Malachi, Isaiah, Moses, David, Joel, Hosea, Zechariah, etc.

Matthew 4:4 - **It is written**, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'" (Quoting Deut. 8:3)

Paul confirmed the Old Testament and showed that they had the same hope:

Romans 15:4 For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and **comfort of the Scriptures** might have hope.

Romans 3:2 Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were **committed the oracles of God.**

The Jews received the 39 books of the Old Testament as the Bible. They didn't decide which books were included.

3. What about the period between the Old and New Testament, were any Scriptures written at that time?

Malachi appealed to that which was there before him and then he jumped forward to Jesus. He left no room for the Apocrypha, (unknown origin) written between him and Jesus. Malachi jumped to John the Baptist to the next source of the Word of God.

Malachi 4:5 Behold, I will send you **Elijah the prophet** Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.

(Malachi was based on the last written prophecy in the Old Testament. 2Chronicles was just completed during that time.) So we have good reason not believe God did not intend to include anything in the Bible from that time.

4. Now concerning the NT: How did we did decide which books should be included?

We didn't. Again, it was God who decided what should be included and God preserved what should be included. He destroyed what he did not want preserved. (Paul wrote at least 16 books, but only 13 were preserved.) **The church received (not decide) what God preserved,** just as in the OT.

5. Further, internal testimony confirmed which New Testament books are part of the he

Canon.

Apostle Paul required that some books be read in other churches for instruction.

Colossians 4:16 Now when this epistle is read among you, see that it is read also in the church of the Laodiceans, and that you likewise read the epistle from Laodicea.

The Epistle to the Colossians was required reading and had to be obeyed.

Peter confirmed that Paul's writings were part of the Canon.

2Peter 3:15-16 - and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.

6. In AD 397, at the 3rd Council of Carthage, the church officially recognized the 66 books of the Bible.

What standards did they use to complete the Bible (39 OT books were readily accepted)?

- a. That the book was preserved by God.
- b. That the book was written by an Apostle or his close associate. The early church fathers recognized miraculous tongues and prophecies were temporary in order to help the church to get established. (The Bible was not yet completed.) This meant that the church was not going to have any more direct special revelation.
- c. That the book was already widely received and used in the churches.

7. The Apocrypha, “unknown origin,” accepted later by the Roman Catholics, was never accepted as part of the Bible before 397AD.

The early church fathers (before and after Carthage) rejected them as canonical.

These books, while they have good information, show that they are not from God.

These books were not written by the Apostles or their close associates.

They were in existence before, but Christ only spoke of the 39 Old Testament books.

The Apocrypha was missing!

Luke 24:44 Then He said to them, "These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me."

Further, Paul said that the Jews had the Word of God – which never included the Apocrypha. The loose Septuagint translation included the Apocrypha, but not the

original Hebrew writings.

The church does not have the right to add authority to any Scriptures. The church can't add legitimacy to it!

8. People called Anabaptists— many modern Arminians—Pentecostal-types—believed that the Old Testament books were useless because the God of the Old Testament God was an angry God who always brought judgment of people and has no grace.

They usually attack the law, given in the Old Testament, as bad. (Popular preacher Andy Stanley and another famous preacher made this assertion recently.) These people believe only the NT speaks of grace (and no judgment).

But the OT is full of grace and prefigured the completion of that grace in Christ (Isaiah 53, Psalm 22, Ezekiel 34).

And the NT has notable judgments, like Ananias and Sapphira, 1Corinthians 11 —abusers of the Lord's Supper were killed, and of course Revelation — where judgment is the most striking in the whole Bible.

It is difficult to understand the NT without the OT. The Old Testament looks forward to Christ, the New Testament looks back to Christ. The Old Testament teaches Christ concealed, the New Testament teaches Christ revealed. The Old and New Testament's center is the salvation of man.

The OT and NT are united. Saints in the OT had the same Gospel, the same Savior, the same faith, and were in the same church!

It is sad that people today print the NT and the Psalms, but exclude the rest of the OT.

9. Even books that might not seem to fit into the Bible, if you examine them carefully, would see that they fit perfectly.

Luther made this mistake. He believed that a couple of the books of the Bible (James, in particular) were not really good books. He thought James was lacking in the teaching of faith. Yet, James is full of the expressions of faith — how faith is seen. So don't attack the Bible. Search it out first! Cherish it.

Why is it dangerous to attack the Canon?

1. God's canon is complete.

You can't add to it. No one can add to a filled cup without making a mess.

2. If you attack the canon, you attack God by trying to change his will.

Do you see the danger? Who changes another's will? Even sinful man knows it is wrong to do that.

Galatians 1:8 But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other

gospel to you than what we have preached to you, **let him be accursed**.

Who wants to rob God of glory that belongs to him? Who would be that foolish?

3. If you attack the Canon, you will rob yourself of truth – so you won't know how to be saved and sanctified.

You will never be able to obey Christ perfectly. And you will rob him of his glory. Also many pastors today indirectly attack the OT by rarely preaching from it. It is a sin to treat the OT as less important than the NT. Additionally, what wonderful stories you can read there of God's grace! Leave nothing out. Don't rob yourself and your hearers of the gems of the OT.

Conclusion:

God graciously provided 66 books of the Bible to his people for their salvation and sanctification. The 2 divisions of the Old and New Testaments are united...they both speak of one Gospel, one faith, on Savior, and one church. God mercifully preserved them for you.

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ:

1. Learn to be saved and sanctified by feasting daily in the Word of God. You will bring glory to your Savior.

2. Remember Christ when you are reading about the sacrifices of Leviticus, or examining the **3 yearly feasts**, or learning about the **Bridegroom in Songs of Solomon**, or **Joshua leading Israel** into Canaan in Joshua. Christ is present throughout the whole Bible.

3. Watch out for those who are attacking the Canon! Challenge them if you are able, avoid them if you aren't. Remember, they are attacking your Savior when they attack his Word. You must honor your Savior by promoting his work and defending his Word – which gives life.

4. When some things in Bible are difficult to understand, don't let them overwhelm you. Ask for help if you need it. Enjoy the fish without choking on the bones.

Finally, if you are not a Christian but are struggling to understand something in the Bible, don't panic. Look at the clear things: Jesus came into the world to die for sinners like you. Ask him to take your sins away and make you his child.