

TXT MSG: What We Believe about the Bible

"CANONIZATION: RULE OF LAW" REVELATION 22:18, 19

This Week's Core Competency

Authority of the Bible – I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action. 2 Timothy 3:16, 17 *All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

Paul's "All Scripture is God-breathed" (2Ti 3:16) implies the need to distinguish those books that belong in the Bible from those that don't, which raises the related question, why does our English Bible include the books it does? Not long ago this rather academic matter was brought to everyone's attention by Dan Brown's bestselling novel, *The Da Vinci Code*, in which one of his characters states flat-out that more than eighty Gospels didn't make it into the New Testament because the Catholic Church wanted to suppress what those books had to say about Jesus. One author describes the impact of such claims on people this way. "For many people the most disturbing feature in contemporary reports concerning the Jesus of history is the attention given to texts outside of the New Testament, some of which are called 'Gospels.' These Gospels—which are also referred to as 'extracanonical Gospels'—are purported to make important contributions to our knowledge of the historical Jesus. Sometimes it is even

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-Charles C. Ryrie

claimed that these texts give us more reliable information about Jesus than the New Testament" (Craig A. Evans, *Fabricating Jesus*, 52). In fact, there aren't eighty extracanonical Gospels. Only five, which are said to support a portrait of Jesus different from the one in the Four Gospels, get much attention, and none of them were written in the first century. What's more, because of their late dates "it is unlikely that they contain information that adds to our knowledge of Jesus" (52).

The individual books in our Old and New Testaments were written over a long period of time by various writers so back to the original question, why does our English Bible include the books it does? In answering this question, "it is essential to remember that the Bible is self-authenticating since its books were breathed out by God (2 Tim 3:16). In other words, the books were canonical the moment they were written. It was not necessary to wait until various councils could examine the books to determine if they were acceptable or not. Their canonicity was inherent within them, since they came from God. People and councils only recognized and acknowledged what is true because of the intrinsic inspiration of the books as they were written. No Bible book became canonical by action of some church council" (Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 119). Think of it this way. Great works of art called "masterpieces" are what they are. Rembrandt's *Return of the Prodigal* is a masterpiece but not because a council of art critics convened and made it one by calling it one. The work's inherent qualities make it one. Some called

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it a "masterpiece" before the paint dried, others saw it later and agreed, in time there was consensus. With respect to the books included the Old Testament, Christ is the final authority. "His own affirmations, by statement and use, of its unqualified divine authority do certify to us its canonicity (Matt 4:4, 7, 10; 5:17, 18; 11:10; 19:4, 5; 21:13, 42; 22:29, 31, 32; 26:31, 56; Mark 12:10, 11, 24; Luke 24:25, 44; John 10:35). Unquestionably, Christ's constant quotation from the OT Scriptures and his utter reliance on them have a crucial relationship to the canon. Therefore, the NT references (many of them recorded in Matthew but paralleled in other Gospels) that establish the content of the previous Scriptures, conclusively define for the Christian a closed canon that concurs with that attested by Josephus, Philo, and the Talmud" (Milton C. Fisher, "The Canon of the Old Testament," *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 1:390). In other words, the Old Testament in our English Bible includes the very same books included in the Hebrew scriptures Jesus considered authoritative-not one more, not one less.

With respect to the books included in the New Testament, the question of canon is tied to the question of authority. "The early Christians had a 'canon' (rule) of unquestioned authority before a single book of our NT was written. Unlike their Jewish brethren who did not believe in Christ, they could not, however, stop there, for the Lord, who had recognized and validated that Scripture, was himself unquestioned authority" (Andrew F. Walls, "The Canon of the New Testament," *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 632). The early Christians, who for the most part were Jewish Christians, first recognized the authority of the Hebrew scriptures, but second, they also recognized the authority of Christ so much so that "a word from the Lord" was enough to settle a question regarding marriage and divorce (1Co 7:10, 11) or to delineate appropriate conduct around the Lord's table (1Co 11:23-33). The authoritative nature of the Lord's words produced a need for collections of his utterances and later for the writing of the Gospels. Third, they recognized the authority of the apostles who "provided a normative interpretation of the person and work of Christ and a normative repository of his teaching" (633; cf., Jn 14:26; 16:13-15). These apostolic functions in their fullest sense could not be transmitted to others so the apostles could have no successors. This produced a need for collections of their writings for reading in the early church (1Ti 4:13)—the epistles as well as the Gospels. Before the end of the second century the four Gospels, Acts, and the thirteen Pauline epistles were universally recognized as canonical (641), "masterpieces" if you will. By the middle of the fourth century the list of canonical writings in a *Festal Letter* of Athanasius (A.D. 367) is identical with that of our own New Testament canon; by then Christians are reading the same sacred books (642).

day 1 ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

Revelation 22:18, 19

18I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book.
19And if anyone takes words away from this book of

prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- * Circle "I" in v. 18.
- * Circle "warn" in v. 18.
- * Circle "hears" in v. 18.
- * Draw a line from "prophecy" in v. 18 to the same word in v. 19.
- * Highlight "this book" throughout.
- * Box "if" indicating *condition* in vv. 18, 19.
- * Underline "adds to" in v. 18.
- * Underline "takes away from" in v. 19.
- * Bracket "his share in the tree of life and in the holy city" in v. 19.

day 2

EXPLORE – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. Revelation 22:18-19 contains a warning. To whom is it directed?
2. How would you describe the *tone* of this warning?
3. Some think John is delivering it; some think Jesus is. Explain what you think.
4. What exactly is he warning against?
5. What do you infer about "this book" from the warning?
6. Is it conceivable that this warning applies to any other books as well? Explain.
7. The consequences for failing to heed it appear to be both *temporal* and *eternal*. How so?
8. Do you think verse 19 is better understood to refer to the loss of salvation or to the loss of rewards in eternity? Explain.
9. **Discussion:** Talk about whether you think anyone who has ever trusted Christ can ever be condemned by God.

EXAMINE – an explanation of the message to better understand the meaning of the passage.

Revelation 22:18-19 contains a dire warning against adding to or taking away from "the words of the prophecy of this book," the book of Revelation. The fact that the warning comes directly from Christ makes it all the more sobering. His warning is directed at everyone—those who might hear the book read, who might read the book themselves, or might make copies of the book for others (see 1:3; 2:7, 11, 17, 29, 3:6, 13, 22; cf., 22:7). It's a two-fold warning similar to the one issued by Moses with respect to the law. In Deuteronomy 4:2 he warned, "Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the LORD your God that I give you." In 12:32 he reiterated the same warning, "See that you do all I command you; do not add to it or take away from it." Clearly, anyone who would add an eleventh commandment to the Decalogue or take one away from it would face sure consequences that fit the crime, even though Moses doesn't specify that punishment in either of these passages. The fact that similar warnings appear in Proverbs 30:6 and Jeremiah 26:2 indicate that such warnings are rooted in the fact that what God has said isn't to be tampered with, and therefore, they apply to the word of God in general not just the particular books in which they appear—so also in Revelation 22:18-19. Christ's warning there applies individually to all the books in the canon and collectively to the canonical collection. Words cannot be added to or taken away from any of the individual books neither can books be added or taken away from the sixty-six book collection.

Christ's warning comes with serious consequences for anyone who fails to heed it. These consequences are both *temporal* and *eternal*. "God will add to him the plagues described in this book" pictures the consequences faced in this lifetime. "God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book" pictures

the consequences faced in the next. Based on the fact that similar warnings appear in other types of religious literature, some don't take this warning very seriously. In their opinion, it's just an example of literary convention. Still, literary conventions convey meaning that can't simply be disregarded. The big "meaning" question here is a theological one. Can those who trust Christ, or in the words of verse 14 those who "wash their robes" violate Christ's warning, and if they do, does verse 19 mean that they will lose their salvation for it. It's a tough question. Some answer no, "No true believer would ever deliberately tamper with Scripture" (John MacArthur, Jr., *Revelation 12-22*, MNTC, 310). Some answer yes, "I would hold to the possibility of believers losing their faith . . . Thus, the reader is warned here that distorting God's message in these prophecies is tantamount to apostasy, and the person guilty of it will become an apostate unbeliever in God's eyes" (Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, BECNT, 796). I think maybe and yes and no answer is called for here. Yes, anyone, even a person who has trusted Christ, is capable of intentionally mutilating Scripture; after all the warning was directed at everyone who might hear, read, or make copies of the canonical books, But no, should a believer do that, he *would* face dire consequences but *would not* suffer the loss of his salvation. Since the tree of life does not convey life, only the Holy Spirit can do that, losing one's share in it does not imply losing one's eternal life. What's more, the fact that it's "him who overcomes" who's given "the right to eat from the tree of life" in 2:7 implies that one's share in it is an overcomer's reward. And as such suggests intimacy with God and an enhanced capacity to experience and enjoy his presence. What the one who trusts Christ stands to lose for not heeding his warning is a heightened experience of God's life.

The Message of this Passage

Adding to or taking away from God's word is strictly forbidden by Christ—those who do so face dire consequences in this life and the life to come.

day **4** **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you through his word.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James suggests in James 1:22. Try some of the challenges below to apply what you have learned this week.

- **Give Yourself Some Good Advice Based on the Message of this Passage.**

- **Pick a verse or verses from the passage to memorize or think about this week.**

- **Relate the message of this passage to any of the following:**
 - o **Belonging**
 - o **Becoming**
 - o *going Beyond*

- **Home Group Discussion** (for those involved in the deeper connections of a home group)

Make a list of questions you have about the canon of Scripture. Email them to tbulick@pantego.org. I will circulate answers to the most frequently asked questions that you can discuss at your next meeting.

“Canonization: Rule of Law”
(Use the space below for Sunday’s message notes)

notes STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

v. 18 **I** Commentators are divided as to the identity of the speaker. Some think it is Jesus others think it is John. (The warning appears in black letters in the red-letter edition of *The NIV Study Bible*, ed. 1985; cf., "I, John, solemnly warn" [TEV].) Nevertheless, the former is more likely. "The speaker of these words of warning is Jesus Christ, who has been directly addressing John (22:7, 12-16). As the Lord Christ says in 22:16, 'I, Jesus [ego, Iesus], sent my angel,' so also here in 22:18, 'I' is Jesus, who says, 'I solemnly give witness (*marturo ego*)" (Louis A. Brighton, *Revelation*, Concordia Commentary, 655). "Since Jesus is the speaker in both verses 16 and 20, it is likely that he is the speaker here as well" (Osborne, 794).

v. 18 **warn** Lit., "testify" (NASB, the NET Bible, NKJV; cf., "this is my solemn attestation" [NJB]). The Greek verb [*marturo*] has a strong legal connotation captured by the paraphrase, "I solemnly swear." This "witness formula" serves to verify the truthfulness and certainty of the following prophecy against any who pose a threat to the integrity of the book (see David E. Aune, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 52c, *Revelation 17-22*, 1229, 30).

v. 18 **hears** The warning is addressed not to future scribes who might be tempted to tamper with the text of Revelation but to every member of the seven churches where the book was to be read (Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, NICNT, 395). "The use of [*pas*] 'every,' emphasizes the responsibility each individual has who hears this book read. Such reading could be done before individuals and groups in a variety of settings, of which Christian worship is perhaps the most obvious candidate, though the possibility of a school setting should not be ignored. Yet despite the group setting, each individual who hears is responsible for hearing and obeying what is heard. In antiquity books were nearly always read aloud so that the terms for 'reading' and 'hearing' could be used as synonyms (Herodotus 1.48) or used together as an idiomatic expression referring to a single activity" (Aune, 1230).

v. 18 **this book** I.e., the book of Revelation. "Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy (cf., 22:18, 19), and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it" (1:3).

v. 18, 19 **adds, takes away** "Such warnings to protect a literary writing were not uncommon in the ancient world, in particular with religious writings. For example, in his letter to Philocrates (310-11), Aristeas, in defending the LXX [Septuagint] text of the Torah, said that the person who would alter its text should be 'cursed' (*diarasasthai*). Eusebius emphasizes how the early Christians passed on the faith with 'painstaking carefulness.' As an example he describes how Irenaeus, in his work entitled *On the Ogdoad*, adjured (*orkizo*) everyone who might copy his book in the name of 'our Lord Jesus Christ,' who will 'judge the living and the dead, to compare what thou shalt write, and correct it carefully by this manuscript, and also to write this adjuration and place it in the copy.' Here the not to change the words of Revelation refers not only to a faithful reproduction of it in the making of copies for distribution, but also more importantly to not changing its words in order to change its meaning. Elsewhere in the Bible such warnings are also given not to change or alter the words of God. For example, Moses in Deut 4:2 told the Israelites not to add or subtract from the commands of God (cf. Deut 12:32; Prov 30:6; Jer 26:2)" (Brighton, 656). (Some see here a warning against willfully distorting the meaning of the text more so than the text itself [see Osborne, 795; Mounce, 395; Ison T. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John*, 779] but the two are obviously related.) "The warning that Jesus gives here in Rev 22:18-19, while directly applying to the book of Revelation, should also be applied by inference to the entire Bible, since Revelation is the climax and conclusion to the entire canon, both the OT and the NT. For the writing of the entire Bible are also so to be received as the very words of God and thus not to be altered—as indicated by the warning of Moses (Deut 12:32)" (Brighton, 656). "In light of the repeated warning against altering God's Word, Christ's warning must be broadened to include all of Scripture" (MacArthur, Jr., 309; cf., "the principle applies to the rest of the Bible, too, since its basis is the book's inspiration" [Craig S. Keener, *The NIV Application Commentary: Revelation*, 517]).

v. 19 **tree of life** The "tree of life" does not convey life; life is conveyed by the Holy Spirit. "God alone possesses immortality (1 Tim. 6:16), so our eternal life is never innate; it is only derived. God sustains us in life. Adam and Eve were capable of dying from the moment they were created, but they might also have lived forever. It all depended on the life-giving work of God, which He conditioned on human obedience. Then they ate the forbidden fruit, death because a reality" (Robert A. Pyne, *Humanity and Sin*, 160). "One characteristic, perhaps the principal characteristic, of the Spirit is that he perpetually imparts the physical and spiritual life of which he is the source. This being so, he must constantly sustain the spiritual resurrection life gained by the believer at regeneration and the somatic [bodily] resurrection life gained by the believer after death . . . Perhaps the symbol of the springs or river of 'living water' in the Apocalypse (7:17; 21:6; 22:1, 17) indicates the perpetuity of the Spirit's role as the giver of spiritual life, since in the Fourth Gospel water is symbolic of the Spirit (John 4.14; 7.38-9; cf. 1 Cor. 12:13). Quite apart from this possibility, there is no reason to believe that the Spirit's function as life-giver will suddenly terminate when the Age to Come arrives in its fullness. There will be no life that is independent of the Spirit of God in the hereafter any more than there is in the present Age" (Murray J. Harris, *Raised Immortal*, 146-47). If the "tree of life" does not convey life, then losing access to it may not imply the loss of eternal life.

Connect the **FAMILY**. During this series, Bible stories appropriate for children will be used that complement the adult teaching.

Experience it!

Experience scripture through the activity-based learning exercise. Dinner is a perfect time to engage the family.

Blindfold a family member. Instruct them to walk to the kitchen from another room in the house. Next, walk the path again, but provide the family member with a guide. It's definitely much easier to know where you are going when you have some help! Read Exodus 19. God gave his people (and us too!) specific instructions (the Bible) to provide guidance through life.



Pray it!

Pray God's will for your child by praying scriptures. Insert your child's name in the blanks as you pray.

Father, thank you for your scripture. I believe it is God-breathed and is useful for teaching me, rebuking me, correcting me and training me in righteousness. Through your scripture I will be thoroughly equipped for every good work. 2Ti 3:16-17

Post it!

Post the kid-friendly Core Competency and the memory verse throughout the house. Lead your children to interact with them as they memorize.

Authority of the Bible – I believe the Bible is God's book that tells me what to believe and do.

Memory verse – "All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." 2Ti 3:16, 17

Discuss it!

Discover biblical truth by discussing the scripture. Reflective questions are great with older kids.

- *How did God speak to Moses when he was on the mountain?
- *How did Moses remember exactly what God had said so he could tell the people?
- *Describe what the tablets of the Testimony looked like. (Ex 32:15-16)
- *How are the tablets of the Testimony similar to the Bible?

Live it!

Live out the Core Competency and build deeper relationships by doing this activity.

The Grand Opening for The Connection is only a few weeks away. Kids will want to invite their friends so they can experience all the fun and interactive truths from God's Word. This Sunday kids will learn how they can win an iTouch when they bring a friend to church.



Challenge

Kids preschool through sixth grade receive a prize for completing a Connect the Family activity.

My family completed at least one Connect the Family activity this week.

Child's name _____ Parent's signature _____

30 CORE COMPETENCIES

10 CORE BELIEFS

Trinity *2 Corinthians 13:14*

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation By Grace *Ephesians 2:8-9*

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God *Psalms 121:1-2*

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ *John 1:12*

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church *Ephesians 4:15-16*

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity *John 3:16*

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion *Psalms 82:3-4*

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity *John 14:1-4*

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship *1 Timothy 6:17-19*

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship *Psalms 95:1-7*

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer *Psalms 66:16-20*

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study *Hebrews 4:12*

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness *Matthew 6:33*

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts *Romans 12:4-6*

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community *Acts 2:44-47*

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Giving Away My Time *Colossians 3:17*

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith *Ephesians*

6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life *Romans 12:1*

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy *John 15:11*

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace *Philippians 4:6-7*

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

Faithfulness *Proverbs 3:3-4*

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Self-Control *Titus 2:11-13*

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility *Philippians 2:3, 4*

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love *1 John 4:10-12*

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience *Proverbs 14:29*

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness *1 Thess. 5:15*

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness *Philippians 4:5*

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope *Hebrews 6:19-20*

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

About the Authors

Tom Bulick (M.A. in Educational Leadership, Eastern Michigan University, Th.M. in Old Testament, and Ph.D. in Bible Exposition, Dallas Theological Seminary). For more than thirty-five years, Tom has served as pastor, faculty member, and administrator. Tom was Vice President for Student Life and Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Trinity Western University (Vancouver, B.C.) for twelve years before accepting the position of Spiritual Formation Pastor at Pantego Bible Church. He and his wife Ruth have been married forty-two years and have one son, Zach.

Keith Smith (B.A. in Speech Communication, Texas Tech University and M.A. in Religious Education, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary) is the Family and Children's Pastor at Pantego Bible Church. Keith is a featured communicator for Song of Solomon for Students and speaks at children/student camps across the country. He has developed a number of relational parenting seminars designed to motivate parents to empower their parenting by emotionally connecting with their kids. Keith lives with his wife, Denise, and their two children, Jordan and Alex.



8001 Anderson Blvd.
Ft. Worth, TX 76120
1-866-PANTEGO
Fax 817-275-6403
www.pantego.org

The mission of THE SCROLLS is to help you develop the beliefs, practices, and virtues of a follower of Jesus Christ called The 30 Core Competencies through your own active reading of the Bible. Send any questions or comments you may have about this lesson to Tom Bulick. His e-mail address is tbulick@pantego.org.