

Belgic Confession 4 – I Believe in the 66 Canonical Books

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ: You learned that God used man's particular talents, struggles, feeling, and historical circumstances in the giving of his Special Revelation – the Bible, and yet he suppressed man's sinful nature so that when man wrote, every word was 100% the Word of God. Then you learned that God graciously gave that special revelation to man so that man could be saved from his sins and be sanctified in Jesus Christ.

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 正典

Which Books should be in the Canon

Why is it dangerous to attack the Canon

Our goals are: That you **know which books are properly in the Bible**, that you **study, obey 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 meant “rule, norm or standard.”** So we begin with the confident assertion that the 66 books we have in the Bible make up the complete Canon.
- 2. Because these books make up the canon, you must hold these as the rule, norm, and standard of what you must believe and must practice.** There are no other standards and you don't need any other standards. God loves you so much that he was careful to give you everything you need to save you from your sins and to guide you in your sanctification 成圣 in the Canon. And since all men were created by God, all men are bound to every work of the Canon, even if they don't like it!
- 3. If you don't know what the Canon is, can it affect you? Yes.**
 - a. If you are ignorant of the Canon is, not only will you not know how to be saved and sanctified, but it means you will be deceived by those who promote false writings – like Mormonism or the Koran or the Gita.** When you are deceived, you will try wrong ways of being saved and sanctified.
 - b. If you add to the Canon then your doctrines will become weakened or become inconsistent.** E.g. The Roman Catholics added the Apocrypha 次经 to the Canon. As a result they believe and teach that it is okay to baptize the dead. They also believe, based on the Apocrypha, that man will never be condemned to hell forever but get out of purgatory 炼狱 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. They will rob him of his 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 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? 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? He knew me. He knew my simple style. He knew words I like to use. He probably didn't see my mistakes. 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. He decides 神来定夺. **And God confirms which books are parts of the Canon!** You are not left with uncertainty. You can confidently know what to believe and how to live. How does God confirm the Canonical books?

2. Jesus clearly infers 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, 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**.

3. What about the period between the Old and New Testament? Look back at the last prophet of the OT, Malachi. He appealed to that which was there before him and then he jumped forward to Jesus. He left no room for the Apocrypha, written between him and Jesus. Malachi jumped straight 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.

4. Now in the NT: How did we decide which books should be included? We didn't. God 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 教会领受 (not decide) what God preserved**, just as in the OT.

John 16:12 "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. 13 "However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.

5. Are there other confirmations? Internal testimony 内在见证 confirmed New Testament books are part of the 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 come to this?

a. That the book was **preserved by God**.

b. That the book was **written by an Apostle or his close associate 亲信**. 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. So it is not surprising that they only recognized God's Words from the Apostles or their close associates.

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. 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. And the church does not have the right to add authority to any Scriptures. **The book must prove itself. The church can't add legitimacy 合法性 to it! But that is what Roman Catholics do.**

8. People called Anabaptists— like 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. On the other hand, they **believed only the New Testament to be valid as it speaks of grace.**

But the Old Testament is full of grace and prefigured the completion of that grace in Christ, and therefore it ought to be part of the Canon. It is difficult to understand the NT without the OT 少了旧约就很难了解新约。

The Old Testament looks forward to Christ, the New Testament looks back to Christ.

The Old Testament teaches Christ concealed 隐藏了基督, the New Testament teaches Christ revealed 揭示了基督.

The Old and New Testament's center is the salvation of man.

The Old Testament confirms who Christ would be, and therefore confirms the faith of the Christian.

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

9. There were even some famous Bible teachers, (Luther, for example, who did not fully understand James or Jude) who believed that one or two books of the Bible were not really good books. Luther thought that the Book of James was lacking in the teaching of faith. Yet, James is full of the expressions of faith – how faith is seen. So it was Luther's misunderstanding that caused him to draw erroneous conclusions. So don't attack the Bible. And don't jump to conclusions when some things are not clear...or when things appear contradictory. Search it out first! God challenges you to study to show yourself approved. When you dig into the Word you show how much you 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 up without making a mess. Let me show you!**

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? 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 the glory that belongs to him? Who would be that foolish?

3. If you attack the Canon, you will rob yourself of truth and destroy knowledge – so you won't know properly how to be save 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. Leave nothing out. If you leave things out you 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 Lord, and one church. God mercifully preserved them for you. You are therefore to accept these books.

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 Joshua leading Israel into Canaan in the Book of Joshua. But remember Leviticus and Genesis when reading Galatians. One does not make full sense without the other.

3. Watch out for those who are attacking the Canon! Challenge them if you are able, avoid them if you aren't. These may be professors in university or men and women who pretend to be preachers but may not even be Christians. Remember, they are attacking your Savior when they attack his Word. You must honor your Savior by promoting his work.

Finally, a message to you if you are not a Christian and you have fought against God's Word: A minister took a seat in a dining car on a train traveling along the Hudson River. Opposite him was an atheist who started a discussion. "I see you are a clergyman 牧师." "Yes," came the reply. The atheist said: "I suppose you believe the Bible." The clergyman, responded, "I certainly do believe the Bible to be the Word of God." "But aren't there things in the Bible you can't explain, he asked?" With humility the minister answered, "Yes, there are places in the Bible too hard for me to understand." With an air of triumph as though he had cornered the preacher, the atheist said, "Well, what do you do then?" Unruffled 从容不迫, the clergyman went on eating his dinner--which happened to be Hudson shad, a tasty fish but noted for its bony structure. Looking up, he said, "Sir, I do just the same as when eating this shad. When I come to the bones, I put them to the side of the plate and go on enjoying my lunch. I leave the bones for some fool to choke on 呛."

So are you choking on the bones, or enjoying the flesh? God offers the meat to you today...that meat is the saving work of Jesus on the cross. He died there for sinners.