

Lesson Three:

Canon & Clarity – How We Got the Bible

Lesson 3 of the series:

The Word Unshaken: Defending the Bible in a Shifting World

Outline for Lesson 3: Canon & Clarity – How We Got the Bible

Series Theme Statement

We must be able to back up everything we teach and preach with the Bible—what it actually says, not what we read into it, infer from tradition, or imagine sounds conservative. If it cannot be supported with chapter and verse, it must not be accepted as doctrine. The Word of God alone is the final authority for the Christian life, and its relevance, reliability, and authority stand regardless of cultural change.

Lesson Objective

To equip believers to:

- Understand how the canon of Scripture was recognized and preserved—not created
- Appreciate the English Bible’s legacy and the blood-bought history behind it
- Learn and apply sound biblical interpretation using a literal, grammatical, historical, and dispensational hermeneutic
- Grasp the vital importance of comparing Scripture with Scripture

I. Introduction: *"Where Did the Bible Come From—and Can I Trust It?"*

"Every word of God is pure: He is a shield unto them that put their trust in Him." – Proverbs 30:5

- Have you ever wondered *how we know the Bible we hold is truly God's Word?*
- Who decided what books belong in the Bible?
- Why do we have an English Bible—and can we trust it?
- How do we interpret it correctly?

Foundational Issue:

"If we do not know how we got the Bible, we'll never be confident in what it says. And if we don't know how to interpret the Bible, we may believe things it never teaches."

This lesson will address **four pillars**:

- (1) How the canon of Scripture was recognized—not invented
- (2) How we got the Bible in English—and the martyrs who gave it to us
- (3) How to interpret the Bible rightly using sound hermeneutics
- (4) Why comparing Scripture with Scripture matters for clarity and accuracy

II. The Canon of Scripture: *Recognized, Not Invented*

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God..." – 2 Timothy 3:16

"For ever, O LORD, Thy word is settled in heaven." – Psalm 119:89

A. What is the Canon?

- The **canon** refers to the **complete and authoritative collection of God-inspired books**—66 in total (39 OT, 27 NT).
- These are not writings that the church chose; they are **writings the church recognized** because God inspired them.

B. The Old Testament Canon Was Affirmed by Christ

“...all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning Me.” – Luke 24:44

- Jesus affirmed the threefold Jewish division: **Law, Prophets, Writings (Psalms).**
- **John 10:35** – “...the scripture cannot be broken.”

Important Note:

- Jesus **never quoted the Apocrypha** (intertestamental books).
- The Jewish people never received them as Scripture.
- Historian **Josephus** confirmed the OT canon was fixed and closed.

C. The New Testament Canon: Apostolic, Inspired, and Recognized Early

“...as they do also the other scriptures...” – 2 Peter 3:15–16

Peter equates Paul's writings with Scripture—**in real time**, not centuries later.

Key Features of NT Canonicity:

- **Apostolic Origin** – Written by apostles or close companions
- **Doctrinal Consistency** – Harmony with existing Scripture
- **Widespread Recognition** – Used across churches before councils
- **Spiritual Authority** – Evidenced by divine impact

“My sheep hear My voice...” – John 10:27

The New Testament was not invented by councils—it was affirmed by the sheep who recognized their Shepherd's voice.

D. Rejection of the Apocrypha

- **Not quoted by Jesus or apostles**
- **Rejected by the Jews**
- **Filled with doctrinal errors and historical mistakes**

- **Added by Rome at the Council of Trent (1546)—not early Christians**

“Add thou not unto His words, lest He reprove thee, and thou be found a liar.” –
Proverbs 30:6

III. How We Got the Bible in English: A *Legacy Written in Blood*

“The entrance of Thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple.” –
Psalm 119:130

A. The Cost of Translation

The Bible came to us through **fire, martyrdom, and conviction**.

1. John Wycliffe (1320s–1384)

- Translated the Bible from **Latin into English**
- Called “The Morning Star of the Reformation”
- Declared Scripture supreme over the Pope
- His bones were dug up and burned posthumously

“The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever.”
– **Isaiah 40:8**

2. William Tyndale (1494–1536)

- Translated the **New Testament from Greek to English**
- Smuggled Bibles into England
- Famous declaration:

“I defy the Pope and all his laws... I will cause a boy that driveth the plough shall know more of the Scripture than thou dost.”

- Martyred in 1536—**strangled and burned**
- Final words: “*Lord, open the King of England’s eyes!*”

3. King James Bible (1611)

- 47 scholars used **formal equivalence (word-for-word)**

- Tyndale's influence in KJV: ~90% of NT wording from his translation

"Thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever." – Psalm 12:7

B. What the KJV Represents

- A **faithful, preserved translation**
- A Bible written in **reverent English**, honoring the original texts
- A **monument to both scholarship and sacrifice**

IV. How to Interpret the Bible: *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth*

"Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." – 2 Timothy 2:15

A right view of the Bible must be matched by a **right handling of it**.

Hermeneutics = The method or science of biblical interpretation

If we mishandle the Word, we will **misapply** the truth—even if our motives are sincere.

A. Our Interpretive Method: Literal, Grammatical, Historical, Dispensational

"Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation."

– 2 Peter 1:20

1. Literal

- Words mean what they say unless clearly symbolic
- God's Word is plain to those who reverence it

"The words of the LORD are pure words..." – Psalm 12:6

2. Grammatical

- We observe **verbs, nouns, prepositions, sentence structure**
- Consider **tense, mood, and number**

“Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass...” – Matthew 5:18

3. Historical

- Who is writing? To whom? When? Why?
- Understand **context, setting, and original audience**

Putting these 3 Principles All Together

Good hermeneutics is **literal, grammatical, and historical**—but it is also **redemptive**. We must always move toward Christ. *“And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself” — Luke 24:27.*

Jesus is the **central figure** of all Scripture. Every text whispers His name. And if our interpretation does not eventually lead us to the cross, the empty tomb, and the reign of the risen Christ—then we have missed the deepest meaning of the Word.

Sound interpretation does not just teach us how to read Scripture. It teaches us **how to meet the Savior** in its pages.

4. Dispensational

- Recognizes **God has worked through different periods (“dispensations”)** in history
- Distinguishes between **Israel and the Church**, Law and Grace
- Examples:
 - **The Mosaic Law was for Israel**, not the Church
 - **Promises to Abraham and David** are still future, literal, and national

“Give none offence... to the Jew, nor to the Gentile, nor to the church of God.” – 1 Corinthians 10:32

Dispensationalism Clarifies the Whole Bible

Dispensationalism in a nutshell means seeing God’s order in the story of redemption. *“God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past*

unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son...” — **Hebrews 1:1-2.**

The Bible is not a random anthology of spiritual truths—it is the unfolding revelation of God’s redemptive plan. Dispensationalism recognizes that while **God never changes** (Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 13:8), **His dealings with mankind have changed** across different ages—what Scripture calls “dispensations.”

The Bible Teaches Dispensations

The word *dispensation* (Greek: *oikonomia*) appears throughout the New Testament, referring to divine stewardship over different eras:

- **Ephesians 3:2** – “*The dispensation of the grace of God...*”
- **1 Corinthians 9:17** – “*A dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me...*”
- **Ephesians 1:10** – “*The dispensation of the fulness of times...*”

Dispensationalism is not a human invention—it is **Scripture’s own framework** for understanding how God administers His will across time.

God Deals Differently in Different Ages

Ask:

- Did Adam bring sacrifices? No.
- Did Abraham follow the Mosaic Law? No.
- Do we sacrifice animals today? No—because we are under grace. We are in a different dispensation. “*Ye are not under the law, but under grace*” — **Romans 6:14.**

Dispensationalism provides clarity, not contradiction. It recognizes God’s consistent character and His changing instructions based on man’s situation.

There are Seven Dispensations Observed in the Bible - Not Imposed By Man

- (1) **Innocence** – Adam before the Fall (Gen. 1–3)
- (2) **Conscience** – Fall to Flood (Gen. 4–8)
- (3) **Human Government** – Post-Flood (Gen. 9–11)

(4) **Promise** – Abraham to Sinai (Gen. 12–Ex. 19)

(5) **Law** – Sinai to the Cross (Ex. 20–Acts 2)

(6) **Grace** – Church Age (Acts 2–Rev. 3)

(7) **Kingdom** – Christ’s Millennial Reign (Rev. 20)

These reflect God’s varied stewardship throughout redemptive history.

Dispensationalism is Clear, Biblical & Christ-Centered

Dispensationalism:

- Takes the Bible **literally**
- Honors God’s **covenants**
- Distinguishes Israel from the Church
- Keeps Christ at the center
- Offers hope through a **literal, promised future**

“For all the promises of God in Him are yea, and in Him Amen...” — 2 Corinthians 1:20. God’s Word is perfectly consistent—and every promise will be fulfilled exactly as written.

For further study [click here](#) or scan below to link to our End Times Study, **lesson three on Dispensations**.



B. What Happens Without Sound Hermeneutics?

- False doctrine arises when people spiritualize or allegorize what God meant literally.
- Whole theological systems are built on **ignoring plain distinctions**.

“If the plain sense makes good sense, seek no other sense.” – Hermeneutical principle

Wrong examples:

- Turning the 1,000 years in Revelation 20 into a metaphor
- Saying “Israel” now means “the church”
- Ignoring clear timelines or audience distinctions

V. Comparing Scripture with Scripture

“Which things also we speak... comparing spiritual things with spiritual.” – **1 Corinthians 2:13**

The best commentary on the Bible is... the Bible.

- Scripture harmonizes with itself. It is internally consistent.
- You can trace threads of doctrine across **books, covenants, and dispensations**.

Example: Salvation

- **Ephesians 2:8–9** – Saved by grace through faith
- **Romans 10:9–10** – Believe in your heart, confess with your mouth
- **John 3:16** – Whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish
- **Acts 16:31** – Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved

These verses do not contradict—they **confirm** one another when rightly compared.

VII. Application: What Should This Change About My Life?

A. Confidence in the Book I Hold

- You don't need a council to tell you what's Scripture—the **Spirit of God bears witness** in your heart.
- The Bible you hold (KJV) is the **faithful English translation** of preserved manuscripts.

“Thy word is very pure: therefore thy servant loveth it.” – Psalm 119:140

B. Reverence for the Sacrifice Behind It

- Others **died** so you could own, read, and preach this Book.
- Every page is **purchased with blood**, every line **burned into history** by conviction.

“I have esteemed the words of His mouth more than my necessary food.” – Job 23:12

C. Dedication to Right Interpretation

- Don't skim—**study**. Don't guess—**compare**. Don't assume—**observe**.
- Let God say what He said, to whom He said it, in the time He said it—**and believe it**.

Practical Challenge

- Choose a familiar passage (e.g., John 3, Romans 5, Psalm 23).
- Apply literal, grammatical, historical, and dispensational interpretation.
- Compare your passage with related Scriptures.
- Write a paragraph explaining what the passage means and how it applies.

Questions to Ponder

- (1) How does knowing the canon was recognized—not created—deepen your trust in Scripture?
- (2) What price was paid to get the Bible in your language?

- (3) How do hermeneutical principles protect you from false teaching?
- (4) What difference does Dispensationalism make in interpreting the Bible?
- (5) Are you reading the Bible devotionally, but also **doctrinally and rightly divided?**

Closing Encouragement:

“The entrance of Thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple.” – Psalm 119:130

You do not need to be a scholar. You just need to open your Bible with faith, read with humility, and let Scripture interpret Scripture. Stand on the unshakable ground of a preserved, inspired, rightly interpreted Word.

Memory Verse

2 Timothy 2:15 (KJV):

“Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”