

It's Up to You 2026 (Week 2) - How did we get the biblical canon?

Yesterday's Sermon Summary

1. The word **canon** came to mean "a closed set of books", though this was not used to refer to the New Testament until 300-350 CE.
2. The **criteria** for canon were **apostolicity** (written by an apostle or close associate), **orthodoxy** (in alignment with Christian beliefs and practices), and **widespread use** across the global church.
3. The process of arriving at our scriptures was SLOW! It took centuries. It was a grassroots movement across church regions rather than a decree delivered by church leadership.
4. The invention and use of the codex (an early form of a book) helped to spread Paul's letters and the four gospels more quickly because unlike a scroll, they could be bound together.
5. Heretical movements in 100-200 forced the church to define its standards for authoritative scripture, especially orthodoxy.
6. Consensus was finally reached in the late 300s-early 400s.
7. Our scriptures are **reliable**. This is exemplified by the discovery of the Dead Sea scrolls in the Caves of Qumran in 1947. They were **one thousand years older** than any scriptures previously found, yet they were entirely consistent with them. Church historian Lee Martin McDonald writes, "Our faith rests not on the absolute perfection of a single manuscript copy, but on the enduring message preserved across thousands of witnesses."
8. Read sections 9.27-9.30 of our Confession of 1947. It reminds us that Jesus Christ is the living Word of God, and that the scriptures (through the illumination of the Holy Spirit) are the witness (without parallel) to Him.



Explore More this Week

- Revisit how mainline Christians, and in our case the PCUSA, understands that phrase "the word of God," namely that Christ is the living Word and the written scriptures are a witness to that living Word...This is notably distinct from what has been labeled "bibliolatry" that is sometimes encountered in other Christian traditions: [A Declaration of Faith](#) and [Question b - Scripture: The WORD of God](#)
- And here's some more explanation from the PCUSA of the process by which we got the biblical "canon" (the authoritative collection of books in our Bible): [Question b - Scripture: Biblical Canon](#)
- The first question in this video featuring renowned biblical scholar N. T. Wright addresses the process by which the biblical canon was formed: [Are Catholics saved? Is the Bible missing books? Ask NT Wright Anything](#)
- What we didn't talk about in the sermon yesterday is a set of books called "The Apocrypha," that are included in Roman Catholic and some Anglican Bibles. These are Jewish writings from between what we now call the Old and New Testament. If you want to learn more, try these resources: [How the Bible Was Formed E1: What Is the Deuterocanon or Apocrypha?](#) and [What is the Apocrypha? The 14 Books Left Out of the Bible](#)