

# From Jesus to the Scriptures (and Back): Meeting the Crisis of Scripture as People of the Word

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## Part 2: Canon

### What Is a Canon?

*Gr. kanōn*  
*rod, rule, measuring stick*

### The Need for a Rule

Galatians 1:6-9  
2 Thessalonians 2:15

Eusebius (c. 263-339): “When the Gospel had come to the West, such a great light of devotion illumined the minds of those who had heard Peter that they could not be content with the unwritten teaching of the divine proclamation or remain steadfast in the things which they had learned of the divine Word without writing; but they implored Mark with great earnestness that he would leave them a written account of that doctrine which they had received orally.”

Chrysostom (c. 347-407): “Matthew wrote when the believers in Christ from the Jews had approached him and asked that he would send them in writing what he had taught them by word of mouth, that it might be preserved.”

Martin Chemnitz (1522-1586): “The epistles of Paul were written so that they might be ‘reminders,’ embracing in a compendium the very same things which he had clearly transmitted orally and personally.”  
*(Examination of the Council of Trent, 106)*

### Canons in the Early Church

#### Canon 1, Rule of Faith

- *mentioned by Clement of Rome, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria*
- *summarized the general contours of the Gospel*
- *passed along in hymns, liturgies, confessions of faith*
- *ultimately took shape in the creeds*
- ***purpose:*** *provided boundaries and framework for Gospel proclamation*

#### Canon 2, Lists of Definitive Apostolic Writings

- *the result of congregation keeping and circulating apostolic letters and Gospels*
- *included writings that taught the same message preached by Jesus and his apostles*
- ***purpose:*** *to identify which writings were truly apostolic*
- *these lists were not meant to include EVERY apostolic writing, but rather identified faithful, written versions of the inspired, apostolic Word*

## How Do We Know Which Writings Were Apostolic?

Recognized Collections in the First and Second Centuries

4 Gospel codex  
Pauline letters

Homologoumena – agreed upon

4 Gospels  
13 Pauline Epistles  
1 Peter and 1 John

Antilegomena – spoken against by some

2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Hebrews, James, Jude, Revelation

“The General Epistles have a different history...In the 4<sup>th</sup> Century, when Eusebius wrote his *Church History*, he distinguished between “agreed-upon” writings (Gr. *homologoumena*) and “spoken-against” writings (Gr. *antilegomena*). Eusebius made this distinction based on whether or not a letter was universally received and used in the church.”

*The Lutheran Study Bible (2009), p. 2000-2001.*

“Can the present church make those writings concerning which the most ancient church had doubts because of the contradiction of some, because the witness of the primitive church concerning them did not agree—can the present church, I ask, make those writings canonical, catholic, and equal to those which are of the first class? The papalists not only argue that they can do this, but they, in fact usurp this authority in that they totally obliterate the necessary distinction of the primitive and most ancient church.”

Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*

“Lost” Scriptures?

Serapion of Antioch (c. 200) was asked if the *Gospel of Peter* could be read during worship. Initially he agreed on the basis of its supposed apostolic origin. But later he reversed his decision on the basis of its false teaching: “I have now learnt, from what has been told me, that [the authors’] mind was lurking in some hole of heresy.”

If writings were not consistent with the recognized apostolic message (as it was known through Canon 1 and proclaimed in the recognized writings that made up Canon 2), they were rejected as inconsistent with the apostolic message. Finding such writings centuries later does NOT make them faithful and true!

## Thinking about the Canon as People of the Word

The purpose of the Scriptures is to guide and norm the proclamation of the Word, which is centered on the Word made flesh, who died and rose and reigns and will return on the last day. As John 20:31 says, “These are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”