

**Why Do We Need the Bible  
and How Did it Come Together?**  
John 16:4-15

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If you go to our church website and click on the “Who are we” tab, you would find our statement of beliefs. The first statement you will read goes like this – “We believe the Bible is God’s Word given by divine inspiration, the record of God’s revelation of Himself to humanity.” It is trustworthy, sufficient, without error—the supreme authority and guide for all doctrine and conduct. It is the truth by which God brings people into a saving relationship with Himself and leads them to Christian maturity. Now it’s easy to read this statement. It’s possible to brush over it as some common religious declaration. But it makes an astonishing claim. It claims that this book, written by human hands, is the Word of God. John Piper writes “If the claim is true, and if the book claims to teach the only path to eternal life, then this book is more important than any other book. It has more to offer us than any other book. And what it offers is of infinite importance.”<sup>1</sup>

But as we saw last week, a lot of people don’t believe there’s anything special about the Bible. And why do we need a Bible anyway? Many people around us don’t pay attention to it at all. They live their lives with no reference to the Bible. Our country used to base some of its laws on the Bible. But now we remove any reference to the Bible from our laws or public discussion.

So do we really need the Bible? And if it was written by human hands, how can we conclude that it’s really God’s Word like our statement claims? That’s what we’re going to talk about today as we continue in our series on the Bible. Last week we asked the question “What view do you hold of the Bible? We recognized that everyone has a view even if they have never actually said it to anyone. We talked about different factors that might shape our view of the Bible. And we considered a change in our thinking about the Bible. Instead of focusing on the view we hold of God and the Bible, we need to trust God who holds us.

Today we’re going to consider the questions “Why do we need a Bible?” And “How was it put together?” We’re going to look at a Bible passage that shows us one piece of God’s plan to put His book into our hands. But we’re not doing this so we can gain knowledge on the history of the Bible’s formation. I believe that the more we understand God’s efforts to get His Word to us, we will see His love for us. I pray that by the end of our time you might be able to draw closer to God because you see how much God has done to get His Word to you. So let’s the read the passage that gives a piece of

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<sup>1</sup> John Piper, *Peculiar Glory: How the Christian Scriptures Reveal Their Complete Truthfulness*, Wheaton, Illinois, Crossway, 2016, 40.

God's communication plan and then seek to answer the questions. Please find John 16:5-14. Jesus speaks to His disciples at the Last Supper.

### **John 16:4b-15**

"I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. <sup>5</sup>But now I am going to him who sent me, and none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' <sup>6</sup>But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. <sup>7</sup>Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. <sup>8</sup>And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: <sup>9</sup>concerning sin, because they do not believe in me;<sup>10</sup>concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; <sup>11</sup>concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.

<sup>12</sup>"I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.<sup>13</sup>When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. <sup>14</sup>He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. <sup>15</sup>All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

**Why do we need a Bible?** The answer to this question kind of depends on our belief in God. A person who does not believe in God would answer "we don't need a Bible because there is no God. So the Bible might be a record of some stories and practices of religious people called Jews and Christians. But it's nothing more than that. We don't really need it to run society or live our lives.

But say you're not sure about God. Say He actually exists and did design the universe. Let's say He created all of us in His image. If such a Creator wanted to communicate with those created in His image, He would need to find a way to do it.

In the Bible itself, we discover several ways God communicates to people. One way is through nature or creation itself. Psalm 19:1 states "the heavens declare the glory of God." So if we are willing to see it, God communicates about Himself to us through Creation. God also communicated by sending Jesus. The Gospel Writer John writes "The Word (Jesus) became flesh and dwelt among us. We have seen his glory; glory as the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." So Jesus' coming and living among humans as God in flesh would be another massive communication from God.

But Jesus only lived on the earth for 33-35 years about 2000 years ago. Only those people who actually met Jesus during His lifetime saw and heard this communication from God; unless the eyewitnesses told their stories and they were preserved by writing them down. We might think that's unreliable depending on some witnesses and their writing. But how do we know anything about events in history apart from eyewitness accounts, written records and evidence. Yet for

eyewitness testimony and writing to gain the title “God’s Word”, it would require God’s participation. He had to somehow be involved in the process for any book to be truly called God’s Word. God could somehow speak to or work through the human writers. Then their God inspired writing could be called God’s Book or Word.

So I think the answer to the first question “Why do we need a Bible” could be stated like this: **God the Creator decided to communicate to people through human authors He inspired.** We now call the collection of their writings the Bible.

**But which Bible?** Take out the Bible in front of you or beneath you. Turn to page 24. There you will see a list of books – 39 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament totaling 66 books. But if you look at a Catholic Bible, you will see they have another section called the Apocrypha. We do not recognize that as part of the Bible. The Mormons add the Book of Mormon as the third piece of God’s revealed Word. But we don’t recognize the Book of Mormon as God’s Word. We recognize the Bible as the collection of 39 books in the Old Testament and 27 books in the New Testament for reasons I will explain later. So which Bible? - **The sixty six books of the Old and New Testament.**

**So how did the Old Testament come together?** It is made up of 39 writings or books. They are the same writings that you’d find in the Jewish holy book - They call it the Tanakh. This is a compound word from the Hebrew words– Torah, Nebiim, Khetuvim – Law, Prophets and Writings. The Hebrew Tanakh was collected over a period of about 1400 years before the time of Christ. The authors of these books believed God revealed Himself to them or spoke directly to them. God spoke in human language to Adam and Eve and Noah and Abram. None of them had Scriptures. But God spoke to them.

He especially spoke to a guy named Moses. First God used Moses to lead the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt. Then God spoke to Moses about His law and will. But He also seems to have spoken to Moses about history and origins. Then God commanded Moses to write down what was spoken. So in Exodus 34:27 for example, we read “And the Lord said to Moses, ‘Write these words, for in accordance with these word I have made a covenant with you and with Israel.’” Most famously God Himself wrote the 10 commandments on the stone tablets. And Moses is credited with writing the first five books of our Bibles or the Torah in the Hebrew Scriptures.

But God did not stop speaking after Moses died. He continued to speak to people like Joshua, Samuel, David and Solomon. They compiled some of the historical books, the Psalms and the Proverbs. He also spoke to and through the

prophets. The phrase “Thus says the Lord” occurs 417 times in the Old Testament and the phrase “declares the Lord” occurs 358 times. So the Old Testament is a collection of writings where the Lord spoke a lot.

How did the Old Testament come together? **God spoke to and through people who wrote a record of His revelation.** Now why is it called the “Old Testament?” Testament is an older word for covenant. This is a Biblical word for God’s commitment to keep certain promises to His people on certain terms. So the Old Covenant or Old Testament contains books that deal with God’s interaction with the world and Israel before the coming of Jesus. Since Jesus Himself used the phrase “New Covenant,” all that came before Him became known as the Old Covenant or Old Testament.

So the Tanakh existed when Jesus came into the world. He and all his apostles were Jews and believed in the Hebrew Scriptures. Most 1<sup>st</sup> century Jews assumed that the Hebrew Bible had absolute authority over their lives. Unlike modern Canadians, they were a people used to living their lives according to God’s book.

But they believed that their book was a closed book in the sense that no more books could be added. They believed the prophet’s voice had stopped. They believed no living prophet had spoken for 400 years. So they only relied on the Old Testament for God’s Word.

That’s why John the Baptist drew such a crowd. When he spoke he sounded like one of the Old Testament prophets they read about in the Tanakh. Then Jesus came. His teaching amazed them. In fact, during the Sermon on the Mount, the people marveled at the authority with which Jesus spoke. Not only did he speak well, he challenged the Scriptures. He would say things like “You have heard it said, “You shall not commit adultery, but I say to you if anyone looks at a woman lustfully, he has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” Jesus claimed to have at least equal if not greater authority with their Scriptures.

But Jesus would only live 33-35 years. How would God continue to speak to those made in His image after Jesus was gone? Yes, they could learn some about Him through His creation. Yes, they could hear some from Him through the Tanakh. But God had become flesh. How would following generations of people know about all that happened?

Well God already had a plan. First, Jesus called 12 disciples who were also called apostles. They lived with Jesus. They heard him teach. They witnessed His miracles. They saw Him back up His talk with His walk. 11 out of 12 of these apostles would survive through Jesus’ trial and death. They would go on to tell or witness about Him to others. But was the transmission of God’s Word solely dependent on their memories?

No. God had further plans revealed by Jesus at the Last Supper in the passage we read earlier. So back in John 16, in just a few hours, Jesus will be arrested. Then He will be tried, convicted and crucified. But the disciples do not fully understand this. So Jesus prepares them for this dreadful reality with much teaching. He tells them hard truths but assures them of His ongoing provision for them.

Yet in verse 6, we see His recognition of their sorrow and concern. Of course they are sorrowful. When someone we love is going away we will miss them. The disciples start to grasp that Jesus departure looks permanent. But then Jesus makes the surprising statement in verse 7. "It is to your advantage that I am going away." What possible advantage could there be in Jesus' leaving them? The entire kingdom depended on Jesus. So His departure meant no kingdom. Unless He had a bigger plan. Jesus reveals it in the second half of verse 7. "For If I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you." **How did God bring the New Testament together? 1 – Jesus promised the 12 the coming of the Holy Spirit.** The Helper is the Holy Spirit – the 3<sup>rd</sup> person of the Trinity. So Jesus explains that He will not abandon them to fend on their own. He will go away and then send the Helper to them. This would happen within a very short time after the death and resurrection of Jesus. But what would the Holy Spirit do that would be such a help?

He would convict the world. (16:8-11) Now I don't know about you, but I don't really like being convicted. It can mean to be found guilty of crime. But here it means "to have something hidden exposed or something wrong uncovered." Most of us would not like to have something we have hidden to be uncovered. Otherwise, we wouldn't have hid it. But what if that which we'd hidden was slowly killing us? What if it was destroying us? An exposure of something deadly hidden away in us could lead to our rescue from death. Though unpleasant at first, such conviction might actually bring us life.

The Holy Spirit will, in verse 9, "convict the world of sin because they do not believe in me." Did you realize that refusing to believe in Jesus as the Son of God is sin? It's not just a personal spiritual choice that we're free for you to make with no long term effects. The world thinks everyone is free to choose to believe or not believe in Jesus as God's Son. But the Holy Spirit comes along and convicts the world and people in their hearts that such a choice is actually a sin. It is a refusal to acknowledge Jesus as God the Son. It is a refusal to recognize that He is absolutely unique in all of history. Without the Holy Spirit, people would likely go on thinking their unbelief was just a personal choice not a moral wrong.

The Holy Spirit will also convict the world regarding righteousness, verse 10, because Jesus goes to the Father and they will see Him no more. This could mean that the world was pretty convinced that it was right in crucifying Jesus. It had convicted Him of unrighteousness. After all, righteous people don't get crucified. But the cross turned that upside down. It exposed the unrighteousness of the people who crucified Jesus and the righteousness of the one crucified.

The Holy Spirit would also convict the world of judgment according to verse 12, because the ruler of the world is judged. The 'ruler of the world' is the devil. Jesus could be referring to his statements earlier in this Gospel that those who rejected Him actually were children of the devil. Their rejection of Jesus revealed their judgment. But the devil was judged and defeated at the cross. So the judgment of those who rejected Jesus would be exposed as false.

But the Holy Spirit would not only come to convict. He would serve a key purpose in God's communication to His people. Verse 12 – Jesus says, "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now." They only had a couple of hours left. Some of Jesus' words would be too heavy for them. Verse 13 – When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak." So this Spirit of truth is going to communicate what He hears Jesus say from heaven. Verse 14 – He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you." So here's a promise that the Holy Spirit will pass on to the disciples the words of Jesus. He will take whatever is Jesus' and declare it to them. Verse 15 – "All that the Father has is mine". So by extension, if all that the Father has belongs to Jesus' and the Holy Spirit will declare what Jesus says, the Holy Spirit will also declare what the Father says. Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit who would teach the apostles God's Word.

To communicate to future generations some of what happened in Jesus' life and His teaching, there had to be a New Covenant. New writings. Jesus prepared for the giving of this Word all through His ministry. He selected the 12 apostles who would see and hear the word. Then He promises that He would send the Holy Spirit who would continue to teach them His Word once He was gone.

Then what happened? Jesus is arrested, condemned and crucified. He dies on the cross. He is buried on Friday. But on Sunday morning He is resurrected to life. In John 20:22, the resurrected Jesus meets with His disciples. "And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit." **2 - So the apostles receive the Holy Spirit. John 20:22.** Then the Holy Spirit is poured out on all believers progressively throughout the book of Acts. But during this time, the apostles go out minister and declare what they have seen of Jesus. The church grows. The word spreads.

Eventually, **3 -The apostles would communicate God's Word in writing.** Some did it by writing Gospels or accounts of Jesus' life and teaching, like Matthew and John. Or they were the key source for the writer of a Gospel like Peter was for Mark or the apostle Paul was for Luke. Some wrote letters to the church as a whole or individual churches that contained God's Word. We've just come through the Revelation which John received about the things that must soon take place.

But then the apostles died or were killed one by one. So now what? Christians in following generations kept and collected and copied the Gospels and the letters. They eventually had to choose which ones revealed themselves to be Words from God. **4 -The early church discerned, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the writings that would form the New Testament** based on their deliberations and discernment. It contains books that deal with God's breaking into history in Jesus Christ and the founding of the Christian church and Christian mission. This did not mean that the Old Testament would cease to be God's Word. Jesus came to fulfill the Old Testament. But his life and teaching would lead to a New Testament. Piper writes – "The person and the teaching of Jesus must inevitably lead to an expansion of the canon (Scriptures) of the early church. A people who for centuries have been accustomed to be governed by a written revelation of God, the Hebrew Bible, are now confronted with the divine author of that very book, present in human form, teaching with absolute authority."

So the New Testament answers questions like "Who is this Jesus Christ? What did he accomplish in his life, death, resurrection and ascension? What is he doing now in his universal reign as Lord? What will he do when he comes again? What is the mission of his church, the way of salvation for the world, and the way his people should live until he comes?" All of this adds up to this conclusion - **God provided His written Word and the Holy Spirit's inspiration so that we can encounter Him.** God did all of this out of His love for us. God went to great effort to get His Word to us.

But how can we approach God's Word in a way that helps this encounter Him? One way is to approach the Bible **not as an equation or textbook but as a personal letter.** There are many mathematical equations that describe some reality about our world. It's true whether or not we know the equation. Yet we can live and die without knowing them and it doesn't really matter. Some people approach the Bible this way. They treat it like a math or physics equation. It may contain some truths about the world and our lives. But unless we want to become experts in the Bible, we don't really have to know it to live our lives. We can live and die without getting into the technical details.

But what if we approached the Bible as personal letter? How differently would you read a textbook compared to a letter from the love of your life? The Bible is like a letter from your Creator to you. The letter connects the receiver to the heart and mind of the sender. A textbook just communicates information. If we approach the Bible like a textbook, it may come across to us as cold and sterile. But if we see it as God's letter to us, we will be much more likely to connect with the heart and mind of the One who wrote it..

Another way we might change our view of the Bible is to approach it **not as concepts to be learned but a glory to behold**. Some of you have been to the Grand Canyon in Arizona. It takes some effort to get there. You need to take the time, gather the money, plan your route and actually go. But when you arrive, you don't have to put effort into seeing. You just see. You take in the view. You behold its glory.

We need to put in effort to get to God's Word. We need to make time and read or listen. But once there, we can see God and His Glory through the Holy Spirit's work. It's not just thinking. It's beholding. It's taking it in. It's that breath taking Grand Canyon moment when you look through the Bible to actually see God.

So maybe these adjustments will help make an encounter with God through His Word more likely. Maybe seeing a little more of God's efforts to get His Word to you will convince you of His love for you. That's why we need a Bible. It's God's letter to us. So today I'd like to invite you to talk to God about your approach to His Word.