

I learned some things from preaching this last Sunday morning. Actually, I learned some things from the response of people to my preaching last Sunday. Apparently, I didn't bring my A game. [You can listen to the sermon here.](#)

One of the problems is the internet and smart phones. At any time during my sermon, a listener can pull out a smart phone, follow a few links, and see what else is out there in the big digital world that may have something to do with the text and theme for the morning's sermon. On the rare occasion, some have even sent me a text message while preaching informing me of newly discovered information or asking an important question. For the preacher, the internet can make sermon research easier. On the other hand, access to the internet by his listeners means the preacher better have his facts correct. If he doesn't, his listeners will soon discover it. Apart from a little embarrassment, the greater concern is the credibility the preacher has in his pulpit. He cannot afford too many missteps at "the sacred desk."

My introduction to the text included a [story about Alexander Fleming and Winston Churchill](#). The story was not original to me, nor did I find it on the internet. It comes from a very trusted resource, [John MacArthur's commentary on 1 Peter](#). In fact, my first words of the sermon last Sunday morning included the line, "John MacArthur opens his commentary on the text with the story..." I did not bother to do any additional research on the validity of the story. That it appeared in a reliable commentary which comes from the pen of one of our generation's most respected Bible teachers and that it was published by an internationally recognized publisher was good enough for me. Big mistake. While it is true Alexander Fleming and Winston Churchill were contemporaries and that their paths crossed at various levels, it is merely an urban legend that Fleming saved Churchill from drowning when they were both young, which Churchill's family paid for Fleming's medical school education, and that Fleming's miracle drug penicillin saved Churchill's life once again during World War II. Other than those minor details, the rest of the facts are spot on 😊.

Lesson learned the hard way: check your sources! Other lesson learned: some people actually pay attention to preaching, so GET IT RIGHT! I am embarrassed by that error. It should not happen. Hopefully, I have not diminished your confidence in our pulpit.

One other matter from the Sunday sermon left at least one family confused. That's not the response I'm looking for when I preach. While I do not

like it, I can handle sleeping during preaching (by the way, some of you fall asleep within the first minute of preaching; at least give me a chance!). I can handle talking and cell phones. What I cannot tolerate is confusion. My job is to make the Scriptures clear. When that doesn't happen, I'm not happy, and I do not think the Lord is pleased.

Part of the sermon touched on the role of a prophet as God's spokesman for revelation. That led to the point of what is authorized text and what is not. In the sermon I passed along a question asked of me during the week: "What would we do if researchers discovered ancient manuscripts attributed to an apostle? Would we accept it as Scripture?" The answer, I said, is we would dismiss them as authoritative text, declaring them not on the same level as the inspired Scriptures. We might find something in them useful about the culture at the time of writing or what issues were important at the time, but we would not accept them as God's Word. The text message from the listener asked, "How does man determine what is inspired and what is not?"

Many years ago, I preached a series of messages entitled, *Strengthening Your Confidence in Your Bible*. I owe nearly everything in that series to my preaching mentor, [Dr. Mark Minnick](#) and to the book [From the Mind of God to the Mind of Man](#). One chapter in the book deals with the subject of which books should we consider Scripture or a part of the canon.

Canonization has to do with determining which books deserve the designation of "Scripture" and ought to be included in the Bible. It is not so much a process of *deciding* which books we want to include in the canon, but rather a process of *discovering* which books belong there. This is an important aspect to consider because neither all of the books written during "Bible Times" nor even all the books written by "Bible authors" are included in the Bible. The conscientious believer will want to know why certain books were included and others were rejected (p. 31 emphasis original).

Determining which books would be the documents of the early church was no small matter. Like urban legends of our day, spurious writings sprouted all over the Roman Empire. How would the early church know what literature was inspired by the Holy Spirit and what writing was to be rejected as fraudulent? It was as important a question to them as it is to us. For what it's worth, "most of the books of the New Testament were accepted immediately and without question, with fewer than ten books taking some time to have the issue of their

canonicity resolved,” and “there was a general unanimity among the churches concerning which books were to be accepted and read (p. 47).” The first century church **under the leadership of the apostles** discovered which writings should hold the title “God’s Word.”

The answer to my listener’s question and the question of the early church has three components. For the early church to consider a writing canonical...

- The book must bear the stamp of apostolic authority. An apostle’s name must be attached.
- The book must be suitable for public reading as evidenced by consistency with the rest of Scripture, its helpfulness to the sanctification of believers, and the dynamic power of God displayed in its declaration.
- The book must be accepted by a wide range of churches across the evangelized world and not merely a small group of churches.

If you’ve made it this far, thanks for reading. If you listen well on Sunday mornings, thanks for listening. If you help your pastor by asking good questions, thanks for helping. I hope I have cleared up some muddled waters. Here are a few more links on how the New Testament canon came to be.

[The Canon of Scripture](#)

[Church History 101](#)

[If you’re really interested in this study](#)

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