

Session 1 - What Is the Bible, and Can We Trust It?

SESSION THESIS

The Bible is identified as the sixty-six canonical books containing God's inspired and preserved words, faithfully communicated through equivalent translation; neither a religious label, physical binding, institutional decision, nor the survival of major doctrine can substitute for identifying its books and verbal content.

The Session Argument



Controlling Questions

- 1 Which books constitute Scripture?
- 2 Which words constitute those books?
- 3 When does another language faithfully communicate those words?

The Label Bible Does Not Identify What It Names

SECTION THESIS

The label Bible is not self-defining because Christians apply it to collections and texts that differ; biblical identity therefore requires an account of canonical, textual, and translational identity.

Different Books Share the Label Bible

Christians use the same title for collections and texts that are not identical.

- Collections called Bible may have different tables of contents.
- Editions may rest on different underlying Hebrew and Greek readings.
- English renderings may communicate different information at the same point.

THE PRIOR QUESTION

Before asking whether the Bible is authoritative or how it should be interpreted, what object are we calling the Bible?

Biblical Identity Requires Three Different Answers

Dimension	Controlling question	What this does not establish by itself
Canonical identity	Which books constitute Scripture?	It does not identify every word within those books.
Textual identity	Which words constitute those books?	It does not guarantee that another language communicates those words faithfully.
Translational identity	When does another language faithfully communicate those words?	It cannot make a noncanonical writing Scripture merely by translating it accurately.

The questions are related, but they are not interchangeable:

- A correct table of contents does not identify every word within the books.
- A correct underlying text does not guarantee a faithful translation.
- An accurate translation of a noncanonical writing does not make that writing Scripture.

The Bible Is a Verbal Object

The Bible is not merely:

- A religious category
- A message abstracted from words
- A publisher's label
- Whatever a Christian community places inside a binding

A book is a verbal object. Meaning is communicated through words, grammar, syntax, literary form, and context.

Physical Form Can Change without Changing the Book

A novel may appear as a hardcover, paperback, e-book, audiobook, or Braille volume. The medium changes, but the book remains identifiable through its words and their arrangement.

A Label Cannot Establish a Book's Identity

Printing Moby-Dick on the cover of a blank notebook does not make the notebook Moby-Dick. The title makes a claim; the verbal content determines whether the claim is true.

Word Order Is Part of Meaning

Sentence	What it reports
"The dog bit the man."	The dog performs the action; the man receives it.
"The man bit the dog."	The man performs the action; the dog receives it.

The same vocabulary can make different claims when grammar and syntax change the relationship among the words.

One Word Can Materially Change Meaning

Sentence	Result
"The defendant is guilty."	A judgment of guilt
"The defendant is not guilty."	The opposite judgment

The small size of a verbal difference does not determine the size of its effect.

A Paraphrase Can Preserve the Subject while Losing the Work

Original wording	Simplified paraphrase	What is lost
Charles Dickens: “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.”	“Conditions were highly inconsistent.”	Parallelism, tension, rhythm, and historical atmosphere
Mark Twain: “You don’t know about me without you have read a book by the name of The Adventures of Tom Sawyer; but that ain’t no matter.”	“Readers unfamiliar with the previous book may not know who I am.”	Huck’s voice, background, personality, and relationship with the reader
Psalm 23:1: “The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.”	“God takes care of me.”	The divine name, shepherd metaphor, personal relationship, and confident sufficiency

Psalm 23:1 - King James Version

SCRIPTURE

1 The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

A verbal work communicates through imagery, rhythm, emphasis, irony, voice, and emotional force as well as through bare propositions. Equivalent translation need not reproduce identical sounds or cadence, but it must account for literary and rhetorical meaning rather than preserve only a general idea.

What This Section Establishes

- 1 The label Bible does not identify its own contents.
- 2 Biblical identity requires distinct answers about books, words, and translation.
- 3 A book remains identifiable through its verbal content rather than its cover, binding, or physical medium.
- 4 Defining the Bible requires both a list of writings and an account of their verbal content.

WORKING CONCLUSION

The Bible is the sixty-six inspired and preserved books faithfully communicated in equivalent translation. The number sixty-six must be established rather than inserted into the premise.

Notes

Inspiration Requires Identifiable and Preserved Words

SECTION THESIS

Inspiration concerns the verbal content God gave, and preservation means that this revelation did not disappear; together they require the Church to identify the words that remain available to be read, preached, and translated.

God Gave Scripture

2 Timothy 3:14-17 - King James Version

SCRIPTURE

14 But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them;

15 And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

16 All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:

17 That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

The passage identifies Scripture as God-given and profitable. Its purpose is not merely to inspire admiration but to furnish the man of God for doctrine and life.

2 Peter 1:19-21 - King James Version

SCRIPTURE

19 We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts:

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

21 For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

Prophecy did not originate in the writer's independent will. Genuine human authors spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

John 17:17 - King James Version

SCRIPTURE

17 Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.

Inspiration does not mean that biblical writers were merely elevated, creative, or spiritually insightful. God gave written revelation through real human authors whose vocabulary, personality, genre, and historical setting remain present.

What God Inspired Was Verbal

God did not inspire an undefined religious impression detachable from wording. Propositions, commands, questions, promises, identifications, and narratives depend upon words and their relationships.

NECESSARY CONCLUSION

A doctrine of inspiration that cannot identify the verbal object inspired remains incomplete at the point of use.

What God Inspired Did Not Disappear

Psalm 12:6-7 - King James Version

SCRIPTURE

6 The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times.

7 Thou shalt keep them, O LORD, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever.

Matthew 5:17-18 - King James Version

SCRIPTURE

17 Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.

18 For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.

The scriptural claim presents God's words as enduring rather than disposable.

- If God inspired words but allowed them to disappear, the inspired revelation would not remain available.
- If the words theoretically survive but cannot be identified, the authoritative text cannot function as an accessible rule.
- If the collection remains unidentified, it cannot govern the Church as a determinate body of Scripture.

The Theological Chain



Movement	Governing claim
Revelation	God made truth known.
Inspiration	God gave that revelation in Scripture through human authors.
Preservation	The inspired revelation did not disappear.
Identification	The writings and words must remain distinguishable as Scripture.
Translation	Those words may be communicated faithfully in another language.

What God Preserved Must Remain Available

Preservation must mean more than recoverable words available only through an expert guild. God's Word must remain genuinely available to ordinary believers to be possessed, read, heard, preached, and translated.

Scholarship can serve the Church by answering linguistic, historical, and textual questions. Scholarship does not create Scripture, confer its authority, or become a necessary priesthood through which Scripture first acquires existence.

Availability Does Not Eliminate Identification

- Preservation does not make every historical question disappear.
- It does not make every printed edition perfect because the cover says Bible.
- It supplies the reason to seek and identify the text rather than an excuse to avoid evidence.

TRANSITION QUESTION

Before asking which words were preserved, which writings possessed scriptural authority?

What This Section Establishes

Inspiration, preservation, identification, and translation form one usable chain. The words God gave must remain available, and what remains available must still be identified.

Textual Observations

The Sixty-Six-Book Canon Is Recognized, Not Created

SECTION THESIS

The sixty-six-book conclusion rests on the recognition of writings received with scriptural authority, not on a late printer, Protestant slogan, or ecclesiastical vote making previously human writings inspired.

The Number Sixty-Six Cannot Be Assumed

- Protestants ordinarily receive sixty-six books.
- Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox communions receive additional writings.
- Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox lists and terminology are not identical.

“The Bible has sixty-six books” is therefore a conclusion requiring historical and theological argument.

Israel Possessed an Identifiable Body of Scripture

Romans 3:2 - King James Version

SCRIPTURE

2 Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God.

Luke 24:44 - King James Version

SCRIPTURE

44 And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that 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 reflects a recognized scriptural structure of Law, Prophets, and Psalms or Writings. Jewish ordering and counting differ from the later Protestant arrangement. The same writings may be combined or divided differently, so counts of twenty-two, twenty-four, or thirty-nine need not describe different contents. The central question is which writings were received, not how later publishers numbered them.

Apostolic Writings Were Recognized as Scripture

2 Peter 3:15-16 - King James Version

SCRIPTURE

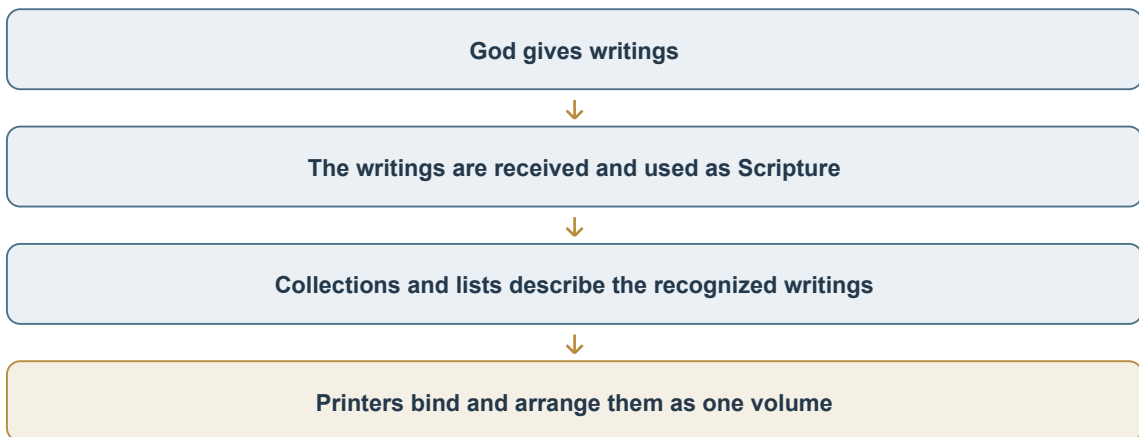
15 And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you;

16 As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.

Paul's epistles are placed in relation to "the other scriptures." Apostolic writings circulated among churches rather than remaining private correspondence.

The early Church did not begin with no ability to distinguish apostolic writings from every religious composition. Many writings received broad and early recognition, although some books remained disputed in particular places or periods.

The Writings Existed Before the Bound Christian Bible



Post-facto does not mean that the canon was invented late. It means that the bound volume, printed table of contents, familiar chapter and verse divisions, and packaging number came after the writings and their reception.

IMPORTANT DISTINCTION

The physical book witnesses to a prior canonical judgment; it does not create inspiration.

The traditional Protestant count arises from thirty-nine differently arranged Old Testament writings plus twenty-seven New Testament writings.

Lists and Councils Documented a Canon Already Being Recognized

Evidence	What it demonstrates	What it does not demonstrate
Israel possessed sacred writings	A recognized body of Scripture existed before a one-volume Christian Bible.	Every later canon dispute had already been resolved.
Apostolic writings circulated and were treated as Scripture	Recognition occurred within the apostolic period.	Every New Testament book enjoyed identical reception everywhere immediately.
Athanasius’s Thirty-Ninth Festal Letter, A.D. 367	The earliest surviving list of the same twenty-seven New Testament books used today; clear boundary-consciousness	A facsimile of a modern sixty-six-book table of contents
Later lists and councils	Existing questions were documented, judged, or enforced.	A council could make a merely human writing become God-breathed.

Athanasius explicitly distinguished canonical writings from other books appointed to be read. His Old Testament arrangement does not reproduce a modern Protestant table of contents exactly, so his testimony must be used as evidence of boundary-consciousness rather than as a modern printed Bible.

Recognition Is Not Creation

The historical question is whether Protestantism created a new canon or rejected later expansions in favor of substantially earlier boundaries.

The history is more complex than a slogan, but it does not support the claim that no one cared which writings were Scripture until a late council created the canon. The process demonstrates continuing concern to identify writings possessing scriptural authority.

Canon Sequence Notes

Physical Inclusion Does Not Establish Canonical Authority

SECTION THESIS

Physical inclusion, liturgical reading, and devotional usefulness must be distinguished from formal reception as inspired Scripture capable of establishing doctrine.

Different Canon Claims Use Different Names and Collections

Term	Meaning in this discussion
Apocrypha	A historically variable Protestant label for writings printed in some Bibles but excluded from the sixty-six-book canon
Deuterocanonical books	The Roman Catholic designation for books it receives as canonical but Protestants exclude
Eastern Orthodox longer canon	Canonical collections whose terminology and contents require separate treatment and should not be assumed identical to Rome’s list

Four Different Claims

A writing may be:

- 1 Printed in a Bible
- 2 Read in a church
- 3 Valued for history, devotion, or moral instruction
- 4 Received as inspired Scripture capable of establishing doctrine

The first three do not automatically prove the fourth.

This distinction prevents two opposite errors:

- Assuming that everything printed inside Bible covers is inspired
- Pretending that Catholic and Orthodox communions treat their longer-canon books as merely optional historical reading

The 1611 King James Bible Demonstrates Inclusion, Not Equal Authority

- A first-edition facsimile demonstrates that the additional books were physically included.
- They appeared in a separate section rather than being intermingled without distinction among Old Testament books.
- Their presence demonstrates use, circulation, and expected readership.
- Their presence does not by itself establish doctrine-establishing canonical authority.

Printers may include calendars, genealogies, maps, and other useful material without inspiring those additions. A cover is a physical boundary, not a sufficient theological definition.

Article VI Distinguishes Use from Doctrinal Authority

Article VI of the Thirty-nine Articles distinguishes books read “for example of life and instruction of manners” from books used “to establish any doctrine.”

Question	Answer
If a church reads a book, has it necessarily called that book Scripture?	No.
If a church receives it as divinely inspired and uses it to support doctrine, has it crossed the canonical-authority line?	Yes.

Catholic and Orthodox Communions Claim Canonical Authority

The Roman Catholic Catechism includes Tobit, Judith, First and Second Maccabees, Wisdom, Sirach, and Baruch in its Old Testament canon and describes the Old Testament writings as divinely inspired.

Catholic doctrine uses these writings in doctrinal support. Its treatment of prayer for the dead and purgatory cites 2 Maccabees 12:46, although the entire doctrine should not be represented as resting on that verse alone.

The Orthodox Church in America identifies longer-canon writings as canonical Scripture and a genuine part of the Old Testament. Orthodox lists and terminology are not completely uniform across jurisdictions.

Canonical-Authority Comparison

Case	Physical inclusion	Ecclesiastical use	Claimed inspiration and doctrinal authority
Additional writings in the 1611 KJV	Yes	Yes	Not established by inclusion alone
Article VI's ecclesiastical books	May be included	Yes	Not used to establish doctrine
Roman Catholic deuterocanonical books	Yes	Yes	Yes
Eastern Orthodox longer-canon books	Yes	Yes	Yes, with jurisdictional variation in lists and terminology

SECTION CONCLUSION

A place inside the binding does not establish scriptural authority. Agreement on book names also does not guarantee agreement on the words within those books.

Important Distinctions

Preservation Requires Identifying the Underlying Text

SECTION THESIS

Preservation concerns the words God inspired, and where textual forms contain materially different assertions, actions, or amounts of content, they cannot all be the one inspired wording at that point.

English Bibles Do Not All Represent the Same Underlying Text

- Christendom uses numerous English translations.
- Those translations do not all rest on one identical Hebrew or Greek textual form.
- Some visible differences arise from English translation decisions.
- Other differences arise because translators are representing different underlying readings.

Every difference should not be labeled corruption, but every difference should not be dismissed as harmless style.

Not Every Difference Is the Same Kind of Difference

Category	Description
Stylistic difference with equivalence	Different wording communicates the same assertion and function.
Translation difference with debatable equivalence	Different wording requires grammatical and contextual evaluation.
Underlying textual difference producing non-equivalence	One form contains or identifies something absent or materially different in the other.

Session 2 will expand this preliminary distinction into a fuller four-category system.

Preservation Requires an Account of the Words Preserved

The governing questions are:

- Did God preserve only a general message?
- Did he preserve all competing readings collectively?
- Did he preserve identifiable words?
- What historical and textual evidence should govern their identification?

WORKING PRINCIPLE

Preservation concerns the words God inspired, not merely the survival of broadly similar religious ideas.

The Presenter’s Limited Positive Position

- The preserved Old Testament is identified with the Masoretic textual tradition.
- The preserved New Testament is identified with the Textus Receptus.
- A full defense of that position is not attempted in this session.
- The narrower conclusion comes first: contradictory or materially different readings cannot all be the one wording originally inspired at the same point.

The King James Version is not being used as the controlling definition at this stage. The present question concerns preservation and textual identity before a complete English-text conclusion.

John 7:8 Presents Different Assertions

John 7:8-10 - King James Version

SCRIPTURE

8 Go ye up unto this feast: I go not up yet unto this feast: for my time is not yet full come.

9 When he had said these words unto them, he abode still in Galilee.

10 But when his brethren were gone up, then went he also up unto the feast, not openly, but as it were in secret.

Textual form	Assertion in John 7:8
“I go not up yet unto this feast”	The word yet qualifies the refusal.
“I am not going up to this feast”	The refusal appears without that qualification.

John 7:10 records Jesus later going privately. Both readings may be interpreted without accusing Christ of falsehood, but they do not make the same assertion at verse 8.

Revelation 22:14 Presents Different Actions

Revelation 22:14 - King James Version

SCRIPTURE

14 Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.

Textual form	Action performed by those pronounced blessed
"Do his commandments"	Obedience is the stated action.
"Wash their robes"	Cleansing is the stated action.

Obedience and cleansing may be related theologically, but they are not the same predicate or verbal action. Similar surrounding syntax cannot make the readings functionally equivalent.

Acts 8:37 Presents Content or Its Absence

Acts 8:36-38 - King James Version

SCRIPTURE

36 And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?

37 And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

38 And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him.

Textual form	Narrative content
Verse 37 in the running text	Philip states a condition, and the eunuch confesses Jesus Christ as the Son of God.
Verse 37 absent from the running text	The narrative moves from the question in verse 36 to the baptism in verse 38.

The presence of two complete statements cannot be verbally equivalent to their absence. This establishes a content difference before deciding which form is original.

What an Individual Variant Proves-and Does Not Prove

For every example, four questions control the analysis:

- 1 What does each form say or do?
- 2 Can both perform the same function at this point?
- 3 What does the example prove?
- 4 What does it not prove by itself?

An individual example can demonstrate a textual-identity problem. It cannot adjudicate an entire textual tradition by itself.

Comparison Notes

Faithful Translation Requires Equivalent Content and Function

SECTION THESIS

Different wording may faithfully communicate the same inspired text when it preserves the same content and function, but functionally non-equivalent wording cannot represent the same inspired words at the same point.

Equivalent Wording Preserves the Same Information

Expression	Quantity communicated	Equivalent to twelve?
Twelve eggs	12	Yes
One dozen eggs	12	Yes
A baker’s dozen	13	No
Nearly a dozen eggs	Fewer than or approximately 12	No

“Twelve” and “one dozen” use different surface wording but communicate the same quantity. “Nearly a dozen” shares more vocabulary with “one dozen,” but it does not report the same quantity.

Across languages, Spanish doce huevos and una docena de huevos preserve twelve. Una decena and once huevos do not.

TRANSLATION PRINCIPLE

Equivalence permits different words; it does not permit different information.

Functional Equivalence Preserves Content and Linguistic Function

Two expressions are functionally equivalent when they communicate the same relevant content and perform the same linguistic work in context.

The comparison asks whether both forms:

- Assert the same thing
- Identify the same subject and object
- Contain the same material content
- Command or prohibit the same thing
- Ask the same question
- Preserve meaningful grammatical relationships
- Function in the same way within the surrounding argument

Functional Non-Equivalence Changes Content or Function

Readings are functionally non-equivalent when one:

- Includes material the other lacks
- Denies, weakens, or changes the other’s assertion
- Changes an identity or relationship
- Converts a statement into a question or the reverse
- Changes a command, condition, agency, time, or logical connection
- Performs a different contextual function

Two Opposite Errors

Error	Mistaken claim	Necessary correction
Identical-wording absolutism	Faithful translation requires identical surface wording.	Translation can use different words while preserving the same content and function.
Unlimited version relativism	Different information may still be treated as equivalent because both forms appear in respected Bibles.	Functionally non-equivalent expressions cannot both represent the same inspired wording at the same point.

Functional-Equivalence Test

When comparing two expressions, identify:

- 1 The information asserted
- 2 The subject and object
- 3 The action, command, condition, or question
- 4 The grammatical relationships
- 5 The expression's function in context

Translation Notes

Doctrinal Survival Does Not Resolve Textual Identity

SECTION THESIS

The survival of a doctrine elsewhere does not identify which wording is Scripture here, because the identity of Scripture is itself the doctrine presently under examination.

Most Variants May Leave Major Doctrines Intact

- Most variants do not overturn a major doctrine.
- No essential doctrine may depend entirely upon one disputed reading.
- Those observations concern doctrinal consequences rather than textual identity.

The Prior Question Is Textual Identity

The first question is not:

KEY STATEMENT

Does this variation destroy the Trinity, salvation, or resurrection?

The prior question is:

KEY STATEMENT

What words constitute Scripture at this point?

A difference need not destroy another doctrine before it matters to biblical identity.

Legal-Document Analogy

Two legal documents differ if one sentence differs. The difference remains relevant to their identity even when it does not change one case’s final verdict.

Question	What it addresses
“Does the doctrine survive elsewhere?”	The theological consequence of the variation
“Which wording is Scripture here?”	The identity of the scriptural text

LOGICAL CONCLUSION

“No major doctrine is affected” may address the theological consequences of a variation; it does not identify which reading is Scripture.

Important Distinction

The Bible Is Identified by Canonical Books, Preserved Words, and Equivalent Translation

SECTION THESIS

The Bible is the sixty-six-book collection of God’s inspired words, preserved and made available through later generations, and faithfully communicated in genuinely equivalent translation.

Biblical Identity Requires Three Answers

Question	Session conclusion
Which books?	The sixty-six canonical books, identified as writings received with scriptural authority rather than created by a Protestant table of contents
Which words?	The words God inspired and preserved, not an undefined religious message and not every conflicting reading collectively
Which translations?	Those that communicate the preserved text equivalently; a publisher’s label cannot make functional non-equivalence disappear

Scholarship Serves an Already Available Bible

Ordinary believers do not create or authenticate Scripture through scholarship. God gave, preserved, and made his Word available to be read, heard, preached, and translated.

Language study and textual evidence can deepen understanding without making an advanced degree a condition of possessing the Bible.

The Next Question Is Unavoidable

KEY STATEMENT

Do English books bearing the title Bible always communicate the same textual information?

Session 2 will classify the kinds of difference before attempting to adjudicate which reading is correct.

What Session 1 Established

- 1 The label Bible does not identify its own contents.
- 2 Inspiration concerns verbal revelation.
- 3 Preservation requires the inspired words to remain available and identifiable.
- 4 The canon was recognized through the reception of authoritative writings rather than created by a binding, printer, or council.
- 5 Inclusion, reading, usefulness, inspiration, and doctrinal authority are distinct claims.
- 6 Materially different underlying readings create a textual-identity question.
- 7 Faithful translation permits different expressions but requires equivalent content and function.
- 8 The survival of doctrine elsewhere cannot identify the wording of Scripture here.

SESSION CONCLUSION

The Bible is identified as the sixty-six canonical books containing God's inspired and preserved words, faithfully communicated through equivalent translation; neither a religious label, physical binding, institutional decision, nor the survival of major doctrine can substitute for identifying its books and verbal content.

