

How to Study the Bible – The Canon of Scripture

October 7, 2019

Recommended Resources

“Scripture Alone” – James White

“The Canon of Scripture” – Samuel Waldron

Introduction – What is the Purpose of God’s Word?

To accomplish His purpose

Isa 55:9-11 For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. (10) "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, (11) so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

To equip believers

2Ti 3:16-17 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, (17) that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.

To defend the church

Acts 20:26-30 Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all of you, (27) for I did not shrink from declaring to you the **whole counsel of God**. (28) Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. (29) **I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock;** (30) and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.

To give hope

Rom 15:4 For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

What is Canon?

Canon – from the Greek “to rule”; a measuring rod; the criteria by which something is judged

From James White:

Two aspects of canon

1. Canon¹: Divine knowledge and understanding of the canon – i.e. the necessary result of God’s freely chosen act of inspiration.
2. Canon²: Human knowledge and understanding of the canon – a by-product of God’s inspiration

Once we realize that it is Scripture, not man’s knowledge of the canon, that is inspired, and that canon¹ exists perfectly in God’s mind, we can see that the clarity and knowledge of canon² is dependent not upon human beings, councils, churches, or anything else in this world, but instead upon God’s purposes in giving us the inspired Scriptures in the first place...

The foundation of the certainty of our knowledge of the canon is based upon God’s purposes in giving Scripture, not upon the alleged authority of any ecclesiastical body.

The Holy Spirit provides the canon for the church; the church does not establish the canon by her own authority. Does the Spirit do this by new divine revelation? No, by His work among the people of God, in whom He dwells.

White, James R.. Scripture Alone: Exploring the Bible's Accuracy, Authority and Authenticity (Kindle Locations 1609-1704). Baker Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

Scripture is self-authenticating

From Chapter 1 of the Charleston Confession

4. The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man or Church, but wholly upon God (who is Truth itself), the Author thereof; therefore it is to be received because it is the Word of God.

Affirmation of the Canon

The considerations used to affirm Scripture can largely be attributed to our understanding of the One giving the revelation.

1. Apostolic authorship – or close association with an apostle: eyewitnesses to the work of Christ; direct instruction from Christ; performed miracles to authenticate their ministry.

Eph 2:19-20 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, (20) **built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets**, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone,

2. The analogy of faith – consistency with other recognized Scripture

Num 23:19 God is not man, **that he should lie**, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?

Jas 1:17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom **there is no variation or shadow due to change**.

Rom 3:2 Much in every way. To begin with, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God.

24 Books in the Tanakh - Hebrew Bible

Torah – The Law	Nevi'im - The Prophets	Ketuvim - The Writings	
Genesis	Joshua	Psalms	} Poetry
Exodus	Judges	Job	
Leviticus	Samuel	Proverbs	
Numbers	Kings	Ruth	} Megilloth "5 small scrolls"
Deuteronomy	Isaiah	Song of Solomon	
	Jeremiah	Ecclesiastes	
	Ezekiel	Lamentations	
	Book of the 12 (minor prophets)	Esther	
		Daniel	} Other Writings
		Ezra/Nehemiah	
		Chronicles	

3. Church Usage and Recognition

From Chapter 1 of the Charleston Confession

5. We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the Church of God to an high and reverent esteem of the Holy Scriptures; and the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, and the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, and many other incomparable excellencies, and entire perfections thereof, are arguments whereby it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God; yet notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth, and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts.

1Co 2:9-11 But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him"-- (10) these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. (11) For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.

John 16:13 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, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.

Other Considerations

Three classifications of disputed texts:

1. Pseudepigrapha (written under false names)
 - a. Testament of Abraham, Apocalypse of Baruch, Acts of John, the Gospel According to Thomas, the Book of Noah, the Testament of Hezekiah
 - b. 3rd century or later writing, historical errors, violate analogy of faith

2Th 2:1-2 Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, (2) not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.

2. Apocrypha (hidden) – added to “canon” at Council of Trent in the mid-1500s
 - a. Not in the Hebrew Bible
 - b. New Testament never quotes from them
 - c. Errors and contradictions – e.g. prayers for the dead, historical inaccuracies
 - d. Rejected by many even within the Catholic church – e.g. Pope Gregory
3. Antilegomena (spoken against)
 - a. Hebrews: author unknown, but is consistent with the teaching of the rest of Scripture
 - b. James: relationship between faith and works
 - c. 2nd Peter: Difference in style when compared to 1 Peter; similar to Jude
 - d. 2nd/3rd John: author not identified – use of “the elder”.
 - e. Jude: references to non-canonical works: The Assumption of Moses and the Book of Enoch
 - f. Revelation: concern over the bizarre doctrines coming out of it – symbolism was open to wide interpretation.

Next Time: Textual Criticism and Translations