

Sunday, October 7, 2018— Grace Life School of Theology—*From This Generation For Ever*
 Lesson 61 Understanding Canonical Models: Historically-Determined Model

Introduction

- Last week, in Lesson 60, we began our investigation into the different canonical models by looking at the Community-Determined Model. In doing so, we observed the following community derived approaches:
 - *Historical-Critical Model*—"the canon is a fundamentally human construct that can be adequately accounted for in purely natural terms." (Kruger, 32)
 - *Roman Catholic Model*—the Magisterium of the Roman Catholic Church infallibly determined the borders of the canon.
 - *Existential/Neoorthodox Model*—" . . . authority is found not in the Scriptures themselves but ultimately in the individual who engages with them." In this view, "authority exists when (and only when) an individual experiences God's word and responds to it in faith." (Kruger, 59)
- Today, in Lesson 61, we want to consider a second model for determining the boundaries of the canon, namely the Historically-Determined Model.

Historically-Determined Model

- Historically-Determined Model—maintains that if historical investigations can demonstrate that a book possessed apostolic content or authority it should be regarded as canonical.
 - "These models deny that the Christian community's reception of the canon is definitive in establishing its authority and instead seek to establish it by critically investigating the historical merits of each of the canonical books. . . If a book can be shown to contain authentic Jesus tradition or can be shown to be apostolic, then it is considered part of the genuine canon of Scripture. Specific examples of the historically determined models reach very different conclusions, ranging from a rejection of most of the twenty-seven books (canon-within-the-canon model) to an acceptance of all twenty-seven books (criteria-of-canoncity model). But the methodology is the same: canon is authenticated via historical investigation into these books." (Kruger, 67/68)

Canon-within-the-Canon Model

- In 1962, Kurt Aland published an article titled "The Problem of the New Testament Canon" in which he argued that the New Testament canon as currently constituted was full of imperfections and uncertainties and was therefore problematic. Instead, Aland argued that the New Testament ought to be reduced to its core truths by discovering the "canon within the canon" as a means of bringing unity to the faith.

- This would be accomplished by investigating the historical development of the New Testament books in order to ascertain which parts are genuine and which are not.
- Michael Kruger highlights how this view shares much in common with the historical-critical model we looked at last week in Lesson 60.
 - “Like the historical-critical model . . . this model often shares the critical methodologies that arose during the Enlightenment and views the New Testament collection as a largely human construct. The difference, however, is in how each model responds to the human nature of the canon. While the historical-critical model is focused on the *reception* of these books and the natural causes for their selection by the early Christian community . . . the canon-within-the-canon model is intent on exploring the origins of these books and finding the “core” material that could be considered genuine.” (Kruger, 68)
- Attempts to locate the inner canon of the New Testament are generally pursued through the same critical methods used to discover the “historical” Jesus or the “real” message of Christ. One problem with such historical investigations is that inevitably philosophy and theology are mixed into the equation and they are not merely historical in nature.
 - “Finding the real Jesus is not as simple as employing the techniques of, say, form or redaction criticism, but often involves the historian's own beliefs about what Jesus should be like or what message he should have preached. Thus, for feminist scholars, the only portions of the Bible that can be considered the real canon are often those that promote an egalitarian agenda. Or for liberation theologians, the core canon would include only those teachings consistent with relieving the suffering of the oppressed. A more orthodox version of this tendency is found in a number of scholars (many Lutheran) who view the gospel message itself as the determining factor for what constitutes the true canon.” (Kruger, 69-70)
- The canon-within-the-canon model is also very unclear on the meaning and usage of the term canon. Its meaning can change depending on what aspect of the canon is being discussed.
 - “When the historical development of the canon is being discussed, the term is used by this model in the standard exclusive and functional senses . . . But when discussion shifts to the inner core of the New Testament, the term *canon* becomes virtually synonymous with *true* or *real*. In this sense, the term does not involve the *reception* of these books at all (as both the exclusive and functional definitions do), but is simply a way of speaking of the authentic portions of these books.” (Kruger, 71)
- Kruger outlines the fundamental problem with this model as follows:
 - “The fundamental problem with the canon-within-the canon approach is that it subjects the Scripture to a standard outside itself, namely, whatever criteria scholars set up to evaluate its truthfulness. . . historical investigations are not neutral affairs but are guided by a variety of theological commitments. Thus, to allow the canon to be “edited” according to what seems reasonable or credible to us will leave us with nothing but a human book. The canon cannot function as a norm over the church if the church gets to

decide which portions of the canon it will accept and which it will reject. . . Given the grand variety of external criteria used to evaluate the New Testament (e.g., feminism, liberation theology, what preaches Christ), each person's private canon will be entirely subjective and every changing.” (Kruger, 71-72)

- We have already demonstrated in previous segments of this class that modern biblical criticism in any of its forms is not consistent with a believing viewpoint toward scripture. Consequently, why should one trust it to adequately and/or accurately establish the boundaries of the canon?
 - “In the end, the canon-within-the-canon model serves not to establish the authoritative boundaries of the canon, but to remove them and replace them with the boundaries determined by the conclusion of critical historical investigation. Once one allows external criteria (whether the gospel message or the conclusions of historical criticism) to determine the extent of the canon, then the biblical canon, at least in any authoritative sense, ceases to exist.” (Kruger, 73)

Criteria-of-Canonicity Model

- Not liking the negative features of the models we have surveyed thus far, some evangelicals have found an answer in the criteria-of-canonicity model. This model maintains that three criteria need to be met in order for a book to be considered canonical.
 - “These criteria—apostolicity, orthodoxy, usage, etc.—are thought to be the characteristics that define a canonical book. Thus, the criteria-of-canonicity model argues that the authority of the canon can be established by doing a rigorous *historical investigation* of the New Testament books and showing how they meet these criteria. Ironically, then, this model shares much in common with the canon-within-a-canon model above. Although these two models reach radically different conclusions—one has a stripped down canon and the other a complete twenty-seven-book canon—they use the same over all methodology, namely, an appeal to the historical origins of these books.” (Kruger, 74)
- Well known evangelicals such as Warfield, Montgomery, and Habermas have held that this “historical methodology for establishing the authority of the canon is the same as for any other ancient book.” (Kruger, 75) Warfield is the most direct:
 - “It is a most assured result of biblical criticism that every one of the twenty-seven books which now constitute our New Testament is assuredly genuine and authentic.” (Warfield, 429)
- A close evaluation of this model reveals that it can be random in its approach and methodology and thereby resembles aspects of some of the other models we have surveyed.
 - “Owing to the variety of criteria of canonicity that have been suggested over the years, this model naturally overlaps, at points, with other models that we have already discussed. For example, inasmuch as one focuses on the usage and/or reception of these books as a criterion of canonicity, then the model can begin to look like one of the community-determined models. . .” (Kruger, 75)

- Despite the lack of specificity and overlap, apostolicity has emerged as the main criteria for canonicity, according to this model.
 - “Out of all of these suggested criteria, however, the apostolicity of a book has emerged as the primary or dominant one. C. Stephen Evans argues that all the other criteria of canonicity either involve or imply apostolicity. Thus, he maintains, “Apostolic authority is not simply one criterion among many, as many historical treatments of the formation of the canon imply, but is essentially linked to the notion of canon as the central criterion.” A.A. Hodge held this view: “We determine what books have a place in this Canon or divine rule by an examination of the evidences that show that each of them, severally, was written by the inspired prophet or apostle whose name it bears.” Warfield’s seminal work also argued that apostolicity is the central criterion for canonicity, and a book should be accepted only if it bears “authenticating proof of its apostolicity””. (Kruger, 75-76)
- In fairness, the Criteria-of-Canonicity Model does inject some positive elements into the study of canonicity. Kruger identifies the following positive aspects of model:
 - “. . .careful collection and presentation of important historical evidence that bolsters these books’ historical credibility. This model has also accurately identified apostolicity as a key component of canonicity—a fact that has been largely overlooked by the other models. There is no doubt that the redemptive-historical role of the apostles is foundational to our understanding of canon. A final positive of this model would be the degree to which the divine origins of the canon are taken seriously and given their due authority as Scripture (something that is not true of every canonical model).” (Kruger, 76-77)
- Despite its positive contributions to the study of canonicity, this model possesses some serious flaws that cannot be overlooked. Most notably is its insistence that the canon must be authenticated via “the assured result(s) of biblical criticism” and/or the “accepted canons of historical method.”
 - “No doubt such an approach is driven by the belief that all historical investigations should be conducted according to neutral standards that are accessible (and agreeable) to the Christian and non-Christian alike. On the surface, this seems eminently reasonable. If scholars have various (and contradictory) worldviews, then historical investigations ought to be done in a fashion that is world-view neutral. While reasonable, however, it also runs the danger of being overly simplistic. Are scholars able to check their worldviews at the door so easily?” (Kruger, 77)
- One problem with the so-called neutral standards of modern historical inquiry that this model is reliant upon is that they are founded upon non-Christian and Enlightenment assumptions. Is taking a neutral approach even consistent with the epistemological position advocated for in scripture. God’s word teaches that a religiously neutral approach to historical study is not possible.

- Luke 11:52
- I Corinthians 1:5
- Colossians 2:3
- Psalm 36:9
- “The lack of neutrality among scholars raises questions about the effectiveness of purportedly neutral historical arguments to authenticate the canon.” (Kruger, 79) Since neutrality when it comes to the truth is not a Biblical virtue, following it as a means of authenticating the authority of the canon seems like an unwise and unscriptural nonstarter. Moreover, attempting to authenticate the canon based on a supposedly independent neutral standard ultimately subjects the canon to an authority outside itself.
 - “Once we hitch our canonical wagon to the supposedly neutral “assured result(s) of biblical criticism,” then we are in effect creating a canon that is always in flux. After all, modern biblical criticism proves to be a fickle partner. What happens when “the assured results of biblical criticism” shift or change? Does the canon change along with them? . . . If autonomous historical investigations alone determine canonicity, then what if these investigations claim that the early church’s decisions were mistaken? Marxsen states, “If better methods for historical study are available to us today . . . then we come face-to-face with the demand—not merely the permission—to apply them once again to determine what is canonical.” In other words, the canon can change as each generation’s scholars reconsider the evidence for themselves. (Kruger, 80-81)
- Historical evidence for apostolic authority of the New Testament books is an effective means for authenticating the canon only when it is viewed as a means provided by and governed by the scriptures themselves along with the internal witness of God the Holy Spirit.
- Kruger points out the notion that criteria existed for determining a book’s canonicity is misleading in the first place and inflates the church’s role in the canon’s development.
 - “The term *criteria* can give the impression that the early church consciously developed some set of standards for what constituted a canonical book and then expressly went out to find books that met those criteria—almost like a search committee would determine the profile of the ideal candidate prior to the formal interview process. However, in the early stages of the development of the New Testament, the canonical process was not so much about the church *choosing* books on the basis of some formal criteria as it was a matter of the early Christians *receiving* what had been handed down to them from the very start. . . In short, the very concept of “criteria of canonicity” unduly inflates the church’s active role in the development of the canon.” (Kruger, 81-82)
- If, as the name of this model suggests (criteria-of-canonicity model), there are criteria that provide norms or standards for determining canonicity, one is left to ask the obvious question of “where did the criteria come from?”

- “Put differently, what are the criteria that determine these criteria? When faced with this question, we have several options. First, we could argue that the criteria of canonicity are determined by what seems reasonable to us. The tests of a divine book come from our sense of what a divine book ought to look like. But where do we get the authority to decide the standards for divine revelation? And how do we know divine revelation when we see it? . . . Second, we could argue that we get these criteria from the early church, claiming that these are the tests that early Christians used. But even if such a thing could be historically demonstrated, this simply raises the next question of whether the early church was correct in using these criteria. . . . If the criteria of canonicity are defended solely on these grounds, then this approach simply morphs into a community-determined model of canon.” (Kruger, 83)
- At best the criteria-of-canonicity model leaves us with an argument for canonicity based on probability. It will not suffice, “if the Christian is left with only this probabilistic argument as the reason to believe these books are from God, then some may legitimately question whether it can provide the necessary basis for the conviction of true religious faith.” (Kruger, 85)
- The problem with this position is not that it uses historical evidence in seeking to establish the boundaries of the canon. Rather, the problem resides in how the historical evidence is being utilized.
 - “It needs to be reiterated, however, that the concerns with this approach are not simply that it uses historical evidences in the discussion of the canon. The use of historical evidence and the investigation of the history of the canon are entirely legitimate. Rather, the concern here is the manner in which such historical investigation is often pursued. The quest for a neutral historical methodology and the lack of sufficient means for identifying the criteria of canonicity present a number of theological and practical problems that can eventually undermine the authority of the very canon we are setting out to defend.” (Kruger, 86-87)
- There remains only one viable option, the scriptures themselves are the authoritative guide for how historical investigation should be conducted.
 - “. . . the criteria for canonicity are best understood as the way in which the Scripture sets the terms for how its own origins are to be investigated and explored. We derive the principle of apostolicity not from probabilistic historical investigations, but from the Scriptures themselves. After all, who has the authority to tell us what constitutes a divine book? Only God himself. And where would God tell us such a thing? In the Scriptures. Thus, apostolicity is not something we derive from our historical investigations; rather it is a principle that guides our historical investigations. . . . there is nothing inappropriate about doing historical work on a scriptural foundation.” (Kruger, 85)
- Next week we begin discussing the self-authenticating nature of the canon.

Works Cited

Kruger, Michael J. *Canon Revisited: Establishing the Origins and Authority of the New Testament Books*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012.

Warfield, B.B. *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*. Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1948.