

Sunday, October 28, 2018—Grace Life School of Theology—*From This Generation For Ever*
 Lesson 63 Understanding Canonical Models: Self-Authenticating Model, Part 2 (Corporate Exposure)

Introduction

- In Lesson 62 we began discussing the Self-Authenticating Model for authenticating the canon. In doing so, we saw that this view holds that the scriptures authenticated themselves in the hearts and minds of believers when they were written.
 - “A self-authenticating model of canon would take into account something that the other models have largely overlooked: the *content* of the canon itself. Rather than looking only to its reception (community determined), or only to its origins (historically determined), this model would, in a sense, let the canon have a voice in its own authentication.” (Kruger, 89)
- Lesson 62 traversed a wide range of topics such as:
 - The Reformers belief in the *autopistic* or self-authenticating nature of the canon.
 - The use of circular reasoning in validating ultimate authorities.
 - The fact that God has created the proper epistemic (truth) environment wherein belief in the New Testament canon can be reliably formed.
- This epistemic (truth) environment includes three components:
 - *Providential Exposure*—“in order for the church to be able to recognize the books of the canon, it must first be providentially exposed to these books. The church cannot recognize a book that it does not have.”
 - *Attributes of Canonicity*—“these attributes are basically characteristics that distinguish canonical books from all other books. There are three attributes of canonicity: (1) divine qualities (canonical books bear the “marks” of divinity), (2) corporate reception (canonical books are recognized by the church as a whole), and (3) apostolic origins (canonical books are the result of the redemptive-historical activity of the apostles).”
 - *Internal Testimony of the Holy Spirit*—“in order for believers to rightly recognize these attributes of canonicity, the Holy Spirit works to overcome the noetic effects of sin and produces belief that these books are from God.”
- “These three components must all be in place if we are to have knowledge of the canon. We cannot know canonical books unless we have access to those books (providential exposure); we need some way to distinguish canonical books from other books (attributes of canonicity); and we need to have some basis for thinking we can rightly identify these attributes (internal work of the Spirit).” (Kruger, 94)

- Today, in Lesson 63 we want to consider these three components in more detail in an effort to truly grasp the veracity of this model.

Providential Exposure (Corporate Exposure)

- For our purposes in this course, I will hereafter be referring to this point as Corporate Exposure as opposed to Providential Exposure. As stated in [Lesson 47](#) The Method of Preservation Providential or Miraculous, I believe that the use of the term providential in these discussions is not helpful because it introduces a theological concept into the discussion that the Bible does not use when describing these matters.
 - “In short, it seems that the use of the word “providence” in this theological sense muddies the waters with respect to the methodology of preservation. For these reasons, I recommend that one not use the term as a descriptor for explaining how preservation occurred. There is nothing to be gained from using such a loaded and confused term.” (Lesson 47)
- I do, however, agree with the idea or premise of Kruger’s point when he uses the Providential Exposure terminology. The corporate body of Christ was exposed to the canonical scriptures through the copying process identified in our study of preservation.
- “The church cannot respond (positively or negatively) to a book of which it has no knowledge.” (Kruger, 94,95) While on the surface this might appear elemental, it is absolutely foundational in establishing the self-authenticating model as the correct option.
 - “If God intended to give a canon to his corporate church—and not just to an isolated congregation for a limited period of time—then we have every reason to believe that he would providentially preserve these books and expose them to the church so that, through the Holy Spirit, it can rightly recognize them as canonical.” (Kruger, 95)
- Kruger goes on to explain why the principle of providential exposure is important for dealing with questions about lost canonical books.
 - “The inclusion of the “providential exposure” component in the self-authenticating model is not only obvious (how could the church recognize books it was not familiar with?), but also critical if we are to claim that the Christian’s epistemic environment is able to lead *reliably* to a knowledge of the canon. If God did not bring about the condition of corporate exposure to the church, then we would have no basis for thinking that the complete canon could actually be known. There could always be an unknown number of books left out of the canon—not because the church rejected them, but because they were lost before they could even be evaluated. Fortunately, we have good biblical grounds for affirming God’s intent in giving his Word to his church (Rom. 15:4; 2 Tim. 3:16-17) and God’s sovereign ability to accomplish it (Ps. 135:6; Dan. 4:35; Acts 17:25-28; Eph. 1:11; Heb. 1:3).” (Kruger, 95)
- This section of Kruger’s book contains an interesting section regarding other books written by the apostles that are not found in the scripture such as Paul’s other letter to the Corinthians

(I Cor. 5:9). Kruger views this letter as inspired but not canonical on account of the fact that it was not exposed corporately to the body of Christ at large.

- “. . . how we are to think of books that the apostles may have written that were not preserved—such as Paul’s *other* letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 5:9). No doubt such letters, if written in an apostle’s authoritative role, would have been inspired by the Holy Spirit. But since God did not providentially allow these books to be exposed to the corporate church (apparently they were known only to a limited group and then lost or forgotten), then we have no reason to think that they are relevant for our discussion about which books are canonical. Again, how can we recognize a book’s canonicity unless we actually *have* that book? If the authentication of the canon is inherently about which books the church should accept or reject (and it is), then lost books, by definition, can play no role. Therefore, the self-authenticating model we are putting forth here can only be used to evaluate books that God has allowed the collective church to be exposed to. . . .” (Kruger, 95-96)
- I must admit that Kruger’s comments on Paul’s other letter to the Corinthians challenged the way that I have heretofore thought about that matter. Historically, I have maintained that Paul wrote other letters that were not necessarily inspired and therefore not identified by the believing church as scripture. Therefore, they were not included in the canon. In contrast, Kruger is arguing that Paul’s other letter to the Corinthians was inspired but failed to be included in the canon because it was not circulated outside of Corinth and therefore failed to receive corporate exposure by the entire body of Christ. While either explanation is technically consistent with a self-authenticating model, I do not like or agree with Kruger’s explanation because it leaves the door open to calling a noncanonical book such as the Shepherd of Hermes or I Clement scripture.
 - “Of course, there is still the complex question of what terminology is appropriate for these “lost” apostolic books. What shall we call them? Although we certainly could use the term *canon* to refer to these books (at least in regard to the functional definition), that seems only to confuse matters. If God providentially intended some apostolic books to serve as permanent foundational books for the corporate church (e.g., John’s Gospel), and other apostolic books to serve a temporary, one-time purpose after which they were lost or forgotten (e.g., Paul’s other letter to the Corinthians), then our terminology ought to reflect such a distinction. If so, then it seems best to refer to these lost apostolic writings as “inspired books” or perhaps even as “Scripture.” In regard to the latter term, this would be the one instance, contra Sundberg, where there is legitimate distinction between Scripture and canon. But this distinction is only applicable to the narrow foundational and redemptive-historical period of the apostles and driven by their God-given function as caretakers and founders of the church. During this unique apostolic phase, canonicity was a subset of Scripture—all canonical books were Scripture, but not necessarily all scriptural books were canonical.” (Kruger, 96)
- While I understand what Kruger is saying here, for me it is much clearer to say that Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians (I Cor. 5:9) was not inspired and was therefore not recognized by the body of Christ as scripture and therefore not included in the canon. There is no verse that teaches that everything an apostle wrote was inspired. Yet, we know from the doctrine of preservation

that no truly inspired scripture would ever be lost. Just as inspiration impacts preservation, so too does preservation impact canonicity.

- Whichever view of the self-authenticating models one adopts, the view of “lost” canonical scripture would be the same.
 - “Therefore, canonical books, as we have defined them here, cannot be lost. If they are lost, then they were never canonical books to begin with. So, even if we were to discover Paul’s lost letter in the desert sands today, we could not place it into the canon as the twenty-eighth book. Instead, we would simply recognize that God had not preserved this book to be a permanent foundation for the church. Putting such a letter into the canon now would not change that fact; it could not make a book foundational that clearly never was.” (Kruger, 97)
- One important question that the self-authenticating model must answer is the following: Is there sufficient scriptural evidence that the inspired New Testament documents experienced a wide circulation and exposure in the first century? The answer is yes. The doctrine of preservation taught us that a multiplicity of accurate reliable copies that are just as authoritative as the original autographs would be the mechanism through which preservation is accomplished. Now, through the notion of Corporate Exposure, we see that the copying process was essential for the body of Christ to identify the authoritative borders of the New Testament canon.

1st Century Copies of the New Testament & Corporate Exposure

- II Peter 3:1-2—when we looked at that verse previously, I pointed out to you that Peter’s attitude towards the books that he was writing were that they are just as authoritative as what the Old Testament prophets wrote.
- II Peter 3:15-16—do you see Peter’s estimation of what Paul wrote? Peter said that they take Paul’s epistles and they twist them as they do the other scriptures.
- The Apostle Peter obviously considered the epistles of Paul to be scripture. Notice that Peter had all of Paul’s epistles that were written at that time, according to II Peter 3:16.
- It is interesting that Peter had all of Paul’s epistles, and he had them for some time. It was not just Peter that had Paul’s epistles because folks were studying them to the point that some were already wresting them during the first century.
- By the way, these epistles were not written to Peter, nor were any of Paul’s epistles written to the Jerusalem church. Paul’s epistles were written to the Gentile churches, and then copies were made, and Peter had copies of them down in Palestine. Peter was not the only one that had copies; all of the people to whom Peter is writing possessed copies as well. They were studying them, and they were getting confused doctrinally by not rightly dividing the word of truth.
- When Paul says to rightly divide the word, the saints of the first century had access to the scriptures. Part of what they had access to was the prophetic program and part of it was the mystery program (Paul’s epistles), and they had to rightly divide it. The scriptures were being written, copied, and placed into the hands of the people. Then, those copies were being

distributed far and wide, and they were recognized, at that time, as being the word of God. Peter calls the copies of Paul's epistles scripture i.e., of equal authority to the originals. The only way that could happen is just to have a bunch of people with copies of Paul's epistles and copies of the rest of the word of God. They had copies and none of them possessed the original manuscripts. If one thinks that Peter is referring to the original manuscripts then Peter, a circumcision apostle, would have needed to have stolen the Gentile church's epistles in order to have them in his personal possession.

- The subject of verse 16 is "as also in all *his* epistles." People were studying them and twisting them like the other scriptures. "His epistles" in verse 16 are clearly considered to be scripture. Peter has them and the people that Peter is writing to in the Jewish church have them, and they have had them for some time because they had them long enough to have been studying them.
- I Timothy 4:13-16—notice the instructions that Paul gave to Timothy in verse 13 – "Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine." What is Timothy supposed to read? From what is Timothy supposed to exhort the people? From where does his authority come? Paul is telling Timothy to read the scripture. He is to exhort the people from the scripture. He is to teach them doctrine from the scripture. Paul expects Timothy to have the scripture to teach, and to preach, and to read for these people. When he says in verse 15, "Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all," Paul is telling Timothy to pay attention to his own personal study. Paul is telling Timothy to be a student. How can Timothy do this if he does not possess copies of God's word?
- I Timothy 5:17—"To labor in the word" is to spend time studying the scriptures. According to this passage, there were people who had been studying the book and teaching it to others. Paul is instructing them to look out among themselves and to take notice of those elder(s) that are studying their bibles and teaching it to the saints. They were already doing this before they received this epistle from Paul. Paul is not telling them to study this epistle (I Timothy) and preach this epistle, but Paul is telling them to look out among themselves and find the men who were already studying the scriptures before Timothy received the epistle. Thus, they have scripture other than I Timothy that they had been studying. Timothy is instructed to give double honor to these men who were laboring in the word.
- I Timothy 5:18—in other words, these people that Paul is writing to have the word of God. Paul quotes Deuteronomy, but he also quotes Luke. Paul says, "The scripture says that." Do you know what Paul is doing? Paul is saying, "Go look it up for yourself." Those people had the book of Deuteronomy, so they could look it up, but they also had access to the book of Luke. They had the Old Testament, and they had portions of the New Testament already. What they did not have was the original autographs.
- Acts 1:1-2—notice the phrase "the former treatise." It is obvious that there is a former book and that its existence was known during the 1st century. The people at Ephesus, where Timothy was pastoring, had copies of the book of Luke. Luke was a traveling companion to the apostle Paul, and he was a close friend of both Paul and Timothy. These people did not have the original manuscript of the book of Luke. Theophilus had the original manuscript of the book of Luke, and these people had copies of the book of Luke. All of this is incidental to what is being taught in the text. The subjects of these passages are something else, but as you read the passages you pick up on the fact that these people had the New Testament scriptures in their hands. These scriptures were being collected together, copied, distributed among the people, and were just as authoritative as the original autographs. According to God the Holy Spirit, the copies of the

book of Deuteronomy, for example, were just as much “God-breathed” as what Moses placed in the ark at the end of Deuteronomy.

- II Timothy 2:15—as previously mentioned, in order to have the ability to rightly divide the word of truth, they needed to have access to the word of truth in order to rightly divide it. There is not any other reasonable/logical conclusion one can reach. These first century saints must have had the scriptures; they had some books containing the prophetic program and some books containing the kingdom program. Just as you and me today, they had to rightly divide between prophecy and mystery. However, there were some people at that time who were not doing such a good job of rightly dividing the word.
 - II Timothy 2:15—we see here the apostasy from the doctrine that Paul had given already. Hence, Paul exhorts Timothy to study to be approved of God, rightly dividing the word. Paul said, “Do not make the mistakes of mixing the two together like these other men.”
- II Timothy 4:1-2—they are to take the book and preach the word. The reference is obviously not just to the Old Testament, but to Paul’s epistles as well. Paul wants them to preach the doctrine committed to His trust. When Paul says, “Preach the word,” he is not just telling them to go out and preach any part of the bible, especially not after II Timothy 2:15.
 - II Timothy 1:13—I submit to you that Paul’s epistles present to you that “form of sound words” which are to be preached today. Paul’s epistles are what equip the man of God in II Timothy 3:16, 17 “unto all good works.”
- Acts 20:28-32—is Paul talking about the Old Testament? No, Paul is not talking about the Old Testament. The Old Testament is not what we are to teach in this age, and it is not what Paul commends them to teach. The Old Testament is not called “the word of his grace” in the scriptures. The word of his grace is that word that is committed to Paul.
 - Ephesians 3:2—that is what was committed to Paul. Thus, when Paul says, “I commend you to the word of his grace,” he is talking about the word of God that had been written down by him. Paul wrote the book of Galatians, I Thessalonians, II Thessalonians, I Corinthians, II Corinthians and the book of Romans by the time Acts 20:1-3 took place. They had a considerable amount of the word of God written down, collected together, and in their hands.
 - Colossians 3:16—the word of Christ is that word that the Lord Jesus Christ, from heaven’s glory, committed to him through the apostle Paul. Folks, it has to do with the word of God.
 - Colossians 2:7—Epaphras and these Colossians had copies of the word of God with them, and Epaphras could teach them, and they could go home and study.
 - Ephesians 3:1-4—before this writing, Paul wrote down some things about the mystery. He said, “I wrote them afore, whereby, when you read them.” Well, where had he written them before? He wrote I Thessalonians, II Thessalonians, Galatians, I Corinthians, II Corinthians, and Romans. Paul said, “When you read those things, you will understand.” The implication is that these people at Ephesus had copies of those prior books. Now, these people are the same people in Acts 20:32 that he commends to the word of his grace. The elders from the church at Ephesus are the people that we just read

about in Acts 20. The implication about the Ephesian church is that they had Paul's prior epistles. They read what he wrote earlier.

- I am simply trying to drive home the fact that these 1st century saints had copies of God's word. The New Testament text was being written down, copied out, collected together, and distributed just like we studied with respect to the Old Testament. Thus, one can have faith that the same process that existed back in the Old Testament, demonstrated in the New Testament to have worked for 1500 or 2000 years, was also at work during the dispensation of grace.
- I Thessalonians 5:27—this is one of the earliest epistles, if not the first then the second epistle that Paul wrote. There is a possibility that Paul wrote the book of Galatians before he wrote Thessalonians. But in the earliest epistles that Paul wrote, he tells them that he expects them to see that this epistle is read and distributed among all the holy brethren. By the way, I Thessalonians 5:27 is quite clear that Paul sees the design of preservation existing in copies of his epistles being made and distributed among the various churches.
- Galatians 1:1-2—the book of Galatians was a circular letter. It was one letter written to a number of different churches in the region of Galatia. Now, you know what would have happened when it got to the church in Lystra before they sent it to the church in Iconium, don't you? You know good and well that someone made a copy of that epistle before passing it along to the next assembly. Paul intended the book to make the rounds and to be a norm and a standard for doctrine in those churches.
- Colossians 4:15-16—Paul wants this epistle read, not just at Colosse, but at the Laodicean church as well. Colossians is one of the prison epistles, and it was one of the last books Paul wrote. Paul's design, from the very beginning to the very end, was that his epistles were to be read obviously by the people he wrote them to, but also in all the other churches too. Paul wants the information, and the doctrine, to get out to everybody everywhere.

Conclusion

- There is ample scriptural justification to support Kruger's first component for a self-authenticating canon, namely Corporate Exposure (Providential Exposure). The same copies that served to preserve the scriptures also provided the mechanism by which the boundaries of the canon could be determined.

Works Cited

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