

Sunday, November 4, 2018—Grace Life School of Theology—*From This Generation For Ever*
 Lesson 64 Understanding Canonical Models: Self-Authenticating Model, Part 3 (Divine Qualities & the Holy Spirit)

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)
- The self-authenticating model maintains that God has created the proper epistemic (truth) environment wherein belief in the New Testament canon can be reliably formed. In his book *Canon Revisited: Establishing the Origins and Authority of the New Testament Books*, Michael J. Kruger argues that this epistemic (truth) environment includes the following three components:
 - *Providential Exposure* (Corporate 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.” (Kruger, 94)
- Once again Kruger states the following regarding these three components:
 - “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)

- Last week in [Lesson 63](#) we spent an entire lesson looking at the issue of Corporate Exposure (what Kruger calls Providential Exposure). In this lesson we want to look at Attributes of Canonicity & the Holy Spirit.

Attributes of Canonicity & the Holy Spirit

- Through our consideration of Corporate Exposure in Lesson 63 we have observed the following when it comes to the issue of canonicity.
 - “. . . we are only dealing with (and can only deal with) the books we have available to us. And in this regard, we trust in the providence of God that the books available to us are the ones he intended.” (Kruger, 97)
- Corporate Exposure is the first of three conditions necessary for the authentication of canonical books in the self-authenticating model. We also need to consider the attributes of canonicity and the role of the Holy Spirit.

Divine Qualities

- “Because canonical books were constituted by the revelatory activity of the Holy Spirit, we would expect that there would be some evidence of that activity in the books themselves—the “imprint” of the Spirit, if you will. Thus, the first attribute of the canon’s self-authenticating nature is that it bears the divine qualities or divine character of a book from God.” (Kruger, 97)
 - John Murray—“If . . . Scripture is divine in its origin, character, and authority, it must bear the marks or evidences of that divinity.” (quoted in Kruger, 98)
 - John Calvin—“It is easy to see that the Sacred Scriptures, which so far surpass all gifts and graces of human endeavor, breathe something divine.” (quoted in Kruger, 98)
 - John Calvin—“Indeed, Scripture exhibits fully as clear evidence of its own truth as white and black things do of their color, or sweet and bitter things do of their taste.” (quoted in Kruger, 98)
 - John Calvin—“As far as Sacred Scripture is concerned . . . it is clearly crammed with thoughts that could not be humanly conceived. Let each of the prophets be looked into; none will be found who does not far exceed human measure. Consequently, those for whom prophetic doctrine is tasteless ought to be thought of lacking taste buds.” (quoted in Kruger, 98)
- Traditionally, among Protestants, the scriptures’ divine qualities are thought to include its beauty, efficacy, and harmony. “As the Westminster Confession of Faith notes, these divine qualities are considered to be objective means “whereby [Scripture] doth abundantly *evidence itself* to be the Word of God.” (Kruger, 98)

- “In many ways the divine qualities of Scripture are analogous to the way the natural world attests to God as Creator. Christians have historically argued that we know the natural world is from God because it bears his “marks” and his “imprints.” The beauty, excellency, and harmony of creation testify to the fact that God is its author.” (Kruger, 98)
 - Psalm 19:1
 - Romans 1:20
- “If the created world (general revelation) is able to speak clearly that it is from God, then how much more so would the canon of Scripture (special revelation) speak clearly that it is from God? Murray draws this same connection: “If the heavens declare the glory of God and therefore bear witness to their divine creator, the Scripture as God’s handiwork must also bear the imprints of his authorship.” (Kruger, 99)
 - Galatians 3:8—God attributed his own attributes to his word. We have already seen in Lessons [18](#) and [19](#) that God’s design in inspiration was to make the written word equal with the Living Word, the Lord Jesus Christ.
- For a Bible believer there can be no doubt that the canonical scriptures possess divine qualities. I trust that at this point we can clearly see how the Bible’s own internal teaching about itself shapes how one ought to view the question of canonicity. As we have seen, the various community-determined models and historically-determined models deny that the canon bears inherent divine qualities. Consequently, these models must appeal to criteria outside of the canon in order to authenticate it.
 - “Thus, once again, we see that canonical models do not (and cannot) approach the question of canon with theological neutrality. All models have prior theological conviction about what Scriptures is (or is not), and this in turn determines the manner in which canon is authenticated. But where do these prior theological convictions about Scripture come from if not from Scripture itself? Ironically, then, each model must know what Scripture is before determining how it is to be authenticated. There cannot be a theologically neutral approach to canon.” (Kruger, 99)
- So how does one recognize the divine qualities of the twenty-seven books contained in the New Testament? Put a different way, why don’t all people recognize the authority of these twenty-seven books? The answer to both questions has to do with the internal witness of God the Holy Spirit.
 - “The answer is that, because of the noetic effects of sin, the effects of sin on the mind (Rom. 3:10-18), one cannot recognize these marks without the *testimonium spiritus sancti internum*, the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit not only is operative within the canonical books themselves (providing the “marks” of divinity noted

above), but also must be operative within those who receive them. The *testimonium* is not a private revelation of the Spirit or new information given to the believer—as if the list of canonical books were whispered in our ears—but it is a work of the Spirit that overcomes the noetic effects of sin and produces the belief that the Scriptures are the word of God. The reason some refuse to believe the Scriptures is not that there is any defect or lack of evidence in the Scriptures (the *indicia* are clear and objective) but that those without the Spirit do not accept the things from God (I Cor. 2:10-14) . . . Put simply, canonical books are received by those who have the Holy Spirit in them. When people’s eyes are opened, they are struck by the divine qualities of Scripture—its beauty, harmony, efficacy—and recognize and embrace Scripture for what it is, the word of God.” (Kruger, 99-101)

- In terms of the internal witness of God the Holy Spirit, Kruger touches upon the similarities and differences between the self-authenticating model and the community-determined models discussed in [Lesson 60](#).
 - “It is here that we see both similarities and differences with a number of the community-determined models above. The self-authenticating model is similar to these models in that they all recognize a legitimate place for the subjective response of Christians in the authentication of the canon. The difference, however, is that the community-determined models make the subjective response foundational to the canon’s authority and, in some instances, that which constitutes the canonical authority. For example, in the existential/neoorthodox model the Scripture does not bear divine qualities in and of itself, but functions as the Word of God only when the Spirit decided to use it. In this sense, the authority of Scripture is utterly contingent on the subjective experience of those who receive it. The Spirit becomes the *grounds* of the canon’s authority, not the *means* to recognizing it. In contrast, the self-authenticating model understands the *testimonium* not as something that stands by itself, but as something that always stands in conjunction with the objective qualities of Scripture noted above. The two always go together. Indeed, they are two aspects of the same phenomenon, not to be unduly separated. . . So, while there is a subjective *aspect* to the self-authenticating model, it is not *subjectivism*.” (Kruger, 101-102)
- The scriptures themselves teach that God the Holy Spirit resides and works within members of the body of Christ.
 - I Corinthians 3:16-17—the Spirit of God dwells within each member of the body of Christ.
 - II Corinthians 6:16
 - Romans 8:9—the Spirit of God dwells within every saint.

- Romans 8:16—the Spirit of God inside us bears witness to our human spirit that we are the children of God. This is an internal witness that one cannot feel and can only know through the internal working of God the Holy Spirit.
- Romans 8:26—the Spirit also helps our infirmities and makes intercession for us. The written word informs as to what the Spirit is doing in our inner man.
- I Thessalonians 2:13—how were the Thessalonians able to receive Paul’s words as the word of God?
 - Because the Thessalonians were saved members of the body of Christ who had God the Holy Spirit dwelling in their inner man.
- Since the scriptures themselves attest to the internal working and witness of God the Holy Spirit viewing this internal witness as integral to the process of identifying the canon, it does not equal subjectivism. Kruger concludes his discussion of the divine qualities of scripture by stating the following:
 - “Of course, some may still object: “But how do I know I am experiencing the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit? How do I know it isn’t, say, heartburn? The problem with this objection is that it assumes we can only know the Scriptures are from God if we can properly identify the *testimonium*. But this would be true only if the *testimonium* were itself the grounds for our belief—as if we argued to ourselves, “Because I am having this experience of the Spirit, therefore, on that basis, the Scripture is true.” But as we have maintained, the ground for our belief is the apprehension of the divine qualities of Scripture itself, not the *testimonium* or our experience with it. Thus, we need not be consciously aware of the work of the Spirit for the Spirit to be, in fact, working. It seems, then, that our belief in the truth of Scripture via the work of the Spirit is best construed not as an inductive inference from some aspect of our experience (whether the Spirit or something else), but, as Johnathan Edwards noted, as a more “immediate” or “intuitive” belief.” (Kruger, 102-103)
- Romans 8:16—I cannot feel or hear the Spirit’s witness with my spirit that I am a child of God. It’s not a feeling that I can experience with my senses, yet I believe it’s happening because of the testimony of the verse.
- Galatians 4:6—likewise with the Spirit in our hearts crying Abba Father. I cannot hear the Spirit of God doing so, yet, when I read the verse, I believe that its true. Why? Because the written word of God is working in conjunction with the indwelling Spirit of God to testify to my human spirit that it’s true. The inward working of the Spirit of God serves to confirm the truth of God’s written word, in my experience.
- When one reads Shakespeare, or the United States Constitution, or the Gettysburg Address, there is no internal witness that they are inspired documents.

- Hebrews 4:12—one of the divine qualities ascribed to scripture is that it is a living book. Just as God breathed his life into Adam (Genesis 2:7) and thereby brought life to his body, He gave his word by inspiration (II Timothy 3:16).
- II Peter 1:21—God the Holy Spirit was the operative member of the Godhead in terms of inspiration. The same Spirit that moved upon “holy men of God”, thereby causing them to record God’s words, lives and resides within every member of the body Christ.
- When an individual believer reads God’s word, the Holy Spirit within that person can identify His own work. Moreover, He can impress upon the spirit of the individual saint that something is or is not God’s word.
- God attributed his own attributes to his word. Therefore, the word of God does possess divine qualities. These divine qualities are completely undiscerned to a lost man who is dead in trespasses and sins. Only a member of the body of Christ with God the Holy Spirit dwelling within them can identify and acknowledge the supernatural nature of scripture. Therefore, the scripture’s divine qualities worked in concert with the internal witness of God the Holy Spirit to aid the body of Christ in discerning inspired canonical books from uninspired and non-canonical ones.
- Next week we will talk about the corporate nature of this testimony by looking at the notion of corporate reception.

Works Cited

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