Sunday, November 11, 2018—Grace Life School of Theology—*From This Generation For Ever*
Lesson 65 Understanding Canonical Models: Self-Authenticating Model, Part 4 (Corporate Reception)

Introduction

- In <u>Lesson 62</u> 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)

  - *Attributes of Canonicity*

    - Divine Qualities

    - Corporate Reception

    - Apostolic Origins

  - *Internal Testimony of the Holy Spirit*

- 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)

- In <u>Lesson 64</u> we began looking at the Attributes of Canonicity by considering the *divine qualities* of scripture and role of the Holy Spirit in identifying them. Today, in Lesson 65 we want to continue our consideration of the Attributes of Canonicity by looking at the issue of Corporate Reception and the role the Holy Spirit played in identifying God's word in the greater body of Christ.

Attributes of Canonicity and the Holy Spirit

Corporate Reception

- Last week, when we looked at the issue of *divine qualities* as a mark of canonicity, we discussed the Holy Spirit's internal witness to individual believers. It would be a mistake to view the canon's authentication as occurring solely on a personal or individualistic level. If this were the case exclusively, one could perhaps object to the canon's authority on the grounds of personal subjectivity. But, as we will see in this study, there is also a corporate aspect to how the canon was authenticated.

  - "There are good biblical reasons to think that the *testimonium* would also result in a corporate . . . reception of God's Word." (Kruger, 103)

- "The biblical witness indicates that it is God's corporate people—not as individuals but as a . . . whole—who are "entrusted with the oracles of God" (Rom. 3:2). As Kline has argued, God gives the . . . documents with the intent that those documents become a "community rule." The implications of this are clear: if God's canonical books ultimately have a corporate purpose, then we have every reason to think that the *testimonium* ultimately has a corporate purpose. The canon cannot rule a community unless it is received by that community." (Kruger, 104)

- Kruger quotes Stephen C. Evans' essay "Canonicity, Apostolicity, and Biblical Authority" to buttress his point:

  - "It seems highly plausible, then, that if God is going to see that an authorized revelation is given, he will also see that this revelation is recognized. . . On this view, then, the fact that the church recognized the books of the New Testament as canonical is itself a powerful reason to believe that these books are indeed the revelation God intended humans to have." (quoted in Kruger, 104)

- "Second, if we affirm the efficacy of the *testimonium* on an individual level, why should we be less willing to affirm its efficacy on the corporate . . . level? If the *testimonium* can reliably lead an individual to belief in the canon, there seems little reason why we should not affirm such reliability for the church as a whole. On the contrary, one might even argue that there are biblical reasons to be *more* confident in the role of the *testimonium* on a corporate level. . . Moreover, it is the church, and not just the individual, that is given the Spirit: the church is God's house (I Tim. 3:15) . . . and is a body with one Spirit (I Cor. 12:13). All of this suggests that if we doubt the *testimonium* on a corporate level, we would be compelled to doubt it equally on an individual level." (Kruger, 104-105)

- Belief in the corporate aspect of the *testimonium* has been a historic tenant of the Protestant movement.

o Herman Bavinck—"Subsumed under this heading of the testimony of the Holy Spirit is the witness the Spirit has borne to Scripture in the church throughout the centuries; and this witness is. . . directly [embodied] in the united confession of the believing community throughout the centuries that the Scripture is the word of God." (quoted in Kruger, 105)

o Abraham Kuyper—"communion of consciousness [generated by the Holy Spirit] not merely with those round about us, but also with the generation of saints from former ages . . . [through which] the positive conviction prevails, that we have a graphically inspired Scripture." (quoted in Kruger, 105)

o Roger Nicole—"the witness of the Holy Spirit given corporately to God's people and made manifest by a nearly unanimous acceptance of the NT canon in the Christian churches." (quoted in Kruger, 105)

o Ned Stonehouse—"Although the church lacks infallibility, its confession with regard to the Scriptures, represents not mere opinion but an evaluation which is valid as derived from, and corresponding with, the testimony of the Scriptures to their own character. The basic fact of canonicity remains, then, the testimony which the Scriptures bear to their own authority. But the historian of the canon must recognize the further fact that the intrinsic authority established itself in the history of the church through the government of its divine head." (quoted in Kruger, 105-106)

- Kruger does an excellent job summarizing the relationship between the church and the canon by comparing it to a thermometer.

o "It is here that we begin to see the proper role of the church in the authentication of canon. The books received by the church inform our understanding of which books are canonical not because the church is infallible or because it created or constituted the canon, but because *the church's reception of these books is a natural and inevitable outworking of the self-authenticating nature of Scripture*. Viewing the role of the church in the context of a self-authenticating Bible can bring fresh understanding to the complex church-canon relationship and may serve as a corrective to some extreme positions in other canonical models. The Catholic model insists that the church's reception of these books is the sole grounds for the canon's authority. In the self-authenticating model, however, the church's reception of these books proves not to be evidence of the church's authority to create the canon, but evidence of the *opposite*, namely, the authority, power, and impact of the self-authenticating Scriptures to elicit a corporate response from the church. . . Thus, when the canon is understood as self-authenticating, it is clear that the church did not choose the canon, but the canon, in a sense, chose itself. As Childs has noted, the content of these writings "exerted an authoritative *coercion* on those receiving their word." Barth agrees: "The Bible constitutes itself the Canon. It is the Canon because it *imposed itself* upon the Church." In this way, then, the role of the church is like

a thermometer, not a thermostat. Both instruments provide information about the temperature in the room—but one determines it and one reflects it." (Kruger, 106)

- On a self-authenticating view, "books are not canonical because they are recognized; they are recognized because they are already canonical." (Kruger, 108) This important point sets the self-authenticating model apart from the various community-determined models discussed in Lesson 60.

Corporate Reception & the Role of the New Testament Prophet

- In Lesson 53 we discussed the role of the New Testament prophet in identifying and copying God's word as it related to the doctrine of preservation. The gift of prophet within the body of Christ, no doubt, would have facilitated the corporate identification/reception of canon with the local churches of the 1st century.

- Ephesians 4:8, 11-12—Paul is talking about Jesus Christ after His ascension, not prior to it. The earthly ministry of Christ takes place, then Christ dies on the cross, He spent forty days on earth and then He ascends into heaven. The Holy Spirit comes on the day of Pentecost. Then the fall of Israel takes place in Acts 7 with the stoning of Stephen. The apostle Paul gets saved on the road to Damascus in Acts 9. Then the Lord Jesus Christ, from heaven's glory, reaches down, and not only saves Paul, but he commits to Paul a new system of knowledge and information – a new realm, a new program called the mystery.

- Paul says that He gave certain gifts to the body of Christ – apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. Christ ascended on high, (and in the passage it is not necessarily His ascension after His resurrection, but is an ascension far above all heavens), which is where Christ is when Paul gets saved. He ascends far above all heavens, and from that position, He gives these offices to the church. The twelve apostles were made apostles before the crucifixion of Christ but there were men that were made apostles after the ascension of Christ; therefore, they are not one of "the twelve apostles" of the Gospels and early Acts.

- The office of the New Testament prophet was given to the body of Christ during its infancy before the full revelation of the mystery was made known to the Apostle Paul.

- Ephesians 2:19-20—the household is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. Thus, I know something about apostles and prophets. Apostles and prophets are "foundational" gifts. It was the function of the apostles and prophets that laid the foundation for the house.

- I Corinthians 3:10—the apostles and the prophets were foundational gifts for the body of Christ. They lay out the foundation upon which the ministry of the rest of the body was built upon. Now, one of the functions of a prophet in the Bible is to be God's spokesman. That was not a prophet's only function, but it was one of them. He spoke for God.

- Exodus 4:15-16—Aaron was Moses' spokesman; he was Moses' mouthpiece. He spoke Moses' words.

- o Exodus 7:1—by comparing scripture with scripture, the definition of "a prophet" is "a spokesman." God puts His words in the prophet's mouth, who in turn speaks the word of God. One of the functions of a prophet is to identify the word of God.

- Ezekiel 3:17—Ezekiel is to get God's word, know what it is, and then send it out to the people.

- Jeremiah 15:19—the prophet Jeremiah is God's mouth piece.

- II Chronicles 36:12—I am just trying to impress upon you the idea that a prophet is a man that speaks forth God's word.

- I Corinthians 14:23, 29-32—God Almighty gave His word through these prophets; He gave revelation and information through these people. These prophets had the capacity to identify what God was saying to the body of Christ. This gift of prophesy was one of the foundational gifts used in the establishing of the body of Christ. Paul was "the apostle of the gentiles" (Romans 11:13) and yet there were a number of other apostles in a secondary sense.

  - o Acts 14:14—Barnabas, was an apostle in a secondary sense. Barnabas does not directly receive information from Jesus Christ, but he receives it from Paul, and he is sent out in that sense.

  - o Timothy and Silas, along with other men, are identified in the scripture as apostles. Epaphroditus is an apostle and he is identified as such in Philippians 2.

- One of the functions of the prophets given to the body of Christ during its infancy was to identify God's word. The prophets in those churches were the men in the local assemblies who did the copying of the epistles. When the prophets got a collection of letters together from a bunch of different churches, they would read those letters; and they would say, "This copy is the word of God; this is scripture. But this letter is not scripture." They would say, "This letter that Paul wrote, I Corinthians, is the second letter that Paul wrote to the Corinthians, but this is the word of God. The other letter, the first one that Paul wrote to the Corinthians, was just personal correspondence. The third letter Paul wrote to the Corinthians was not scripture; but the fourth one is, and it is II Corinthians, and it is to be in the bible."

- There had to be somebody in the local assembly who had the capacity to identify what God's word was when that assembly received copies from different places. They were getting all of this information from all over the place and they discerned what was scripture and what was not.

- II Thessalonians 2:1-2—there were phony letters floating around the churches that claimed to be from Paul. Therefore, when those churches received one of those letters, they had to know if it was genuine scripture or not.

- Thus, God Almighty, in the founding of the church, gave some prophets so they could identify "Thus saith the Lord." It was not the only function of the prophets, but it was one of their functions. The evangelist, the pastor and teacher, took the copies and did the work of the ministry with them. They did not make the copies, but they used the copies. They preached the word from the copies that they had. But, the prophet's function was to say, "This is God's word." Then they made accurate, reliable copies of the word and distributed them. The apostles took them out to the various churches.

- I Corinthians 12:28—God put prophets in the church. He put them in the local churches.

- I Corinthians 14:36-37—in other words, are you the only people that received a copy of the word of God? Are you the only people that sent copies of the word of God out? Those people are receiving and sending copies of the word. There were people in the Corinthian church who were suppressing the gift and the function of the prophet, and they were trying to exalt other gifts above it. Thus, the work of the prophet was not getting done, and consequently the word was not getting out. Paul was rebuking them about that. Paul was rebuking these people for their frustration of the function of the prophet.

- I Timothy 6:3

- I am saying to you that "the scriptures of the prophets" are the scriptures that the prophets copied down. Those prophets in those New Testament churches (the Pauline churches) collected the word of God together. Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, Romans, I Corinthians, II Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, Peter, I John, II John, III John, Jude, Revelation were the books that these prophets collected together. They said, "These are scripture." They identified them as what God Almighty said, and they authoritatively said, "These are the scriptures."

- According to II Peter 3, Peter had all of Paul's epistles. All those people in Galatia that Peter wrote to had Paul's epistles. They had them because of the functioning and the activity of these prophets, who Christ gave as foundational ministers to the body of Christ to produce the canon and to authoritatively identify scripture.

Conclusion

- Lessons 64 and 65 bear witness to the fact that believers have sufficient scriptural justification for believing that God the Holy Spirit worked both individually and corporately within the body of Christ to authenticate His word and establish the boundaries of the canon.

- From this we can see clearly that God did not leave the identification of the canon to the whims and fancies of mankind. Rather he properly equipped the church with the indwelling Holy Spirit and supernatural giftings to authoritatively discern the boundaries of the canon. In this we see the following relationships established:

  o Revelation is God revealing or disclosing Himself to mankind (general & specific).

  o Inspiration is God causing man to record in writing those aspects of His revelation that He wanted written down.

  o Preservation secures the written revelation and passes it down from generation to generation through a multiplicity of accurate reliable copies.

  o Preservation facilitates the identification of the canon by corporately exposing (Corporate Exposure) the body of Christ to God's written word via the multiplicity of copies.

- Corporate Exposure leads to the Corporate Reception via the ministry of the New Testament prophets during the 1st century.

- This means that a scripturally informed view of the canon would maintain that it was established and known among the independent Bible believing churches by the end of the 1st century.

Works Cited

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