

Sunday, November 18, 2018—Grace Life School of Theology—*From This Generation For Ever*  
 Lesson 66 Understanding Canonical Models: Self-Authenticating Model, Part 5 (Apostolic Origins)

## Introduction

- In [Lesson 62](#) we began discussing the Self-Authenticating Model for establishing the boundaries of 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 [Lesson 65](#) we studied the issue of *corporate reception* as one of the Attributes of Canonicity outlined by Michael J. Kruger in his book *Canon Revisited*. In addition to the material presented by Kruger, we considered the role and ministry of the New Testament prophets in identifying and copying the scriptures in the 1<sup>st</sup> century Pauline assemblies. Given the chaotic climate of the 1<sup>st</sup>

century church, the New Testament prophets were essential to helping the corporate body of Christ establish the boundaries of the canon. In the end, we concluded 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 1<sup>st</sup> century.

- Today, in Lesson 66, we want to consider the final Attribute of Canonicity by looking at the *apostolic origins* of the New Testament books.

### **Attributes of Canonicity and the Holy Spirit**

- Thus far, we have observed that canonical books are characterized by the following two attributes: 1) they bear the marks of divinity (*divine qualities*) and 2) they are recognized by the body of Christ as a whole (*corporate reception*). Yet, these two characteristics alone are not sufficient for establishing a well-rounded view of canonicity.
  - “Indeed, if only these two attributes were considered, one might erroneously get the impression that canonical books are abstract revelation from God, utterly ahistorical and timeless—something quasignostic that just drops down from heaven to be given again and again throughout the life of the church. But the Scriptures do not present the canon as abstract revelation, but as *redemptive* revelation. Canonical books derive from particular redemptive epochs where God has acted in history to deliver his people.” (Kruger, 108,109)
- Put another way, canonical books did not just descend from heaven on golden tablets, rather they were penned by human authors within the progressive dispensational unfolding of God’s eternal purpose. In this way the authors themselves serve as real historical links between the events of the New Testament and their subsequent recording by the apostles in the New Testament documents. Recognizing this reality aids, us in identifying the third Attribute of Canonicity—the *apostolic origins* of the New Testament.
- Regarding this point, Kruger states the following:
  - “The apostles are the link between the redemptive events themselves and the subsequent announcement of those events.” (Kruger, 109)
- The importance of this point extends beyond the obvious fact that the apostles wrote many of the New Testament documents to include their labor and efforts to protect the truth deposited and contained within those documents.
  - “Not only did the apostles themselves write many of these New Testament documents, but, in a broader sense, they presided over the transmission of the apostolic deposit and labored to make sure that the message of Christ was firmly and accurately preserved for future generations, through the help of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:1-4; Rom. 6:17; 1 Cor. 11:23; 15:3; Gal. 1:9; Phil. 4:9; Col. 2:6-8; 1 Thess. 2:13-15; 1 Tim. 6:20; 2 Tim. 1:14; 2 Pet. 2:21; Jude 1:3). Thus, the New Testament canon is not so much a collection of writings by apostles, but a collection of apostolic writings—writings that

bear the authoritative message of the apostles and derive from the foundational apostolic era (even if not directly from their hands).” (Kruger, 109)

### *Apostolic Origins*

- It is here that we encounter the third attribute of canonicity—all canonical books are apostolic books.
  - “This attribute reminds us that the authentication of canon has a strong retrospective component, it is to look backward to a particular historical epoch in which God has acted in Jesus Christ and to recognize that these books provide the authoritative apostolic interpretation of those actions. But it is more than that. It is not just the claim that these books are *about* Christ’s redemptive work in history, but it is the claim that these books are the *product* of Christ’s redemptive work in history—that they are the outworking of the authority Christ gave to his apostles to lay down the permanent foundation for the church. This is why canonical books are not only marked by divine qualities and corporate reception. They are not just instances of generic revelation that God offers the church in the present and might continue to offer in the future, but are the final and complete stage of revelation offered once and for all in the past.” (Kruger, 109-110)
- Despite their many failings on other matters (see the Grace History Project), the early church fathers recognized the connection between apostolicity and canonicity.
  - “Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, recognized the unique role of the apostles: “I am not enjoining [commanding] you as Peter and Paul did. They were apostles, I am condemned.” Likewise, the book of *I Clement* not only encourages its readers to “take up the epistle of that blessed apostle, Paul,” but also offers a clear reason why: “The Apostles received the Gospel for us from the Lord Jesus Christ, Jesus the Christ was sent from God. The Christ therefore is from God and the Apostles from the Christ.” (Kruger, 110)
- If one of the Attributes of Canonicity is a book’s apostolic origins, then some appeal to external historical evidence is unavoidable. The key difference between how the self-authenticating model and historically-determined models utilize external evidence resides in the fact that the self-authenticating model does not use external evidence *alone* as an independent standard to which scriptures may “measure up.” Kruger identifies three reasons why this is the case:
  - “*External evidence is part of the application of Scripture. . .* But the use of such evidence is not inconsistent with the self-authenticating model because it does not stand alone but is interpreted and understood by the norm of Scripture. Indeed, the only reason we even know to look for “apostolic” books in the first place (as opposed to other kinds of books) is that Scripture is guiding our investigations. Even the earliest Christians would have used extrabiblical data as they sought to apply their understanding of the role of the apostles to their particular situation. Such data may have included simple things like whether the courier who delivered an apostolic letter was a known companion of the apostle who wrote it (e.g., Tychicus and Onesimus delivered Colossians and Philemon, Col. 4:7-9; Philem. 1:12), knowledge of a personal visit from an apostle himself where he

delivered or mentioned a letter (which is information that does not come from the text of the letter!), or awareness of when or where a book was written.” (Kruger, 111)

- “*External evidence can provide adequate grounds for belief through the work of the Holy Spirit.* . . . it would “be a mistake to argue that the Holy Spirit could not operate by means of evidence [Belief in preservation presupposes that this is true.] . . . Thus, it is entirely appropriate for a single canonical model to have attributes that are more immediately or intuitively known (the divine qualities of a book) and attributes that are known through some awareness of external evidence (apostolic origins of a book).” (Kruger, 112)
- “*Apostolicity is not the only attribute of canonicity.* In the self-authenticating model, as opposed to the criteria-of-canonicity model, the historical evidence for apostolicity does not stand alone but stands in conjunction with the other attributes of canonicity, divine qualities and corporate reception. . . each of the three serves to confirm and reinforce the other two. For instance, since all apostolic books also bear divine qualities (by virtue of their inspiration), then divine qualities, in one sense, can function as evidence of apostolicity.” (Kruger, 112)
- In contrast, the criteria-of-canonicity model is solely dependent upon historical data.
  - “It seeks to use extrabiblical data not in the process of applying Scripture, but in order to determine what should be Scripture in the first place. Apostolicity is not viewed as a principle supplied by the canonical books, but is viewed as an independent and external test of what constitutes a canonical book and what does not.” (Kruger, 112)
- Ultimately, we see that, “Historical judgement cannot be the final and *sole* ground for the church’s accepting the New Testament as canonical. To accept the New Testament on that ground would mean the church would ultimately be basing its faith on the results of historical investigation.” (quoted in Kruger, 113) For a Bible Believer our faith rests first and foremost in the testimony of scriptures themselves, not in historical investigations.
- “It should be noted here, however, that exploring the apostolic origins of these books not only works positively (showing they are apostolic), but also works negatively (showing that *other* books are not).” (Kruger, 111)

### **Summary of the Self-Authenticating Model**

- The self-authenticating model maintains that “God has provided the proper epistemic [truth] environment where belief in these books can be reliably formed. This environment includes not only providential [corporate] exposure to the canonical books, but also the three attributes of canonicity that all canonical books possess—divine qualities, corporate reception, apostolic origins—and the work of the Holy Spirit to help us recognize them. Thus, contra the *de jure* objection, Christians do have adequate grounds for affirming their belief in the canon.” (Kruger, 113)
- Please recall the difference between *de facto* and *de jure* objections to canonicity presented in [Lesson 59](#).

- *De facto*— “This objection argues that the Christian belief in the canon is intellectually unacceptable on the grounds that it is a *false* belief. *De facto* objections are quite common in modern canonical studies and have taken a variety of forms: for example, these books cannot be from God because they contradict each other, or because they are forgeries, or because they are merely the choice of the “winners” of early theological battles. Regardless of the specific form of the *de facto* objection, the overall claim is the same—the Christians belief in the canon should be rejected because it isn't true.” (Kruger, 20)
- *De jure*— “The *de jure* objection argues not so much that Christian belief in the canon is false, but that Christians have no rational basis for thinking they could ever know such a thing in the first place. Given the chaos of early Christianity and the various disagreements over books—not to mention scholarly claims that some of these books are pseudonymous—it would be irrational for Christians to claim that they know these twenty-seven are the right ones. Thus, on the *de jure* objection, the problem with the Christian belief in canon is something other than its truth or falsehood, but has to do with whether Christians have adequate grounds for holding such a belief.” (Kruger, 20,21))
- The Christian faith does provide enough grounds for thinking that Christians can know which books belong in the canon and which do not. The self-authenticating model furnishes the Bible Believer with an answer to the *de jure* objections to belief in the canon. The goal of the model is not to prove the authenticity of the canon to a skeptic but rather the purpose of the self-authenticating model is to present sufficient grounds that Christian belief in the canon is justified and warranted.
- “It is also worth mentioning that this model does not imply that Christians can have some sort of infallible, incontrovertible certainty about the canon (in a Cartesian sense). Even though canonical books necessarily bear these attributes, one can always raise doubts about whether we are accurately identifying the divine qualities, reading the evidence for apostolicity correctly, and so forth. But if the model does not entail that Christians can have infallible certainty about the canon, that does not mean Christians cannot have *knowledge* of the canon. Most epistemologists have rejected the idea that we must have that level of certainty in order to know something—otherwise we would have very few instances of knowledge. Consider, again, our own sense perception. Does my seeing a cup on the table provide *infallible* certainty that a cup is indeed on the table? No, because I could be hallucinating or dreaming, or I could be a brain in a vat somewhere and electoral impulses could be making me think I see a cup on the table. But this does not require me to reject my sense perception as a reliable means of knowledge. In this same manner, just because a person could be mistaken about whether a book has divine qualities does not mean divine qualities are not a reliable means of identifying canonical books. Again, one can know something even if it does not rise to the level of absolute, incontrovertible certainty.” (Kruger, 114)

### Works Cited

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