

The Authority of Scripture (3)

By Jay Rogers

(http://forerunner.com/orthodoxy/X0003_2_Authority_of_Scri.html)¹

Contents

- The Principles for Discovering Canonicity
- The Authority of a Book
- The Prophetic Authorship of a Book
- The Authenticity of a Book
- The dynamic nature of a book

*The Principles for Discovering Canonicity**

False books and false writings were not scarce. Their ever-present threat made it necessary for the people of God to carefully review their sacred collection. Even books accepted by other believers or in earlier days were subsequently brought into question by the church.

Operating in the whole process were some five basic criteria:

1. Is the book authoritative?
Does it claim to be of God?
2. Is the book prophetic?
Was it written by a prophet of God?
3. Is the book authentic?
Does it tell the truth about God, man, etc.?
4. Is the book dynamic?
Does it possess life transforming power?
5. Is the book accepted as being inspired of God?
Is this book received or accepted by the people for whom it was originally written?

The Authority of a Book

"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16).

"For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:20,21).

"Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the Word of God" (2 Timothy 2:15).

¹ The original article by Jay Rogers is not divided in five separate files, but is presented as one essay. No changes were made to the text of the article. We acknowledge the authorship of Jay Rogers and refer readers to other insightful articles he wrote: <http://www.forerunner.com>

Each book in the Bible bears the claim of divine authority. Often the explicit "thus says the Lord" is present. Sometimes the tone and exhortations reveal its divine origin. Always there is a divine mandate. In didactic (teaching) literature, there are commandments for believers to obey the "Word of the Lord."

In the historical books, the exhortations are implied. The authoritative "Word of the Lord" is about what God has done in the history of His people. If a book lacked the authority of God, it was not considered canonical and was rejected from the canon.

The books of the prophets were easily recognized by this principle of authority. The repeated, "And the Lord said unto me," or "The word of the Lord came to me," is abundant evidence of their claim to divine authority.

Some books lacked the claim to be divine and were thereby rejected as noncanonical. Perhaps this was the case with the book of Jasher and the Book of the Wars of the Lord. Other books, such as Esther, were questioned and challenged as to their divine authority but finally accepted into the canon.

Not until it was obvious to all that the protection and therefore the pronouncements of God on His people were unquestionably present in Esther was this book accorded a permanent place in the Jewish canon. Indeed, the very fact some canonical books were called into question provides assurance that the believers were discriminating. Unless they were convinced of the divine authority of the book it was rejected.

The Prophetic Authorship of a Book

Inspired books come only through men moved by the Holy Spirit and known as prophets (2 Peter 1:20-21). The Word of God is given to His people only through His prophets. Every biblical author had a prophetic gift or function, even if he was not a prophet by occupation (Hebrews 1:1).

Paul argued in Galatians that his book should be accepted because he was an apostle, "not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father" (Galatians 1:1). His book was to be accepted because it was apostolic -- it was from a God-appointed spokesman or prophet. Books were to be rejected if they did not come from prophets of God, as is evident from Paul's warnings not to accept a book from someone falsely claiming to be an apostle (2 Thessalonians 2:2) and from the warning in 2 Corinthians about false prophets (11:13).

John's warnings about false messiahs and trying the spirits would fall into the same category (1 John 2:18-19; and 4:1-3). It was because of this prophetic principle that 2 Peter was disputed by some in the early church. Until the Church Fathers were convinced that it was not a forgery, but that it really came from the Apostle Peter as it claimed (1:1), it was not accorded a permanent place in the Christian canon.

The Authenticity of a Book

Another hallmark of inspiration is authenticity. Any book with factual or doctrinal errors (judged by previous revelations) could not be inspired of God. God cannot lie; His word must be true and consistent.

In view of this principle, the Bereans accepted Paul's teachings and searched the Scriptures to see whether or not what Paul taught them was really in accord with God's revelation in the Old Testament (Acts 17:11). Simple agreement with previous revelation would not therefore make a teaching inspired. But contradiction of a previous revelation would clearly indicate that a teaching was not inspired.

Much of the Apocrypha was rejected because of the principle of authenticity. Their historical errors and theological heresies made it impossible to accept them as from God despite their authoritative format. They could not be from God and contain error at the same time.

Some canonical books were questioned on the basis of this same principle. Could the letter of James be inspired if it contradicted Paul's teaching on justification by faith and not by works? Until their essential

compatibility was seen, James was questioned by some. Others questioned Jude because of its citation of inauthentic books, the Pseudepigrapha (Jude 9, 14). Once it was understood that Jude's quotations granted no more authority to those books than Paul's quotes from the non-Christian poets (see also Acts 17: 28 and Titus 1:12), then there remained no reason to reject Jude.

The Dynamic Nature of a Book

A fourth test for canonicity, at times less explicit than some of the others, was the life-transforming ability of the book. "The word of God is living and active" (Hebrews 4:12). As a result it can be used "for teaching, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

The Bible has the ability to convert the unbeliever and to build up the believer in the faith. Untold thousands have experienced this power. Drug addicts have been cured by it; derelicts have been transformed; hate has been turned to love by reading it. Believers grow by studying it (1 Peter 2:2). The sorrowing are comforted, the sinners are rebuked, and the negligent are exhorted by the Scriptures. God's Word possesses the dynamic, transforming power of God. God vindicates the Bible's authority by its evangelistic and edifying powers.

The apostle Paul revealed that the dynamic ability of inspired writings was involved in the acceptance of all Scripture as 2 Timothy 3: 16-17 indicates. Paul said to Timothy: "The holy scriptures ... are able to make you wise unto salvation" (v. 15).

The Bible indicates that indicates that the Word of God preached is the means of grace God has provided to draw sinners to salvation (Romans 10:14). The Word of God is also powerful in the life of the believer.

1. Nourishment -- Craving the milk of the word is a sign that you have been born-again.

"For you have been born-again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. For all men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord stands forever. And this is the word that was preached to you. Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. Like newborn babes, crave pure spiritual milk, so that you may grow up in you salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good" (1 Peter 1: 23-2:3).

"It is written: Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God ... It is written again: You shall not tempt the Lord your God ... Get away from me, Satan! For it is written: You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve" (Matthew 4:4,7,10).

"I have not departed from the commands of His lips; I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my daily bread" (Job 23:12).

"When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight, for I bear your name, O Lord God Almighty" (Jeremiah 15:16).

"We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. In fact, though by now you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not meat! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But meat is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil" (Hebrews 5:11-13).

2. Cleansing -- Reading the Word of God is one of the means of grace God has given us for our sanctification -- the cleansing of the heart and mind from sin.

"Christ loved the church and gave himself for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless" (Ephesians 5:26,27).

"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like" (James 1:22-25).

"Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water" (Hebrews 10:22).

3. Devotions -- There is a distinction to be made between devotions and devotion. Devotions are a time set aside for the reading of the Word. Devotion is to God, and is the highest reason for reading Scripture in our daily walk with God.

"Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night" (Psalm 1:1-3).

"My eyes stay open through the watches of the night, that I may meditate on your promises" (Psalm 119:148).

"I have posted watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; they will never be silent day or night" (Isaiah 62:6).

"I will bring him near and he will come close to me, for who is he who will devote himself to be close to me?" (Jeremiah 30:21).

"Could you men not watch with me for one hour?" (Matthew 26:40).

4. Spiritual Warfare -- The Christian life is likened to a spiritual warfare. The power of the Word is likened to a living blade by which we may win the battle.

"For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12,13).

"The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of this world ... He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant -- not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life" (2 Corinthians 10:4-6, 3:6).

"Take the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God" (Ephesians 6:10-17).