

The Biblical Canon
2 Tim 3:16-17
By Russell Earl

Thesis: I want to show that we can know that we have the writings God intended for man to possess.

Introduction:

1. The first link in the chain of revelation “From God to Us” is inspiration, which concerns what God did, namely, that He breathed out the scriptures.
2. The second link is canonization, which relates to the question of which books God inspired.

I. It’s definition and its closure.

A. Canonicity Defined

1. Literally – The original meaning goes back to the Greeks, who used it in a literal sense: a kanon was a rod, ruler, staff, or measuring rod.
2. Theologically – From the literal “ruler,” the word was extended to mean a rule or standard for anything.

B. Canonicity Described

1. Sacred writings – An inspired or canonical writing was considered sacred and was kept by the Ark of the Covenant (*Deut 30:24-26*).
 - a. This special attention and reverence paid to the Jewish scriptures is equivalent to the writings being recognized as part of the canon.
2. Authoritative writings – Another concept that is synonymous with canonicity is “authority.” The rulers of Israel were to be subject to the authority of the Scriptures.
3. Books from the Prophetic Period – The books written from Moses to Malachi, in the succession of Hebrew prophets, were considered to be canonical.
 - a. If a book was written after the prophetic period, it was not considered canonical. If it were written within the prophetic period, in the succession of Hebrew prophets, it was canonical.

C. The canon is closed

1. Theologically – God has only inspired so many books and they were completed by the end of the apostolic period (1st century A.D.).
 - a. God used to speak through the prophets of the O.T., but in the “last days” he spoke through Christ (Heb 1:1) and the apostles whom He empowered with “signs” (miracles).
 - i. Because the apostolic age ended with the death of the apostles (Acts 1:22), and because no one since apostolic times has had the “signs of a true apostle (2 Cor 12:12) whereby they can raise the dead (Acts 20:10-12) and perform other supernatural acts (Acts 3:1-10; 28:8-9), it can be concluded that God’s revelation is complete.
 - ii. Therefore there are no new revelations for the church.
2. Historically – There is no evidence that any special gift of miracles existed since the death of the apostles. The immediate successors of the apostles could not accurately claim new revelation, neither did they claim special confirmatory gifts.

- i. In His providence, God has guided the church in the preservation of all canonical books.
 - a. These canonical books are those necessary for faith and practice of believers of all generations.

II. Discovery & Recognition

A. How the canon was determined

1. Definition – Canonicity is determined by God.

- a. A book is not inspired because men made it canonical; it is canonical because God inspired it.
- b. Canonicity is determined or established authoritatively by God; it is merely discovered by man.

2. Distinction – God determined the canon, and man discovered it.

B. How the canon was discovered

1. The principles involved

- a. Was the book written by a prophet of God? If it was written by a spokesman from God, then it was the Word of God.
 - i. A prophet was the mouthpiece of God.
 - ii. Notice the words of Amos (Amos 3:8).
- b. Was the writer confirmed by acts of God? Due to the presence of false prophets there was the need to have divine confirmation of true prophets. Miracles were used for this purpose.
- c. Did the message tell the truth about God? Does the book tell the truth about God as we know from previous revelations?
 - i. God cannot contradict Himself (2 Cor 1:17-18), nor can He speak what is false (Heb 6:18). Therefore, no book with false claims can be the Word of God.
- d. Does it come with the power of God? The Word of God is “living and active” (Heb 4:12), and therefore ought to have a transforming force for edification (2 Tim 3:17) and evangelism (1 Pt 1:23).

III. Lessons for us today

A. Who’s responsible for the canon

1. God is solely responsible for determination the canon and man is responsible for discovery of the canon.
2. A Bible is canonical due to divine inspiration.

B. How can we know what books belong?

1. Was it written by a man of God
2. Who was confirmed by an act of God
3. Told the truth about God
4. Came with the power of God

Application & Conclusion:

1. We have the writings God intended for us today.
2. Now it’s time for man to obey the message contained within.

3. Full Invitation

Non-Christians must:

Hear – James 1:22, Romans 10:15,17

Believe – Jn 12:44, Jn 8:24, Mt 16:16

Repent – Luke 13:2-3

Confess – John 12:42, Romans 10:9

Be Baptized – 1 Pt 3:21, Acts 22:16, Col 2:11, Mk 16:16, Rom 6:3-4

Live faithfully – John 14:15, Rev 2:10

Christians must:

Repent: Acts 17:20, Acts 8:37, Lk 13:3

Pray: James 5:16, 1 Jn 1:9