Is the Bible as God’s Word Trustworthy: How We Got the Bible?

Zanesville, OH | March 24, 2019 | John Pollard | Sermon Notes

**Foundational Scripture:** 1 Thess. 2:13

**Intro**:

* The book that we have in our possession today is the result of years of God’s providence and care for His word. It is the result of years of tireless work and concerted efforts of faithful men who have ensured that what we have to today is the untainted and unbiased objective truth. As faithful disciples, we ought to ensure that what we have today is not the just the work of man but the work and word of God that has been preserved and protected over the course of centuries. **How did we get the Bible?**

1. **The Canonization of the Bible**
   1. **Definition of Canon:**
      1. Bart Ehrman in his book entitled *“The Bible: A Historical and Literary Introduction”* says this concerning the canon: *“The word canon comes from the root word reed (English word cane, Hebrew form ganeh, and Greek form kanon). The reed was used as a measuring rod and came to mean ‘standard.’”* (Ehrman, *The Bible*).
      2. As a result, the word canon came to be associated with the standard or rule by which one evaluates any belief or faith presented. As we will use it in this study, the word refers to an accepted list of inspired books that find its origin with God and not man. Thus, we use these books to evaluate and guide our lives.
      3. Thus, it is not the church that creates the canon. They simply recognize the books that are inspired and study it as such. Geisler and Nix said, *“A book is not the Word of God because it is accepted by the people of God. Rather, it was accepted by the people of God because it is the Word of God. That is, God gives the book its divine authority, not the people of God. They merely recognize the divine authority which God gives to it”* (Geisler and Nix, *GIB*).
   2. **Purpose of the Canon**
      1. Logically, there must be some higher standard to which businesses and services hold themselves accountable. In society and the economy, we understand the need for a set standard and constant evaluation based on said standard(s). A certain hierarchy may be set up in order to accomplish this.
      2. As Christians, we must ask ourselves what our standard is. How do we evaluate ourselves and how do we know what steps to take in order to improve and grow? Is there a higher authority we answer to? The answer is, of course, YES! We answer to God. But God does not speak directly to us. He speaks through His word (Jn. 12:48-49; 1 Cor. 13:10; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; Heb. 1:1-2; 2 Pet. 1:20-21).
      3. Thus, the importance of the canon is readily seen. Without some set standard or rule, we have no reason to do what we do and believe what we believe. Does the bible point towards an established standard?
         1. Old Testament: Consider that the OT revolves around the Pentateuch in which the bulk of it contains the established standard for Israel: **The Law of Moses and all that it entails.** This, God established with the people in the wilderness (Ex. 19-24) and this served as their standard by which they would evaluate themselves, live their lives and hold themselves accountable.
         2. New Testament:The New Testament clearly revolves around the teachings of Jesus and His apostles. The fact that the OT pointed to a time where a *“new law”* would come into effect (Jer. 31:31-34) should solidify what we now have in our NT. Thus, our standard is based on the teachings of Jesus and His apostles.
   3. **Canonicity Tests**
      1. Now, the question then is what books make up this standard? This question should be applied to the OT and NT. How can we know that the books that are a part of these testaments are indeed from God and not from elsewhere?
      2. Norman Geisler and William Nix (Geisler and Nix, *GIB*) proposed five principles or tests by which folks could determine whether or not a particular book or writing was divinely inspired. It is as follows:
         1. Was the book written by a prophet of God (2 Pet. 1:19-21)?
         2. Was the writer confirmed by the acts of God (Ex. 4:1-9; Acts 2:22; 3-5)?
         3. Did the message tell the truth about God (Jn. 17:17; Heb. 6:18)?
         4. Does it come with the power of God (Heb. 4:12; 1 Pet. 1:23)?
         5. Was it accepted by the people of God (1 Thess. 2:13)?
      3. The primary test for establishing New Testament canonicity was whether or not it came from the apostles (in addition to Jesus) and if it had their stamp of approval. The reason this was of utmost significance is because Jesus said His apostles would be guided into all the truth (Jn. 16:13). The NT affirms the establishment of the church based on the teachings of the apostles and Christ (Acts 2:42; Eph. 2:20).
      4. The above 5 principles for testing canonicity when applied to the OT and NT clearly indicate which books ought to be considered as divine and which ones should not. The policy of the early church fathers was *“If in doubt, throw it out.”*
   4. **Books included in the Canon**
      1. Old Testament: The books in the OT as we have them now (39) were recognized as a part of the canon between 450 B.C. and 150 B.C. Originally they were only recognized as 24 as follows:
         1. *The Law (Torah): Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy*
         2. *The Prophets (Nebhim): Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings (former prophets), Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, The Twelve (latter prophets)*
         3. *The Writings (Kethubhim or Hagiographa [Greek]): Psalms, Proverbs, Job (poetical books), Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Esther, Ecclesiastes (Five Rolls [Megilloth]), Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, Chronicles (historical books)*
      2. New Testament: Shortly after the Gospels and Epistles were penned and they began to circulate, disciples immediately recognized their origin as divine and thus held them to be a part of the canon. By the 2nd century the 27 books were recognized as part of the canon and they were classified as follows:
         1. *The Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John*
         2. *The History: Acts*
         3. *The Pauline Epistles: Romans, 1 Corinthians 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Hebrews, Titus, Philemon*
         4. *The General Epistles: James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, Jude*
         5. *The Prophecy: Revelation*
   5. **Testimony to the Canon**
      1. Jesus Christ: Jesus affirms the establishment of the OT canon by referring to the Law, Prophets and Psalms (Lk. 24:44). This is the same as referring to the *Law*, *Prophets* and *Writings*.
      2. New Testament: The NT repeatedly refers to the collection of writings in the OT as sacred scriptures thereby attributing its origin to God (Matt. 22:29; Jn. 10:35; 2 Tim. 3:15-17; 2 Pet. 1:20-21).
      3. Josephus: Josephus wrote about the three-fold division of the OT in his book called *“Against Apion.”* He names 22 books (same as the 24) which is gotten by placing Ruth together with Judges and Lamentations together with Jeremiah.
      4. Dead Sea Scrolls: In the document called *“4QMMT”* also known as the *“Halakhic letter”* or the *“Sectarian Manifesto”* there is evidence that names the OT canon and it divides them according to Moses, the Prophets and David (Psalms).
      5. Talmud, Mishnah etc.: The Talmud is the collection of Jewish civil and ceremonial laws which preserves the oral traditions of the Jews. The Talmud rejects writing after Malachi since God ceased to speak for a time. The Mishnah forms the first part of the Talmud and present the Jewish text in the three-fold division we have discussed.
      6. Muratorian Fragment: NT scholar F.F. Bruce says concerning the Muratorian Fragment, *“An early list of new Testament Books, drawn up in the church at Rome towards the end of the second century, is called the Muratorian fragment. . . . The fragment is mutilated at the beginning, but seems to have mentioned Matthew and Mark, because it goes on to mention Luke as the ‘third’ Gospel; then it mentions John.”* (Bruce, *BP*). It also mentions Acts, Paul’s epistles, Jude, 1 and 2 John and Revelation.
      7. Early Church Fathers: Influential figures in the 1st and 2nd century wrote about recognizing the 27 books of the NT as a part of the canon and originating from God via Jesus and His apostles. Among them were Polycarp, Clement of Alexandria, Irenaeus, Justin Martyr and Origen.

**Sources**

Bruce, F. F. (1984). *The Books and the Parchments: How We Got Our English Bible*, rev. ed. Old Tappan, NJ: F. H. Revell.

Ehrman, Bart D. (2014). *The Bible: A Historical and Literary Introduction*. Oxford University Press.

Geisler, Norman L. and William E. Nix. (1986). *A General Introduction to the Bible*, revised and expanded edition. Chicago, IL: Moody Press.

McDowell, J. (1999). *Evidence That Demands A Verdict*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.