

GW 101: The Bible—The Rule of Faith and Life

Lesson 2.2 “The Meaning and Origin of the Canon”

1. What does the term “canon” mean?

The term “canon” is simply a way of saying a “rule” or “measuring rod.” In regards to the Bible, the canon of Scripture deals with the books that meets the standard for inclusion to function in the church as the “measuring rod” for believers.

2. The apostle Paul said in 2 Timothy 3:16–17 that the Bible is “God-breathed”. What does this mean and what are some practical consequences of something being “God-breathed”?

The text of Scripture is the product of the divine, life-giving breath of the Almighty—breathed out through the secret operation of the Holy Spirit by which He produced the Word of God using men. In other words, the Spirit guided the biblical authors to write “true truth”, all the while preserving the individual personalities of each author. Because the text of Scripture is “God-breathed”, the Bible must necessarily be (1) infallible, (2) inerrant, (3) obeyed, and (4) regarded as the final say in all matters of faith and practice. After all, nothing can be higher or more authoritative than that which is “God-breathed”, nothing greater than God’s very speaking.

3. Is the Bible capable of fully equipping the Christian for every good work?

Because Scripture represents God’s very voice, it is most certainly profitable for the work of the ministry. The apostle Paul makes it clear that God does not leave His church without guidance or understanding for the required task. Instead, the apostle tells us all Scripture is “profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16 – 17, ESV). Paul does not point us to anywhere else other than the very voice of God—the Scriptures.

4. Who determines the canon? The church? Councils? Etc.?

Canon is determined by God alone (the author) and exists whether anyone knows it or not.

5. If the canon is determined by God is human effort still necessary?

Absolutely. The Spirit leads His people to recognize that which is truly God-breathed.

6. How did God use human efforts to help His people recognize the voice of God?

In the Old Testament, He spoke through prophets; in the New Testament, He used apostles to carry forth His message.

7. What was the historical process used (or, what 3 criterion were used) to help the church understand what was truly the voice of God and what was not?

The single deciding factor in determining if a book was truly authoritative for the church rested with the conviction that only the apostles were legitimately authorized to speak on behalf of Christ Jesus. Apostolic authorship, therefore, or someone directly related to or commissioned by one of the apostles was required. Another factor in the historical process was whether or not a book was universally accepted in churches throughout the nations and not just isolated communities. And yet another factor was whether or not a book claiming apostolic origin was actually in harmony with other accepted books.

8. Do you suppose God would first inspire Scripture and then *not* work through the Holy Spirit among His people to help them recognize His Word?

God has made His Word known so that it may instruct us and equip us for every good work (2 Tim. 3:16). And just as the Spirit was active in the Old Testament to help the saints recognize what was truly God-breathed, He likewise worked among the New Testament church to help them discern that which is ultimately God-breathed.