

Systematic Theology: Bibliology Part 3

(Memory Verse: James 1:21-22)

Preservation of Scripture

The Word of God has been the target of assaults from the moment of Satan's first onslaught in the garden of Eden (Gen. 3:1-5). The battle against the Bible continues to this day, but God has stated that such attacks are futile (Ps. 119:89, 160; Isa. 40:8; Matt. 5:18; 24:35; Luke 16:17; 1 Pet. 1:24-25). God will ensure that his Word is preserved.

NATURE OF PRESERVATION

"Preservation" refers to God's act of preserving through time the written record of his special revelation. It begins with direct commands and promptings to record his words in written form (Ex. 34:27; Rev. 1:11). It continues through the specific instructions he gave to his people to preserve and copy those words (Deut. 17:18). It also includes the providential way in which God has kept his Word by the diligent efforts of human agents.

- The Bible establishes the reality of God's **direct, eternal preservation**. (Ps. 119:89,152; Isa. 40:8; 1 Pet. 1:24-25)
- God does not take the same, direct approach to the preservation of his Word on earth as he does in heaven. Here, Scripture testifies to a **mediated, relative preservation**, whereby God preserves his Word (sometimes miraculously, sometimes providentially) through his people, who have the responsibility to protect and transmit it.
- 2 examples of the mediated preservation of God's Word: (1) Moses smashes the Ten Commandments (Ex. 31:18; 32:19; 34:1-2, 27-28) and (2) Jehoiakim burns scroll but God restores through Jeremiah (Jer. 36).
- Commands to not add or take away from his Word (Deut. 4:2; 12:32; Prov. 30:6; Jer. 26:2; Rev. 22:18-19).
- Derived authority: To the extent that the copies reflect the wording of the original, they maintain their divine, authoritative quality. Illustration: God's instructions to kings concerning the copying of the Law (Deut. 17:18-20).

CANONICITY AND PRESERVATION

Definition of Canon: 2 Primary Definitions

"Canon" comes from the Greek word kanōn, which originally meant a 'reed' or a 'rod'. Since a rod was frequently used as a measuring stick, the word came to convey the idea of a "standard" or "rule," specifically in regard to scripture.

1. The view of the Roman Catholic Church is that the Bible is an authoritative collection of writings. However, that authority was conferred on the books of Scripture by the Church itself.
2. The biblical view understands that the canon is a collection of divinely authoritative writings. Its authority is **inherent**, not derived from human agents. God's people do not create God's word; God's word creates God's people (1 Pet. 1:23-25; cf. James 1:18). It is not a church or the people of God that determines which books to make authoritative. Rather, the people of God **recognize** the inspired nature that these writings already possess. Rightly understood, the canonization of Scripture is a process **not of conferring but of recognizing authority**.

Criteria for Recognizing Canonicity: 3 General Principles

1. First, any inspired writing had to have been authored by a recognized prophet or apostle of God—or by someone closely associated with one, as in the case of the writers of Mark, Luke, Hebrews, James, and Jude. No authoritative spokesman for God is self-appointed (Ezekiel 13). His authority must come from a divine commission.
2. Second, any inspired writing would not contradict any previous work of Scripture. God cannot contradict himself. Therefore, any word from him will be consistent with the foundation of revelation he has already provided (Deut. 13:1-5; Acts 17:11). Contradictory works must be rejected (2 Thess. 2:1-3, 15).
3. Third, if a book was truly inspired, the people of God would be able to come to a consensus about it. This consensus would be achieved through the Holy Spirit's ministry of internal witness--testifying among his people as to which works were indeed the words of God (e.g., 1 Cor. 14:37-38; 1 John 4:6).

Completion of the Canon: **4 Proofs that the canon is closed**

1. First, the book of Revelation is unique to Scripture in that it describes with unparalleled detail the end-time events that precede eternity future. As Genesis began Scripture by describing the beginning of time (Genesis 1-2), the book of Revelation ends Scripture by explaining the end of this age and the age to come (Revelation 20-22). By their contents, Genesis and Revelation are the perfectly matched bookends to Scripture.
2. Second, just as there was prophetic silence after Malachi completed the Old Testament canon, so there was silence after John recorded the book of Revelation. With the passing of this last apostle and eyewitness of the life of Christ, the era of revelatory activity closed. It would be bizarre to think that a new book of inspired revelation would appear today, after almost two millennia of revelatory silence and two thousand years of church history.
3. Third, Paul asserted that the New Testament church was built on the foundation of the New Testament apostles and prophets (Eph. 2:20). The apostles and prophets were those instruments of divine revelation while the New Testament was being composed. Once the foundation of revelation had been laid in the completed canon, there was no need for additional revelation from God in this life.
4. Finally, the early church- those who lived closest in time to the apostles and were their disciples--believed that, with the composition of the book of Revelation and the death of John, the canon had closed.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM AND PRESERVATION

Textual criticism: The intricate science of examining and comparing the ancient copies and translations of the biblical writings to determine the original text that gave rise to these copies.

“When all the textual evidence for both Testaments is evaluated, most scholars affirm that the current versions of the Hebrew Old Testament and Greek New Testament upon which our modern translations are based are **reliable**. The variant readings have been identified and examined, and the vast majority of them are **easily resolvable**. Common discrepancies include things as obvious and insignificant as spelling errors, accidental omission of words, the transposition of words or phrases in a sentence, and the like. Other variants can be quickly identified as explanatory insertions or deliberate alterations by the copyists for various reasons. **Moreover, unlike any other work of antiquity, the Bible has received the greatest scrutiny with respect to its text. At the same time, the Bible enjoys the most reliable and greatest number of copies when compared to any other literature of antiquity.** Furthermore, advances in computer technology have allowed more exact analysis than ever before. When these considerations are taken into account, the text of the Bible today can easily be received as a **faithful representation** of the text originally composed by the biblical writers.”

The Necessity of Scripture

1. The Bible is necessary for *knowledge of the gospel*. (Rom. 10:13-17, John 14:6)
2. The Bible is necessary for *maintaining spiritual life*. (Deut. 8:3; Matt 4:1-4)
3. The Bible is necessary for *certain knowledge of God's will*. (Deut. 29:29; 2 Pet. 1:3)
4. But the Bible is *not* necessary for knowing that God exists or for knowing something about God's character and moral laws. (Rom. 1:18-21,32; Rom. 2:14-15; Ps. 19:1)
5. The necessity of scripture for salvation should motivate believers to preach, teach, speak, and share the gospel. (Matt. 9:36-38; Acts 2:42; Acts 6:2; Acts 20:27; 1 Tim. 4:11, 13, 16; 1 Tim. 6:2; 2 Tim. 4:1-4)

The Obligation to Scripture

The Scripture is no ordinary book. Readers cannot merely move their eyes over its words. Apprehension of its contents is not enough. Scripture brings with it definite obligations (James 1:22-25).

1. Receive it by faith as the Word of God: (1 Thess. 2:13)
2. Seek the Lord for understanding: (Ps.119:18; see Acts 6:4)
3. Feed on the Scriptures as a way of life: (1 Pet. 2:2; Deut. 8:3; Matt. 4:4; 1 Cor. 3:2; Ps. 19:10; Job 23:12; Jer. 15:16)
4. Study the Scriptures meticulously: (Ezra 7:10; cf. 2 Tim. 2:15)
5. Apply the Scriptures in daily living through obedience: (John 14:15, 21, 23; 2 John 6; 3 John 4)
6. Preach and teach the Word of God: (2 Tim. 4:1-2)
7. Tremble in response to God's Word: (Isa. 66:2)