BIBLE & THEOLOGY

Canon Revisited

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In his latest book, *Canon Revisited: Establishing the Origins and Authority of New Testament Books*, Michael Kruger wants to know whether or not Christians have “intellectually sufficient grounds” (20) for accepting the current 27 books of the New Testament as inspired Scripture. More specifically, Kruger, associate professor of New Testament at Reformed Theological Seminary, seeks to answer the objection that Christians “have no rational basis for thinking they could ever know such a thing in the first place” (20). In light of the confusion surrounding the origins of the canon in the early church, the argument goes, it appears unlikely that Christians can truly know (i.e. have intellectually justified belief about) what books belong in the New Testament. Kruger, however, argues cogently and persuasively that such an objection cannot withstand the weight of historical evidence, theological argument, or the testimony of Scripture itself.

Accordingly, Kruger does not attempt to “prove” the validity of the canon in a way that would be acceptable to a determined skeptic, nor does he investigate how a Christian may initially come to believe that the canon is from God. “Instead,” Kruger affirms, “the issue that concerns us here is not about our having knowledge of the canon (or proving the truth of canon), but *accounting* for our knowledge of canon” (21). Methodologically, then, Kruger does not build his argument solely on historical explanations for how the canon was formed. As a properly *Christian* defense, Kruger takes into account other important categories related to the issue of canon. Theology, epistemology, revelation, and the doctrine of God—along with matters of history—are all considered.

Determining a Canonical Model

Kruger’s work proceeds by first examining and appraising methods that have been traditionally used to determine the contours of the New Testament canon. Here, he considers “community-determined” models that argue for the validity of the canon on the basis of the church’s recognition and acceptance of specific books. Second, Kruger investigates the “historically-determined” model by which the canonicity of particular books is determined by their faithfulness to the apostolic tradition. Yet both models, while contributing useful resources for determining the New Testament canon, ultimately founder on the charge of inadequacy. Consequently, Kruger proposes a third approach—the “self-authenticating” model—that takes into account not only historical and community related evidence, but other essential criteria such as God’s providence, the self-attesting attributes of the Scriptures themselves, and the testimony of the Holy Spirit.

Unlike the other two models, the “self-authenticating” model bears the unique advantage of using both objective and subjective aspects of canonicity while avoiding reliance on the external authority of human judgment as final arbitrator. Kruger rightly argues:

> What is needed, then, is a canonical model that does not ground the New Testament canon in an external authority, but seeks to ground the canon in the only place it could be grounded, its own authority. After all, if the canon bears the very authority of God, to what other standard could it appeal to justify itself? (89)