

# Apologetics - Lesson 4

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The Canon - Attributes of Canon “Divine Qualities”

# The NT Canon

- Look at Divine Qualities (anything in these books that would internally self attest to being Canon)

# Divine Qualities

Do the NT books bear internal marks of their divinity? Are there theological inconsistencies within the books?

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# Divine Qualities - Quotes

It's easy to see that the Sacred Scriptures, which so far surpass all gifts of grace of human endeavor, breath something divine”

- Calvin

“As far as Sacred Scripture is concerned...it is clearly crammed with thoughts that could not be humanly conceived. Let each of the prophets be looked into: none will be found who does not far exceed human measure. Consequently, those for whom prophetic doctrine is tasteless ought to be thought of lacking taste buds”

- Calvin

“The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork” - Psalm 19:1

“For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.” - Romans 1:20

“If the heavens declare the glory of God and therefore bear witness to their divine creator, the Scripture as God's handiwork must also bear the imprints of his authorship.”

- John Murray

# Divine Qualities - The Holy Spirit

If these marks are really there in the canonical books, then how is it that so many people do not receive them or acknowledge them? If they are so objectively present, why do so many reject the Bible?

Romans 3:10-18 - effects of sin

Not that there is a lack of evidence but rather that those without the Spirit do not accept the things from God ( 1 Cor. 2:10-14)

John 10:5 - My sheep hear my voice

The Voice of Scripture is the voice of The Shepherd

# Divine Qualities - Content of the Books

- What exactly is it about the content of these books that gives us good reasons to think they are from God?

**Beauty of Excellency** - Scriptures bear the evidence of their divine origins by their beauty, majesty, and perfection

**Efficacy and Power of Scripture** - the way it functions in the life of the reader; not only evident from what it says, but what it does

**Unity and Harmony of Scripture** - the internal qualities that show the harmonious unity of the NT scripture

# Beauty of Excellency of Scripture

When a person encounters God, they are aware of his beauty, majesty, and perfection and no need for further evidence that he is God.

- Psalm 27:4 ...to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord
- Psalm 50:2 “out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God shines forth
- Psalm 96:6 “Honor and Majesty are before him. Strength and beauty are in His sanctuary.
- Isaiah 6:1-7 ..Isaiah seeing the Lord of Hosts on his throne. “Holy, Holy, Holy”
- Revelation 1:12-17 ..John’s encounter
- Revelation 4:3 ..beauty of emeralds, jaspers, rainbows

# Beauty of Excellency of Scripture

Likewise, Scripture ITSELF is described over and over again throughout the Bible as bearing these very same attributes.

- Psalm 19:7

The law of the Lord is perfect

- Psalm 19:8

The commandment of the Lord is pure

- Psalm 119:103

How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!

- Psalm 119:129

Your testimonies are wonderful



# Beauty of Excellency of Scripture

Although there is a beauty and excellency in the Scriptures, this does not mean this is some literary quality that would appeal to modern man. The beauty of Scripture is a spiritual beauty, not just aesthetic.

Ultimately, we are reminded, that the beauty and excellency of Scripture is primarily due to the manner in which it puts forth the beauty and excellency of Christ.

Although writers such as Aristotle, Plato, Socrates do have rhetorical force, Scripture on the other hand as Calvin put it is “clearly crammed with thoughts that could not be humanly conceived.”

1 Corinthians 2:4-5

“My message and my preaching were not with wise or persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith may not rest on human wisdom, but on God’s power.”

Clement of Alexandria words of man/Scripture

- “No one will be so impressed by the exhortations of any of the saints, as he is by the words of the Lord Himself”

Jerome’s commentary on Philemon

- “A document which has in it so much of the beauty of the Gospel, which is the “mark of its inspiration”

Chrysostom on the Gospel of John

- “There is nothing counterfeit” because the Gospel is “uttering a voice which is sweeter and more profitable than that of any harp or any music”

# Powerful and Effective

Gives Wisdom and Teaching

- Psalm 19:9-10, 2 Tim. 3:16

Gives Joy to the heart

- Nehemiah 8:8-12, Psalm 119:11

Gives understanding to the mind

- Psalm 119:144

Expose sin and guilt

- 2 Kings 22:11-13, Acts 2:34-37, Hebrews 4:12-13

The Scriptures are powerful and dynamic, making an impact on the reader in a way that testifies to their distinctive origins and authority.

“Those who read these writings discovered, from very early on, that the books themselves carried the same power, the same authority in action, that had characterized the initial preaching of the “word.””

Hebrews 4:12

“Another example on how the canon of scripture is not so much shaped by the community of faith but rather a means of shaping the community of faith”

# Unity and Harmony of Scripture

God is a God who is always consistent with himself and never contradicting himself

- Psalm 89:35
- Prov 14:5
- Titus 1:2
- Hebrews 13:8

## Church Fathers on Unity and Harmony

“All Scripture, which has been given to us by God, shall be found by us perfectly consistent....and through the many diversified utterances of Scripture, there shall be heard one harmonious melody in us, praising in hymns that God who created all things”  
-Irenaeus 2nd century

Never mind if there does occur some variation in the order of their narratives, provided that there be agreement in the essential matter...And here I might now make a stand and contend that a work ought not to be recognized..which exhibits no consistency” - Tertullian 2nd-3rd cent.

“I am entirely convinced that no Scripture contradicts another” - Justin Martyr 2nd century

But what is meant  
when we say  
consistency?  
Consistent to what?

# Doctrinal Unity

## Early Church

Argument: Before the 4th century, there was no Christianity per se, but rather a wide variety of Christianities, each with its distinctive doctrinal beliefs and each vying to be the dominant version. The canon is not so much the result of orthodoxy, but the cause of it. The consistency of of Jesus teachings was simply after fact justification of choices already made.

Was there anything the early Christian had access to that they could measure the doctrine up against?

1. **The Old Testament**
  - a. There was never a time when the church didn't have written scripture.
  - b. Would have helped rule out other versions of christianity
2. **Core New Testament Books**
  - a. Paul's major epistles and the four Gospels recognized early on
  - b. Provided a theological and doctrinal foundation for analyzing peripheral books such as 2 Peter, Jude, 3 John
3. **Rule of Faith**
  - a. Brief oral summaries of Scripture's own storyline of the gospel and the scriptures of Israel passed down from the apostles
  - b. Summarized the already harmonious story and themes

These 3 are examples of how the early church recognized the internal qualities of Scripture that helped guide them in their reception of the canon.

# Doctrinal Unity

## Church After Complete NT Canon

New Testament Writings are not always easy to understand and can at times prove challenging and difficult (2 Peter 3:16)

And within this frame of thought, we need to know there is diversity in the NT. (Synoptics don't always tell the story of Jesus in the same manner or words, John is different, Paul's letters seem quite different than one another in tone and content, and sometimes even Paul's theological concerns seem to be opposed. (Re: James)

Many of these differences though do not entail actual contradictions as we can have a multiplicity of theological perspectives while also recognizing they share a common end. And usually, these decisive factions are overplayed.

- Paul vs. James (supposed division)
  - Galatians 2:12
  - Although there were actual disagreements between Paul and men from James over function of ceremonial law, this does not mean the NT puts forth contradictory teachings on the matter.
  - Paul in unity with them (Gal. 2:9)
  - Paul and James unified in Gospel Message to Gentiles and nature of law to maintain (Acts 15:22-29)
  - Paul and James on brotherly terms (Acts 15:25, Romans 15:26)

Even James vs Paul in justification faith/works shows that an idea of a split and division between Paul and Jerusalem is exaggerated.

- Paul - how a person can acquire right standing before God (Romans 3:19-31)
- James is dealing with the situation of someone who claims to have faith but has no fruit (James 2:14)

# Doctrinal Unity

## Argument:

What if some other form of Christianity had become dominant, instead of the one that did? We would likely have an entirely different set of books. Our current canon therefore represents a loss of the great diversity of the early centuries of Christianity.

## Problem with Argument:

If the current form of the canon includes the preferred books of theological winners and thereby represents a loss of great diversity, how, at the same time, can one claim that the canon is composed of contradictory books that reflect great diversity. If the “winners” determined the canon, then why would they pick books from various and contradictory theological camps? One cannot argue that the canon is the “invention” of the orthodox designed to suppress the opposition and then turn around and argue that the canon is a cacophony of diverse theological viewpoints that stand in opposition. Which one is it? Can’t be both.

# Doctrinal Unity

Can we expect the world to understand the theology of the NT while at the same time rejecting its own teaching about how theological understanding actually occurs?

Again, you cannot understand the NT like one understands Plato. The NT claims to be a divine book that has been constituted by the Holy Spirit. (1 Cor. 2:14)

Should Christians abandon their commitment to the canon's authority because critics, who view scriptural interpretation as merely a human enterprise, claim to have discovered theological disagreements?

No, because Christians have no grounds for thinking that those without the Spirit can rightly discern such things. Actually the opposite; Christians have ground for thinking they cannot.

- Joshua Bell - should he abandon his musical career after failure in subway?
- Could the average person identify musical genius when they hear it?

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# Doctrinal Unity

## Argument:

It is no surprise that Christians “conclude” that the NT is harmonious - they already believe in the truth of the NT from the outset! Therefore, it is not proper to allow those who believe the NT to be the final judges of its theological harmony.

## Answer:

If the Christian assumes the truth of the NT while arguing for its unity, then it is clear that the non christian assumes the falsity of the NT while arguing for its disunity. That person assumes 1 cor. 2:14 is mistaken and you don't need the Spirit.

Why would we allow those who have already rejected the NT to be the final judges of its theological harmony?

Would be like allowing a person who is tone deaf (rejects the concept of being on key) to judge a singing contest. If he were to be kept from judging, he may object and say this “on key” thing is a sham and run my musical insiders who claim to have a special ability to hear such things. But despite all the protests, the truth of the matter would remain:

There is such thing as being on key whether the tone deaf person hears it or not.

# Redemptive Unity

Similar and overlapping to Doctrinal but focus is on the completion of the redemptive story of God.

Each NT books highlights a primary divine quality: the Christocentric Nature as books fully exalting Jesus as the resolution to the problem of sin and rebellion presented in the Old Testament.

They have divine qualities because they are not only from Christ (through apostolic hands) but speak of Christ

**Luke 24:44**

**Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”**

# Structural Unity

## - **Covenantal**

- Divinely fit together in structure in regards to covenant. NT documents take on covenantal functions that parallel OT.
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- **Gospels** <> **Exodus** (Moses/Jesus typology), **Acts** <> **Historical Books** (covenant people after death of mediator), **Prophets** <> **Epistles** (apply and uphold terms of covenant from historical accounts; covenant lawsuits against those who have rejected or pursued false gods.)  
**Revelation** <> **pattern of apocalyptic literature curses and blessings**

## - **Canonical**

- Law, Prophets, Writings by time of Jesus
- Luke 24:44
- Law Prophets and Writings ( Moses, Elijah, and David)
- Jewish Old Testament Ends with Chronicles (Davidic focus of Chronicles and Matthew beginning with genealogy with David at center)
- Also focus on Moses and Elijah

- 7 is completion (both in Genesis and Revelation)
  - Law Prophets, Writings, Gospels, Acts/Epistles, Pauline Epistles, and Revelation
- Genesis/Revelation
  - Begins creation heaven and earth, ends with re-creation heaven and earth
  - Paradise in Garden, Paradise in Heaven
  - Genesis them of marriage, wedding of the Lamb
  - Focus on serpent deception, serpent's destruction
  - Curse being put upon the world, curse being lifted
  - Creation of day night and oceans, no need for day, night, or oceans
  - Tree of life among people of God, Tree of Life among people of God
  - God dwelling with his people, God dwelling with his people again
  - OT ending in Jerusalem, NT picking up focus in Jerusalem and spreading globally in God's ultimate plan.

# Structural Unity

- **The skeptic may just say the unity is coincidence or irrelevant, but it is exactly what we would expect from a divine book. Such intricate connections, covering such a vast amount of literature, authors, and time periods suggest that the canon is not merely a human construct. We should at least appreciate the way the 2 testaments divinely cross reference themselves**

# Divine Qualities

- We have seen a bit how the NT canonical books have been recognized by the nature of their content and how that should play a part in how we not only define the canon but also affirm the canon.
- And we have seen if these books are constituted by the work of the Holy Spirit, then Christians, who are filled with the Holy Spirit, should be able to recognize that fact.