

THE CANON OF SCRIPTURE: CAN WE BE SURE WHICH BOOKS ARE INSPIRED OF GOD?

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One of the cardinal principles of the Reformation was the right and duty of every believer to interpret the Scripture for himself up to the limit of his knowledge. Our doctrine is not determined according to human ideas and philosophies. It is not the result of human speculation, or of human aesthetic feeling. Our convictions about God and His will must be determined by careful objective study of His Word.

This right and duty of private judgment on the interpretation of Scripture has always been claimed by evangelical Protestants. Inevitably, however, another question arises. How do we know what is the Word of God? We have many evidences of the marvelous uniqueness of the Scripture. The Holy Spirit testifies to our souls that this book is indeed God's Word. If we have been born again through the Holy Spirit, we know that Jesus Christ is our Saviour and Lord, and we are anxious to accept those books which He approves. Yet this does not immediately determine the question as to selection of the individual books. After all, the Bible was not written by one man, nor at one time. Its books were written by many different men over a period of many centuries. These men varied greatly in their characteristics. Some were kings upon the throne, while others were shepherds caring for the sheep. Some were prophets and some were priests. They discussed a great variety of subjects, and used many types of literary style. These various books are now combined together into one volume which we call the Bible, but until our present book form came into general use, at some time between the second and fourth centuries A.D., such a unified volume was not known. Before that time the various books existed on separate scrolls. How are we to know whether the men who combined these books into our present Bible made a correct selection of the books to include?