

OpenTheo

How Do We Determine Which Books Are Divinely Inspired?

August 15, 2022



#STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about how we determine which books are divinely inspired and how to explain inerrancy to a skeptic.

- * How do we determine which books are divinely inspired and which are not?
- * How do you explain inerrancy to a skeptic?

Transcript

I'm Amy Hall and you're listening to Stand to Reasons #STRSKPodcast. Greg, welcome. Thank you, Amy.

All right. Let's start with a question from. Famous, Amy.

Amy's got a follow-up. I think I've said this before, but it's so funny that my bosses have called me Amy's and famous Amy's without you even knowing that my previous boss called me famous Amy's. Oh, no kidding.

Without knowing that my mom called me Amy's so badiah and you're the only ones who call me Amy's. It's just very funny to be. Yeah, but you weren't famous when your old boss called you that, but you have a following and deservedly so in my view.

Well, thank you, Greg. All right. So this question comes from the Supreme Fancy Man.

The Supreme Fancy Man? The Supreme Fancy Man. All right. Fancy Man? Yes.

Huh. If you have a daughter named Fancy Nancy, what do you think? I don't know. All right.

Twitter's a fun place. Okay. How do we determine what books are the divinely inspired Word of God and what ones are not? I have heard of books such as the Gospel of Thomas, which are not in the Bible and was curious what criteria were used to determine this? Well, nobody thinks that even the advocates of the Gospel of Thomas thinks that

the Gospel of Thomas is divinely inspired.

All of those people reject the idea of divine inspiration. The question for them is which books legitimately record the views of the primitive church, the earliest church. Okay.

And in their mind, the person of Jesus and the doctrines of the early church were really result of a political battle and one group won out and the other group didn't. And the group that didn't win out were the Gnostics. All right.

Thomas is a Gnostic Gospel. And by the way, people interested in this question ought to read the Gnostic Gospel. So what you're going to find is an odd collection of sayings.

You're not going to get a kind of full-throated characterization of the person and work of Christ, even the life of Christ. You're going to get a lot of odd sayings. And some of them are very odd, a deprecation of women, for example.

And Jesus performing miracles when he was a kid and making claybirds and having them fly away and stuff like that. The problem with those claimants to be the more legitimate characterizations of the human person, Jesus of Nazareth, views and the things he did is that these are all written very late. And it is very clear that the idea that they represent came late to.

This is late for a century. John addresses some of that a little bit. So does Paul seem to make reference in some places.

But remember this neoplatonism, this philosophy began to get involved in the church in little bitty ways. And by the second century became full blown. But what you can see is people who we know were disciples of John and those who was a polycarpe.

And then the ones who are disciples of polycarpe who wrote against heresies, I'm trying to think it was a name right now. Anyway, the title of this book is Against the Cara season. He's critiquing Gnosticism and also promoting the classical understanding of early Christianity.

This isn't come just from books people arbitrarily chose because they like the theology. This was embedded in the history of the writers of that time in a Christian tradition. Jay Warner Wallace tracks this too.

He calls it the detective term that he used to describe the evidence of the early first century is carried on and acknowledged and reaffirmed by subsequent writers that are all connected. He calls it chain of custody. I think it's what he calls it.

So with regards to the doctrines of classical Christianity, compared to Gnosticism, we know that Gnosticism was later addition. And it's not just a matter of politics. This is what there is a vast amount of records from the gospel writers and the people like the Apostle

Paul who wrote about these things too.

And he wrote early. And the Pauline epistles are at least a certain body of them are not challenged by critical scholars. They're questionably Pauline Galatians, for example, Romans, another example.

And these give a very, very crisp, clear, straightforward early characterization of the person to work of Christ. And then I'll come to the Gospel of Thomas and others that are called pseudo-pigrapha or anti-legomena. These are just bad, pseudo-false, phony, anti-against.

And against the word. So these are things that the people at the time, the church at the time recognized as imposters and wrote about it. And it wasn't just their declaration.

You could see the content is very different from the content of the most primitive testimony of Jesus, the earliest testimony of Christ. So I'm speaking mostly now to the issue of why not the Gospel of Thomas and why the other Gospels. And there's the reason that I just offered you.

There is the broader issue. The canon is hinted at in that piece. And I would just say that the canon was largely recognized.

No one group said, "Okay, we're going to decide these books are in the Bible." This is what Rome claims, and it's just not true. There was no Roman Catholic Church in the first, second, third century. All right.

By the fourth century, you have the Council of an I.C., a Constantine called that. And every group of Christians, every district, if you would, sent two representatives. And that was true of Rome.

Rome didn't prevail over that. They had nothing to do with this. It was Constantine.

It was the one who called it, and he had no legal authority, no theological authority. He was getting them all together, so they quit fighting about the Aryan issue. And Rome just had this.

So there was no Roman Catholic Church using it. By that time, the canon was already established, excuse me, for all intents and purposes. And it was established mostly because people recognized that Paul and those who are, a fighting had apostolic origin.

Whether it was Paul or Peter or John. And it was clearly so. And there was a history of that that was acknowledged by the people who subsequently lived and wrote about the history of that.

And these generations of disciples who taught the very same thing that we find in those gospels and who actually quote those gospels, this gives us a very solid foundation for

understanding that those who Jesus commissioned personally, which would include Paul, spoke with his authority. And that was the basic foundational issue of which books should be in the canon. After they all died, you don't have apostolic authority anymore.

And I know the new apostolic reformation might be surprised to find out. That's the case, but they died and they're part of the foundation according to Ephesians chapter 2. And that's the foundation. That's not the rest of the house.

Foundation was laid by Christ and the prophets and the apostles and then the rest was built and that's what we would know in 2000 years. In any event, the apostles had a unique role and the early Christians understood that. And there is no argument that the so-called gospel of Thomas actually was well, there is no evidence that the so-called gospel of Thomas was actually authored by Thomas.

Thomas was a disciple of Christ. All right, we know what Jesus taught because of John who taught about Jesus and others who taught about Jesus. And that teaching about Jesus does not match the so-called gospel of Thomas.

That's the Gnostic Christ. Read it, you'll see it, just it's weird. By the way, there are some verses in the gospel of Thomas that are in the canonical gospels.

But there's a whole bunch of other stuff that just odd. And look, Jesus was odd in many ways, but Jesus always sounded like Jesus. And some things are hard to understand, got it.

These are not just hard to understand. They don't sound like Jesus and they're weird. You start to get a feel as you're reading the New Testament for what feels like it really is Jesus, what feels like it really is New Testament theology.

And even if you can't put your finger on it right away, you can recognize when things sound foreign. Yeah, Jesus had a voice. Just like you have a voice and I have a voice.

We both have ways of characterizing ideas, Jesus did too. And even beyond Jesus, the apostles, the way they wrote, one thing I've discovered, I've been reading through the New Testament over and over and starting to notice more and more how the different, how Peter will reflect Paul in certain places and how their ideas mesh together, all of them. And it's kind of amazing to see.

It's also pretty amazing to know that there was never a huge fight in the church over the books of the Bible. Why is that? Like why is it that all, you know, the church was spread out, but they agreed that certainly there were people had different ideas slightly different at the beginning, but there was no big fight over what was to be included up until you get to the Reformation. Yeah, there you go.

With Roman Catholic Church and the Protestants in the, and right, exactly. It's like 1600

years later. And just to point out that was where they wanted to add books into the canon.

It wasn't that the Protestants were taking books out just to make that clear. Absolutely. That's right.

That's right. But it's, what's amazing to see is that they could recognize the inspiration of these books. And there was no huge counsel to fight it out.

There was, it was no ecclesiastical authority that declared the canon as such. It was the Christians who recognized it as such and acknowledged it as such. It doesn't mean that there weren't leaders that weighed in.

And there were a couple of, there were some books like the, like the D2K or Shepherd of Hermos or some, you know, some of these, or also the book of Hebrews, you know, there's some question about that because they didn't know who wrote it. So the question of apostolic authorship was, because it was up in the air a little bit with that. But the, the large majority of the books were commonly acknowledged because of their apostolic input or the undergirded like Mark wrote as a tutor of, as being tutored by Peter.

And Eusebius makes this clear. So you've got, you've got, you've got that apostolic foundation to all of those books. And, and the times when there was, there was some, there was some discussion.

You have the Prologoma, you've got the Antilagoma, which is the, I think the ones that they debated, which is a very small number. And then you've got the pseudopigraphy, which is the false writings like the Gospel of Thomas. And at some point they did lay these things out and make lists because they wanted people to know which book they should, they should die for.

Right. In the second century they had the, a meritorium canon, which is probably the, the, the, the late in the second century. So you know, this isn't fifth, sixth century where Rome is gaining ascendancy.

This is, this is the, the Christians in general that have acknowledged this. And so you have this characterization that is put together, not by a person speaking with authority. This is the canon, but this is the, these are the books that the Christians acknowledge and recognize as authoritative.

Okay. Here's a somewhat related question. This one comes from Callie.

Callie? Callie. How do you explain inerrancy to a skeptic? And I know you've talked before Greg about not defending inerrancy. I'm assuming that explain specifically means explain rather than defend.

But if you want to respond to both of those ideas. Well, I would say to define it, different people have defined it in different ways. And the essential is that the words of scripture are the exact words that God intended to communicate.

So God is the ultimate author. And the way John rather Paul describes it in second Timothy is that they were theon nusdo. They were God breathed.

This was the out breathing of God through the divine authors so that they would write exactly what he wanted them to write. Now if the words are God's words ultimately and God can't error, then the scripture can't error. Now so that's where the inerrancy concept comes from.

If God can't error, then the scriptures can't error. Okay. Now of course this applies only to the originals because in the copying there can be mistakes and then it's our job in an academic way to try to restore the original as much as possible.

Of course this has been done. And we know this through the literary science. And I say science because it's a very precise kind of methodology even though there's some judgment calls that have to be made of textual criticism, which has allowed us to restore the original to a very, very high degree of confidence even when we have different variations.

The vast majority of variations are just spelling errors so that has no bearing on restoring the original. And things that sometimes are real questions about we don't know which ones which, it turns out that the passage or the element is largely inconsequential. So it doesn't have any theological bearing either.

Inerrancy just means that the scriptures are without error in what they affirm. Without error in what they affirm. And if the words are God's words and God can't error, then the scripture can't error either.

So if Cali did mean defend, then would you, how would you, if you would, make a case for inerrancy? Well, my general approach to this is to ask the question is not to look at every single line and try to prove everything, a single line to the satisfaction of a skeptic because it's not possible to do that with every single line. And generally what you do with any confidence in any authority is you establish the authority of the individual and then trust what they have to say about the thing their authorities on. And you might cross-examine a little bit here and there or whatever, but you don't demand that they have external proof for every sentence that they offer.

This is just not possible, certainly impractical. And then no one could be trusted as an authority. Yet most of what we know, we know on the basis of authority.

Almost everything we know from before we lived, everything we know in the future, like, you know, planes arriving and taking off at certain times like mind will in the morning,

for example, this, everything we know about things that we've never seen, places never been, about things we don't have studied personally. Virtually every scientific thing we think we know, we know because someone else told us is authority. So this is a very ordinary way of knowing.

And so my question when I come to the Bible is what kind of book is the Bible? Is it a book by God about man? And when I say by God, I am acknowledging the agency as human beings. But if it's by God, then God is the one who is ultimately responsible, not man. So is God the main author or is it just a human book by man about God? Okay, that's the two categories.

And then we go ahead and look at some characteristics of the book. I'll just give you one fulfilled prophecy. If there's bonafide fulfilled prophecy in scripture, that is a specific prophecy was made at a time that ante dates its actual fulfillment.

And it was fulfilled in the precise way that the prophecy was made. Well, this is evidence of supernatural. Now this book claims to be God's book and it does have fulfilled prophecy demonstrable.

And so this is a way of kind of qualifying the authoritative nature of the Bible. And so if we have a couple of touchstones there and actually I have a talk in which I give six different touchstones and the talk is called the Bible has God spoken or has God spoken. I don't know which one is a baby the longer short or whatever you can find it as str.org. And if that's excuse me, if we are able to, if we look at these six characteristics that defy a naturalistic explanation and are better accounted for by a supernatural origin of scripture, we have then largely established the Bible as the first kind of book by God to men and not the second kind of book by men about God.

So then if it is by God, even though I don't answer every single line, then I have reason to believe that it is also without error and that which it affirms. Now sometimes then we read things and we say that doesn't look right. Well, it might be a scribble error.

It might be some change and you look at other manuscripts you see, well, this might be an exaggeration. It might be a there might be technical difficulties with the translation that will account for that. Sometimes it may be that we are reading, we are trying to read with a kind of literal precision, something that was not meant to be bred that way.

Just I think Genesis one is an example of that. It's obvious to me that this is not, it's not talking about solar days because there's no solar until the fourth day. It's not talking about 24 hour segments of time because it has a morning and evening and a morning and evening, every day, well, there's no morning and evening without a sun.

You know, since it's another problem and but it does seem like there's a poetic arrangement. So some of these things that are apparent contradictions can be resolved

with new archaeological discoveries closer look at the text and understanding of the culture of the time. They go up to Jerusalem.

Wait a minute, they were in some area. How could they go up to Jerusalem? Jerusalem South? Well, they're not looking at a map. They're talking about elevation.

Huh? It's elevation. Jerusalem is high. They're going up to Jerusalem.

But notice the inacritism. We're reading a 20th century, 21st century sensibility into a first century document and then we're misunderstanding it. Those are all strategies for resolving apparent contradictions if in fact, or apparent difficulties, if in fact, the scripture is inspired by God and therefore, inerrant.

Point is, if you have the bigger picture understood and you've made a case for the bigger picture, as you said, knowing who God is and what the nature of scripture is, then we shouldn't jettison the idea of anerrancy because of an anomaly that we can't answer because there are a lot of things that we don't have all the information for. So once we have a solid reasons for thinking that the Bible really is inspired and inerrant, when we come across something we don't understand, we should first assume that there's something we don't understand. You should be thinking about it.

That's a good point. Exactly. And there was a long list of apparent discrepancies in the scripture.

A lot coming from the Old Testament. And then as time has gone on, those have been resolved because archaeological discoveries demonstrate the reconciliation of actual history with what the scripture says. Well, thank you, Greg and Callie and Supreme Fancy Man.

We hope to hear from you again. And if you have a question, send that through our website or through Twitter with the hashtag #strask. This is Amy Hall and Greg Cogle for Stand to Reason.

[Music]