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How Do We Know the Protestant Canon of Scripture Is the Correct One?

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#STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about how we know the Protestant canon of Scripture is the correct one, how we can know the New Testament books are inspired if we don't know who the authors were, and how to talk to a friend who denies Paul's apostleship and writings.

* How do we know the Protestant canon of Scripture containing 66 books is the correct one as opposed to the Catholic canon?

* If the authors of 20 of the 27 books of the New Testament are unknown, how do we know those books are inspired if nobody knows who wrote them?

* I have a friend who claims to be a Christian but who believes the earth is flat and denies Paul's apostleship and writings. How should I discuss these matters with him?

Transcript

I'm Amy Hall, I'm here with Greg Cokel and welcome to Stand to Reason's hashtag, SDRaskPugast. Hello Amy. Hello Greg.

Today we have a few questions on the topic of the Bible. Okay. So let's start with one from Ryan Z. How do we know the 66 book Protestant Canon of Scripture is the correct one as opposed to the canons that include the apocryphal or dudoro canon... Ah, dudoro canonical books! Like, the book is the book is the correct one.

The Maccabees, Ezra's Tobit, prayer of Manasseh, etc. Right. This is a distinction between the Roman Catholic Canon and the Protestant Canon.

Okay. So I actually have a piece about this on the internet. It's an outline.

And I think it has to do with the apocrypha. So if you do search online for the apocrypha, my outline is there. But I remember a couple of the salient details.

There was never a unified voice about the apocrypha. What's called the apocrypha? Those books. By the way, those books that the Roman Catholic Church has canonized or considers part of their canon, those aren't all of the apocrypha.

It's just a select number of the apocrypha. Okay. The Jews never considered any of those books as part of the Hebrew canon.

Now to me that's significant. These are the people of God who have been the caretakers of Scripture for millennium. They never considered those things on par with Scripture.

There's been a split voice regarding those books in the body of Christ. There was never any unanimity about it. You have scholars on both sides.

Jerome, for example, did not consider those apocrypha works to be canonical. And there is also some difficulty in some of the works. Most of the books, there's also some difficulty in some of the works.

Some of them are benign. In other words, theologically, they're not going to be problematic. But there are some that seem to reinforce a peculiar Roman Catholic doctrines.

And what I mean by that is they are peculiar to the Roman Church. They are not held by Protestants. And I think for good reasons, for biblical reasons.

And so interestingly, the apocrypha did not become part of the canon officially until the Council of Trent in the 17th century. It was in a counter-reformation move. Now this doesn't mean it's false, but I just want to give you the history.

You've got the Reformation. You've got Luther. You've got all that stuff going on.

And Luther offering a way of understanding, justification, by faith, and etc. etc. etc.

All that, that was conflicted with the Roman Church. In the Council of Trent, they anathematized a whole bunch of things that Luther taught. So the kinds of things that many Christians take as gospel, quite literally, according to the Council of Trent, those beliefs are anathematized.

You believe those and your sons are perdition, essentially. You're on your way to hell. Okay.

You are cursed to hold these views. And one of those things that was anathematized was the understanding that you're saved by faith alone. Okay.

And in this Council, they also officially canonized these books. So though it sometimes sounds to people like the Protestants removed books from the canon, actually it was the Roman Catholic Church who officially placed them in the canon. Now those books were

around for thousands of, about 1800 years, 1500 years at that time, or 17, 100 years.

But so it isn't like they just manufactured these things out of thin air. And they had respect in the Church in general. But just so you know, the canonization of it came late.

There was a split decision in the Church. One of the reasons that we are confident in say the New Testament canon is because there was a very strong unified response from the Church on virtually every single book that this was authoritative because of its apostolic origins or its apostolic connections. All of these books that we're talking about, these are came before the time of Jesus during the Jewish period and the Jews didn't consider them canon.

So these are, I think, all good reasons to not consider these books on par with the rest of Scripture. So the 66 books of the Bible are still the 66 books of the Bible. Those are the books that all Christians affirm and also with regards to the Jewish texts, all Jews confirmed.

So we have a unified understanding of those books by all Christians and one group of Christians has added additional books to the canon. And people can make whatever they want of that. But that's the history there in some.

That does seem key to me that they were added rather than removed. That seems to be an official action. Yes, right.

They were around to being used by some. But there was controversy. When you have somebody like Jerome that says no, that's a big deal because he was one of the most eminent scholars of this period.

And there's nothing wrong with reading them. There's nothing wrong with reading books that are spiritually helpful. We do that all the time.

It just there's a difference between being inspired by God and being a good, helpful spiritual book. Sure, sure. We do that.

We write them. Yeah, exactly. Yeah.

And even in the early church, you have the shepherd of Hermas. You've got the D.T.K. You've got these different books that were considered very, very highly. And as useful for the church, but not on par with scripture.

That's the way I would consider these other books, keeping in mind that when there seems to be a conflict scripture, actual scripture, God inspired scripture has to trump any differences that you find in these other books that may be helpful. So that leads into our next question. This one comes from June.

My question is about the New Testament authors. I hear some scholars say 20 of the 27

books are unknown. Who did the first Christians think wrote those books and how do we know they're inspired if nobody knew who wrote them? I don't.

I 20 out of 27. That's a lot. And I think that's because they deny that Paul is an author of a lot of them and some scholars.

Yes. Right. No, right.

Some scholars deny lots of things about that partly because they late date for some reasons, which I actually have not been able to discover, though I've asked this question a lot. The impulse to late date a lot of these things after the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple, which by the way, John A.T. Robinson, who is no conservative at all puts all the dates prior to that simply because it's not mentioned. And it's hard to believe that anyone writing after the destruction of the temple in favor of Christianity would not have mentioned this because it would be a convenient appeal to an act of God punishing Jews for rejecting Jesus.

Nobody does that. And so then why? So this, there's good arguments to early date them, but many late date them. And if they're late dated sometime in the second century, well, then none of the books could be written by apostles.

They might be collections of things that different people wrote and maybe some apostles, whatever. So I don't know why anybody would say that the authorship of 20 of the 27 books are not known. Now, I don't have figures in front of me of, you know, I could just count right here.

And if the Pauline epistles, the Petrine epistles and the Joining epistles. So, you know, I'm looking in the context, contents. What we don't know who wrote Hebrews.

Okay. We have internal evidence regarding many of the other letters from Paul that he wrote Paul that he wrote these letters. Now, whether you believe the internal evidence or not, that's another question.

And so you're going to have critics that are take exception. And sometimes the reasons are not so good, but they're tied to other presuppositions that they have. Acts and Luke were written by Luke.

Okay. Matthew was written by Matthew. Now, Mark, according to was it Eusebius or no, not Eusebius, someone else earlier.

I can't remember his name. One of the church fathers, Mark was the companion of Paul and recorded, I'm sorry, the companion of Peter and recorded Peter's observations. So you've got the gospel of Mark is substantiated the apostolic witness of Peter.

So we have records that indicate this. I don't like it when people say church tradition

says, well, church is isn't just like something, some belief that was handed down and everybody talked about it. So, you know, our tradition is we open up one present on Christmas Eve and all the rest of Christmas.

And it's not that kind of thing. There were early church fathers who actually recorded information that caused us to believe some of these things. For example, Mark being the author under Peter's guidance of the gospel.

Of Mark, but if you look at the, the other books of the New Testament, you know, Romans, Paul, 1 Corinthians, Paul Galatians, Paul, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Paul, Titus, Paul, Philemon, Paul, Hebrews, who knows James, James, 1 Peter uncontested Peter, 2 Peter, some contesting. First John, second John, third John, John, Jude, Jude. That's why it's named that way.

And Revelation was written by John. So at least prima fasci on the surface of it, there's not all this doubt that we, it isn't that we don't know who wrote these documents. We do.

And what we can do is look at the testimony given by people. And Jay Warner Wallace does a great job of this in Cold Case Christianity, which is the 10th anniversary edition is being released. Same day, my book is being released.

We're going to have him on the show, actually, do a show about that. And he makes it clear that there is a chain of custody of these beliefs and these ideas and stuff. So we can look at the writings of those who followed the disciples and their references back to the writings of the disciples as having been of the disciples and the citation of those books as being Holy Rit.

So it isn't like hundreds of years later, we're just trying to figure this out and piece it together and the winners decide which books. It wasn't like that. And Peter refers to the writings of Paul saying that they're inspired.

Paul refers to the writings of Luke and quotes it as scripture. So I think there is, if what I'm hearing you say, Greg, is that there is early Christian testimony that they believed the authors were who we think they are, who they say they are. And they say, well, this can't be Paul because he uses these words differently.

And I'm not really familiar with all the arguments, but I do know that part of the issue is they would use scribes who would write down. So there could be differences there. Even people use different words at different times for different people.

And you could do this with other people's writings and people have done it with other people's writings. Those who are familiar with tactics and who have read the story of reality, I authored both of those. You know that because you help me with all the wordsmithing and they are different voices.

They are very different voices. And some might say, well, look at this author here doesn't use very many contractions in the story of reality. It couldn't be the same guy who used contractions all the time in tactics.

No, I did that on purpose for a particular effect. So that's why you can't always trust these literary assessment methods to try to figure out the authorship of these books because there are some people have applied those same methods to the authors books that talk about those methods and have come to conclusion. You think those methods that the authors didn't write this book, it was a bunch of people that put it together.

So anyway, that's basically higher critical method form, form criticism, et cetera. And those have some value, but they also, you know, can be very misleading depending on the presuppositions that you go into the discussion with. Yeah.

So Jay Warner Wallace's book is a great place to start, case Christianity, if you're interested in hearing more about the arguments there. And obviously we've only been talking about this for a few minutes and this is a huge debate, but I don't think it's fair to say that nobody knew who wrote them at the time. I think they did think they knew who wrote them, which is why they trusted them.

Right. Yeah. Yeah.

Because see many of the people, the early church fathers, these were just early believers that got old and became church fathers. And, you know, got in charge of churches that these early church fathers were discipled by the disciples who were discipled by Jesus. And then these who were discipled by Jesus, discipled other people and all of this string of disciples left behind writing that we can look at and see as Jay Warner calls it using a detective term, the chain of custody of the ideas that were entrusted from generation to generation.

Let's go on to a question from Fran. I have a friend who claims to be a Christian. He believes the earth is flat and denies Paul's apostleship and writings.

How do I discuss these matters with him? Well, the first question that comes to my mind is what does he mean when he says he's a Christian? All right. He must have some definition in his mind, some sense of what a real Christian is that he would characterize himself as one. Gee, it's hard.

It's hard to be a real Christian and dismiss Paul. For one you said Peter in 2 Peter chapter 3 describes Paul's writings as scripture. You have in Galatians 1 an account by Paul himself of going to the pillars and that would be Peter, James and John and bringing what he understood Jesus to have taught him to them for verification to determine whether as he puts it, he run in vain.

Yet he was received fully as a brother and his doctrines were received. I'm just curious

why a person would say Paul's out. And there were there have been traditions of in the broader Christian movement of taking whole sections of scripture and just discounting them.

I think the Mannequians early on were, you know, they said the Old Testament is they liked Paul. They don't like the anything Jewish. I'm not sure.

The Marcy and I. Or maybe the Marcy and I. That's right. Yeah. The Marcy and I. The Marcy and I. Thank you.

And so, I mean, you just have you have these things happening where it's just odd. Why reject Paul 2000 years after the fact when the entire church almost without exception accepted everything that Paul had written. No, he had to defend his apostleship and you see this in 1 Corinthians or 2 Corinthians especially because there were naysayers that were after him.

There were people, he says in Philippians that were preaching the gospel out of competition with him and he said, well, whether in pre-tense or in truth, the gospel's preached. So, okay, the final of me as long as the truth is communicated, he wasn't taking it personally. So, there were naysayers, but as a whole, if Paul was the author of a letter, the church characteristically accepted it, hands down, it was canonical.

So, that's why I'm kind of curious about why this person rejects all the Pauline writers. Now, I suspect he's got an unusual definition of Christianity and this is where using the first column will question over and over and over again as it applies to different parts of what he says. What do you mean by that? What's going on here? Give me a clear understanding of your view.

We'll help friend to know what she's up against. Okay, but you want particular, she wants specifics. I suspect this person has some reasons because this is an unusual view.

I reject everything Paul wrote. And it's unclear if he's saying he doesn't think Paul really wrote them. That's what I thought by denying his writings, but it sounds like if he's denying his apostleship, even if he wrote them, it wouldn't matter because he's denying him as an apostle.

So, I agree, Greg, I think you need to get more information. Why do you reject them? Do you think they don't fit with what Jesus said? I know there are some people who say that. And if that's the case, now you have to explain how those things fit with what Jesus said.

Explain that the people who Jesus trained accepted Paul as teaching the truth. And like you said, Peter refers to his writings as scripture, so he's got to wrestle with that too. There might be something, you know, Fran mentions that he believes the earth is flat.

I don't know. I'm not sure that has much to do with here. I think I would focus on Paul

first, but there might be some underlying thing beneath both of these positions.

And that might be why Fran brought them both up. Yeah, and it's, I'm not sure what to say about this. And I want to be careful.

I don't want to sound condescending, but somebody who believes the earth is actually flat. It's hard to take seriously the other things that person believes because something is wrong. And if he thinks, I'm not sure if he takes that on what he thinks is biblical authority or not, but, you know, I've been in five continents.

You know, you can sit outside. You could go down the 405 freeway at twilight, pass the airport, and you could look at the planes that are approaching. And you can see the curvature of the earth reflected in the approaches of the planes that are wrapping around.

The furthest ones are actually lower, but they're not lower in elevation. They are lower visually because of the curvature of the earth. So people knew that the earth was round or spherical, whatever, even before the Egyptians knew this.

This is how you could see it in a clip. You see the shadow in the eclipse. So I don't get it.

Unfortunately, I think this is more widespread than I would like. There might be somebody listening right now. I think it was last year I had somebody at our reality conference argue with me about whether or not the earth was flat, and she wanted to make her case that the earth was flat.

And what she was saying is she was citing certain verses, and that's why I think what might be behind this is a hermeneutical problem. So it's a misunderstanding of how to interpret the text, and that leads them to not understand how Jesus, what he says, can fit with Paul. Therefore Paul doesn't seem to make sense.

So I think there might be some sort of hermeneutical issue. You might want to start there. Yeah, and keep in mind that so much of what people say about things, and this includes biblical writers, is the language of appearance.

So I can look at my iPhone now and still see on the weather thing for 1000 Oaks, sunrise and sunset. But of course the move the sun isn't moving at all. It's the earth that's spinning.

But appearances are that the sun is rising in the east and setting in the west. And we talk about that all the time, even though we know strictly speaking, literally that's not what's going on. So it's normal for anyone to describe the earth in a flat way because from the position of almost every observer, that's exactly the way it looks.

Unless you're on Mount Everest and then you can see something more or something like

that. And you might also. Yeah, you might also ask Fran if he sees those two as related and maybe he has already mentioned that.

And that's why you ask both those things together because it does seem like an odd combination. Maybe those are just the two things that stood out to you. But hopefully this gives you some ideas about where you can take this and you can have a good conversation with your friend.

Alright, that's it for today. Thank you for sending in your question. If you haven't sent one in yet, please do.

And we would love to hear from you. This is Amy Hall and Greg Cocle for Stand to Reason.