

The Word of God

A Succinct Summary of the Attributes of Scripture

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Introduction

This may sound like an overstatement from a zealous pastor but, trust me, it's not. Everything in your life rises and falls on what you believe, or don't believe, about Scripture. Think about it. Satanic lies introduced uncertainty about God's words in the garden, and this led to the rebellion and ruin of humanity (Gen. 3). Human beings, God's image bearers, are now deceived and dead—spell-bound to Satan's propaganda (Eph. 2:1-3). Thousands die each day around the world and fall headlong into eternal torment because they failed to embrace God's word. Eternal destinies are at stake, and they hinge on what people believe about the Bible.

And Paul says that even now, as a believer, Satan attempts to deceive you away from pure devotion to Christ, like he tempted Eve in the garden (2 Cor. 11:3). So, what will keep us devoted to Christ? What will cause us to grow and thrive in spiritual fruitfulness in this life? What will keep you from the schemes of Satan? It starts with deepening your convictions about the Bible. To do this, you need to know what the Bible claims about itself—what it claims to be and to do.

In this short (and dense) article, we want to expose you to a summary of what the Bible teaches about itself. In theological studies, some have called this “The Attributes of Scripture” — attributes like inspiration, inerrancy, and sufficiency, to name a few. We want to help you think more deeply and carefully about these common terms, so that you both treasure the Bible and stake your entire life upon it.

For the more ambitious reader, we've included an appendix on the topic canonicity, or why the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments, no more and no less, make up God's inspired word.

Attributes of Scripture

Scripture is Inspired¹

The Bible—the entirety of the 66 written books in the Old and New Testaments—is inspired by God. Put in biblical terms, Paul says all Old Testament Scripture is “God-breathed” (2 Tim. 3:16). In saying that God breathed out Scripture, Paul declares that the entire Old Testament came about as God's creative act. In other words, God is the ultimate source of Scripture. Peter makes a similar statement: the prophets who penned the “prophecy of Scripture” (2 Pet. 1:20) “spoke words from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (1:21). The words they spoke had God as its source and were propelled by the Holy Spirit.

¹ For this section, I consulted Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, chap. 23.

Although the two texts cited above refer to the inspiration of the Old Testament Scriptures, the doctrine of inspiration is also applied to the New Testament documents. As God incarnate, when Jesus spoke, his words carried divine authority (Luke 4:31-32) and revealed new truth from the Father (Luke 8:10; 10:21-24; Rev. 1:1). Jesus delegated his authority to his apostles (Luke 9:1-2) and appointed them to both proclaim and preserve his divine words, promising that his Spirit would bring them to their remembrance (John 14:26). And beyond this, Jesus also promised that his Spirit would reveal new truth to the apostles, truth that Jesus had not yet told them (John 16:12-14; 1 Cor. 2:12-13). As an apostle, Paul knew that his written commands carried the authority of Christ's own commands (1 Cor. 14:36-37). He can also quote the Gospel of Luke right alongside Deuteronomy, calling both "Scripture" (1 Tim. 4:18). Even Peter put Paul's words on par with "the other [Old Testament] Scriptures" (2 Pet. 3:16). Beyond this, Paul commanded his letters be read aloud to churches at large (Col. 4:16), echoing the pattern of reading the Law aloud to God's people (Neh. 8:3, 8, 18; cf. 1 Tim. 4:13). Thus, we are justified in claiming that inspiration extends to *all* the Bible, not only to the Old but also to the New Testament.

Though there are examples of God directly dictating what the biblical author should write (cf. Rev. 21:5), his normative method is to inspire Scripture by using the unique human faculties of each appointed author. In other words, the human author of Scripture chose to write for a specific occasion and purpose, and with specific recipients in mind (Luke 1:1-4; 1 Tim. 3:14; etc.). He employed human literary genres to communicate the message. The sentences are shaped by his personality, giftedness, and individual style (cf. the literary elegance of Luke-Acts with the profound simplicity of 1 John). In one sense, the words are fully Paul's, Peter's, or Isaiah's. But in a more fundamental (and mysterious) sense, the words originated from God himself. The Holy Spirit ensured that each human author accurately conveyed what God intended to communicate. The humanity of the Bible does not detract from the divine inspiration of the Bible; rather, it is the central medium through which God has chosen to communicate his very words with us.

Scripture is Inerrant²

The Bible is inerrant, meaning it is completely truthful. Claims that God's words are true are made frequently in both Old and New Testaments (Ps. 18:30; Prov. 30:5; John 17:17; Rom. 3:4; Rev. 19:9; 21:5; 22:6). Jesus is the exclusive message of truth (John 14:6). The Scriptures cannot be anything less than true because the One who speaks them is the source of truth (Rev. 3:7, 14). His words are free from deceit (2 Tim. 2:13; 1 Pet. 2:22) and he is ignorant of nothing (Rom. 11:33-34; Heb. 4:12-13). Therefore, not only is his word inerrant, but it *cannot* contain errors. It is infallible.

But to force the term 'inerrant' to mean exactness in every case, or the most precise language possible, goes beyond what the Bible claims. In fact, it goes beyond the lexical meaning of 'inerrant'—which simply means "without error." To be sure, truth always requires some measure of precision. But sufficient precision often varies according to the context. When a

² In this section, I consulted Frame, chap. 26.

man is asked his age, it is not expected that he answer with exactness—down to the day, minute or second. He is not accused of error if he answers with a round number. However, a science laboratory measurement requires a different, more technical, kind of precision. In this case, a round number would constitute an error! Scripture communicates in an ordinary style, suited for everyday communication. It contains round numbers, approximations, figures of speech, hyperbole and other expressions of everyday communication. So instead of forcing the word ‘inerrant’ to mean technical exactness without respect for the situational or literary context, it is more accurate to define it simply as the Bible’s ability to make good on its claims. In other words, the Bible is completely truthful.

This claim to inerrancy should be modified, as well, to the original manuscripts written by the apostles, prophets and those connected to them. Although these documents were profusely and carefully copied and transmitted to us, the copyists did occasionally make errors. But in God’s providence, there are thousands of copies (and families of copies) available for analysis and an overwhelming amount of continuity between them. For the most part, the errors are quite apparent through the process of textual criticism. Although there are still a few difficult textual variants, they do not alter any major doctrine of orthodox Christianity. So, God has provided an incredibly accurate and faithful reflection of the content of those original inerrant manuscripts. And insofar as the copies reflect the original, they are equally the inerrant word of God to us today.

Scripture is Authoritative³

The Bible has ultimate and comprehensive authority. The authority of Scripture is rooted in the authority of the God who speaks them. And his authority is absolute. The God of Scripture is the “God Most High” and the “Possessor of heaven and earth” (Gen. 14:18). He is “exalted far above all gods” (Ps. 97:9). There is nothing or no one like him, and no god can rival his authority (Ex. 15:11; Deut. 33:26; Ps. 89:6; 113:5). When God makes an oath, he must swear by himself because he can appeal to no higher authority (Heb. 6:13). And all of God’s authority has been given to his divine Son, Jesus (Matt. 28:18). Since the Bible is inspired by God himself, it is the expression of his ultimate authority to his creatures.

For language to have ultimate authority means it has the “capacity to create obligation in the hearer.”⁴ In other words, when God’s speaks, his creatures are obligated to respond appropriately because of his supreme authority. We see this throughout Scripture. All creation responds to God’s authority: waves and wind listen to him (Job 39:13; 107:25, 29; Matt. 8:26); the greatest fish (Jonah 1:17; 2:10) and the tiniest worms obey him (4:7). When some angels rejected God’s authority they were bound in chains and are kept judgment (Jude 6). When humans rejected God’s authority and sought to establish their own, independent from God, they

³ In this section, I consulted Frame, chaps. 1, 10, 25; Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England : Grand Rapids, Mich: Inter-Varsity Press ; Zondervan Pub. House, 1994), chap.

4.

⁴ Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, 5.

received divine cursing and death instead of blessing (Gen. 3). Though the world currently rages in autonomy against God (Ps. 2:1-3), every knee will ultimately bow to his authority manifested in the Son (Isa. 45:23; Rom. 14:11; Phil. 2:10). Thus, Jesus and the apostles *command* faith and repentance as the only appropriate response to the good news of the gospel (Mark 1:15; Acts 2:38). The word of God carries ultimate authority and as a result, obligates its hearers to obey.

The Bible is also comprehensively authoritative, meaning that its authority extends to all areas of human life and applies to all our experiences. Implications of the gospel and lordship of Christ extend to every station of life: husbands, wives, parents, children, slaves, masters (Eph. 5:22-6:9; Col. 3:18-4:1; 1 Pet. 2:18-3:7) and church elders (Acts 20:17-35; 1 Pet. 5:1-4). Our families are impacted for good, our workplaces, our neighbors, and even (in some cases) our governments. Whatever we do and say is to be done to the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31), in Christ's name (Col. 3:17), and motivated by faith (Rom. 14:23). And our end goal is that every nation comes under the kingly authority of Christ (Matt. 28:16-20). The Bible's authority is comprehensive.

Scripture is Powerful⁵

The Bible is powerful, meaning it is able to perform all that God intends. From the very first page of Scripture, God's word is able to call inanimate objects into being (Gen. 1; cf. Rom. 4:17) and powerfully governs that creation (Ps. 29; 147:15-18; 148:7-8). God is often praised because of the power of his creative word (Ps. 33:6-7; 148:1-6). This should cause fear and awe in all the world's inhabitants (Ps. 33:8-9).

Additionally, his word is powerful to judge (Isa. 49:2; Jer. 23:29) and to defeat adversaries (Hos. 6:5). The power of God's word is living and active, able to bring about the most profound conviction and exposure of the human heart (Heb. 4:12).

God's word is also powerful to heal (Luke 7:7) and to save (Rom. 1:16; 1 Thess. 1:5; 2:13). It has the power to create converts (Acts 19:20; Col. 1:5-6), strengthen believers (Acts 15:32), and continue transforming them into Christlikeness (John 8:32; Col. 1:28). God's word will never go out from his mouth and return empty; rather, it will always accomplish what God purposes (Isa. 55:11). We have no more powerful weapon in our arsenal than "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Eph. 6:17).

Scripture is Clear⁶

The Bible is clear, meaning its content is inherently accessible and understandable. This basic assumption permeates the whole of Scripture. Parents under the Old Covenant were commanded to teach the Torah to their children, demonstrating to them its application in every

⁵ What follows is modified from Frame, chap. 9.

⁶ In this section, I consulted Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, chap. 6; Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, chap. 29.

area of life (Deut. 6:6-7). Moses assumes the Torah is clear and understandable to the average Israelite parent, so much so, that he can teach his child what is required for faithful obedience to Yahweh (cf. Deut. 30:11-14). And not only the average parent, but also the simple and inexperienced can understand the law and by it become wise (Ps. 19:7; cf. Ps. 119:130). During a period of spiritual decline in the Davidic monarchy, the Torah was rediscovered in the temple. When read aloud, those who heard it immediately understood they were under God's wrath and in need of repentance (2 Kings 22:8-13). After their return to the land, the all people (including children!) listened to the law read and explained and were able to understand it (Neh. 8-9). When interacting with Jewish leadership, Jesus never says the Old Testament Scripture is too complicated to understand. Instead, he rebukes them for their ignorance (Matt. 12:3; 19:4; 21:42; 22:29, 31). Paul can commend the public reading of the Old Testament in the assembly (1 Tim. 4:13), as well as his own letters (Col. 4:13), because of their God-given clarity and ability to transform (cf. 2 Tim. 3:15-17).

Furthermore, the biblical authors themselves assume their readers will understand what they write. Luke writes his gospel so that Theophilus will have certainty concerning the things he has been taught (Luke 1:1-4). John writes his gospel so that his readers will believe in Jesus (John 20:31). Paul gives instructions to Timothy, and by extension, to the church members in Ephesus, so that they will know how they should behave in the church (1 Tim. 3:15). Similarly, John writes a letter to a congregation so that they will have assurance (1 John 5:13). This sampling of statements reveals the biblical authors assumed they were writing clear, understandable, and followable documents for their recipients.

However, this claim that the Scriptures are clear and understandable must reckon with texts that seem to indicate the opposite. Peter, while affirming Paul's God-given wisdom, acknowledges there are some things in his letters that are difficult to understand (2 Pet. 3:15-16). While this does require some explanation, we must initially observe this statement implies that most of what Paul writes is *not* hard to understand. Additionally, Peter does not say those hard texts are impossible to understand—only that they are difficult. In fact, when some do misunderstand them and twist them, they are morally responsible for that failure (3:16b). In other words, Peter does not excuse their misunderstanding merely because some of what Paul says is difficult to understand.

Texts like these should be understood in light of several scriptural considerations. Most fundamentally, the truth of Scripture is rendered inaccessible because of mankind's initial rejection of it. Paul writes that while truth about God is self-evidently plain, unbelievers suppress it (Rom. 1:18-20). Hearts and minds were darkened and have been ever since (Rom. 1:21; Eph. 4:18). Even when unbelieving Jews read the Torah, a "veil lies over their hearts" (2 Cor. 3:15). Only through repentance and faith in Christ is the veil taken away (3:16), and this comes through the regenerating work of the Spirit of God himself (3:17-18). Those without the Spirit are unable to perceive spiritual truth (1 Cor. 2:4). In fact, the Scriptures claim that God often scrambles his truth even more for those who are set against it (Matt. 13:10-15).

But even after we have turned to the Lord and received his illuminating Spirit, remnants of our sinful flesh remain. We are being transformed progressively from one degree of glory to another (2 Cor. 3:18), which includes our understanding of truth (cf. 1 Cor. 13:12). The author of Hebrews says that solid food, or deeper doctrine, is for the spiritually mature—namely for those who have grown in their ability to discern good from evil by constant practice (Heb. 5:14). In other words, as Christians grow in obeying what they know now, they will be able to truly understand and appropriate deeper doctrine. So, one fundamental reason why some of Paul’s writings are harder to understand is because they require greater maturity. But this should not discourage us. Rather, we should be filled with hope because as we grow in obedience, the Lord will be pleased to grant us further understanding (cf. 2 Tim. 2:7).

Scripture is Necessary⁷

The Bible is necessary for our lives in an absolute sense. Generally, we owe our very existence to the word of God (Gen. 1-2). Even now, the entire cosmos is held together “by the word of his power” (Heb. 1:3). Without God’s word, nothing would exist or continue existing.

But we need God’s revelation most urgently for salvation. Because of sin, we are completely in the dark with regard to our understanding (Eph. 4:18). We have no knowledge or fear of God (Rom. 3:11, 18). And what’s worse, no one seeks for him (Rom. 3:11) because we love the darkness of our sin more than the light of truth (John 3:19). If we are to be rescued, it must come from outside of us. God must shine the light of his revelation into our darkened lives (2 Cor. 4:6; Eph. 5:8). He must give life to otherwise dead souls (Eph. 2:1). He must open the eyes of the spiritually blind (Acts 26:18). Since no one seeks God out (Rom. 3), God himself must initiate it. And he has! He has revealed himself to us through his word not only in judgment but also in mercy through the gospel. And it is clear that this revelation is found in the written words of Scripture.

Not only do we need God’s words for salvation, but we also need his words for growth in godliness. Even after conversion to Christ, we are prone to deception (2 Cor. 11:3)—to believing falsehood instead of what is true. We are not yet rid of our old nature, the old Adam, that has been corrupted by wrong desires bubbling over from deceived minds (Eph. 4:22). Our minds must be progressively and daily renewed by the truth if we are to combat the schemes of our old Adamic nature and Satan (Rom. 12:1-2; Eph. 4:23). That’s why Christ gave us apostles like Peter and Paul so that through their teaching and writings they could equip the church in the truth (Eph. 4:11-16). Paul gave himself to preaching Christ and his words—so that he could present disciples mature in Christ (Col. 1:28; cf. 3:16). He commands his own inspired letters to be read publicly to the congregation (Col. 4:16; 1 Th. 5:27). Even the Old Testament is profitable to equip the believer for every good work (2 Tim. 3:16-17), which explains why Paul commands it to be read aloud, too, in the congregation (1 Tim. 4:13; cf. Neh. 8:3, 8, 18). Paul commands these kinds of things because he knows all our church ministries must be saturated with truth if we are going to grow. So, he tells Timothy to preach the word whether or not it’s popular (2 Tim. 3:16).

⁷ In this section, I consulted Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, chap. 30.

He tells every single member of the church in Ephesus to make sure they speak truth to each of the other members (Eph. 4:25). As the truth reverberates in a congregation, that congregation is less susceptible to lies and more equipped for fruitful ministry (Eph. 4:16).

So, without God's words operating in us, we have no hope for growth in Christ. But when his words remain in us, and we learn to live by them, we can be assured that our prayers will be answered, our lives will be filled with good fruit, and that we will be filled with Christ's own joy (John 15:1-10)! God's written revelation, therefore, is absolutely necessary for every aspect of our lives. It is our very life (Deut. 8:3; Matt. 4:4)!

Scripture is Sufficient⁸

The Bible is sufficient, meaning nothing outside of it is required for redemption. Peter claims that God has given us everything we need for both eternal life and growth in godliness through the knowledge of God (2 Pet. 1:3). This knowledge comes to us through God's "precious and very great promises" (1:4). By believing these promises, we are converted. And Peter says we continue adding to our faith a string of Christlike qualities, so that we do not become unfruitful in our knowledge of Christ (1:5-8). In fact, as we continue growing according to his apostolic word, we grow in assurance—that is, we know that we will have a rich entrance provided for us as we enter the eternal kingdom (1:10-11). This is the language of sufficiency: God has provided for us everything we need to richly enter the kingdom.

These sufficient promises—and all of God's sufficient words—are found in both the Old and New Testaments. Paul reminds Timothy that the sacred writings of the Old Testament "are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 3:15). They have the ability to lead to salvation. In the next verse, Paul is even more explicit about the sufficiency of the Old Testament when he says Scripture is able to produce a complete or mature man of God, who is "equipped for every good work" (3:16). Like Peter, Paul also affirms that Scripture is sufficient for eternal life and growth in godliness.

But this raises an interesting question: if Paul claims the Old Testament is sufficient for salvation and sanctification, why did God provide the New Testament? Initially, we should answer this question by looking more carefully at context of Paul's assertion. As an apostle, Paul himself knew he had been entrusted with new and necessary revelation about Christ in the gospel (2 Tim. 1:10-12). Paul also understood this new revelation as necessary for the sanctification of Timothy, because in the following verse, he commands him to "follow the pattern of the sound words which you have heard from me" (1:13; cf. 3:10). Timothy is to guard this new deposit (1:14), pass it on to other faithful men who can multiply it (2:2), and rightly handle its interpretation (2:15). So, in 3:15-17, Paul cannot be saying the Old Testament is completely or ultimately sufficient, apart from apostolic New Covenant revelation. Rather, New Covenant revelation is assumed as necessary, even in the overarching context of this statement! So, when

⁸ In this section, I consulted Frame, chap. 32; Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, chap. 8.

the entire letter is examined, we might synthesize Paul's comments by saying the Old Testament is sufficient for Timothy, *with apostolic revelation assumed*, to lead to his salvation and complete equipping.

We should also make another instructive observation from Scripture: although God provides revelation progressively, the revelation given at each period in redemptive history is sufficient for those to whom it was given. For example, when the Levitical laws were obeyed by faith under the Old Covenant, the sacrifices did secure atonement for the offeror. Later in redemptive history, God reveals that although real forgiveness occurred, it was not all that was required to completely satisfy his demand for justice (Rom. 3:25-26; Heb. 10:4). Now that new revelation about Christ is given, the former is not completely sufficient. To state it differently, the standard by which sufficiency is measured changes or develops as more revelation is added. Thus, the 66 books of the Bible are God's sufficient word to us today.

Yet this still does not answer how we know the 66 books we now have are ultimately or finally sufficient, meaning God will not add any additional revelation. This can be answered with the following Scriptural observations. The author of Hebrews says the redemption accomplished in Christ is final (Heb. 1:1-2), meaning God does not need to add anything to it. God has spoken in Christ, mediated through his apostles. Paul says these apostles and prophets are the foundation upon which the church is built (Eph. 2:20). The apostolic foundation is laid once for all in the inspired documents produced by their circle. Timothy, part of the second generation of the New Covenant, is commanded to preach this word (1 Tim. 4:6, 13; 2 Tim. 4:1), stay faithful to it (1 Tim. 4:15-16), guard it (1 Tim. 6:20; 2 Tim. 1:14) and pass it on to other faithful men (2 Tim. 2:2)—not to expect new or additional revelation. Because of the finality of the redemption of Christ, and the foundational role of the apostles, we should not expect more inspired revelation to be given. Thus, what we have preserved for us in the Bible is God's final, sufficient word for us today.

Appendix: Canonicity

Various Methodologies for Determining Canon⁹

Perhaps the most central issue of Bibliology is the question of canon: how do we know the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments are actually the authoritative word of God? This question has been answered in three fundamental ways.

First, some argue the canon is ultimately created, established or constituted by *people*. Canonical boundaries, then, are imposed upon certain documents. They argue that the church (or in some cases, the individual), chooses which books are canonical. Some say this decision happened as a result of natural processes or as the natural outflow of choices made in church history (historical criticism); others claim the church plays the *definitive* role in establishing the canon because of her God-given authority (many strands of Roman Catholicism); still others argue that books become the word of God when the church experiences them as such (existential). But in all these cases, *people* are the determining factor to what is (or is not) canonical.

Second, others argue that the canonical books are those whose legitimate origins can be established by rigorous historical research. Certain criteria are formed, such as apostolicity, orthodoxy, authentic Jesus tradition, usage, etc., and are used to measure the authenticity of the documents. If books meet the requirements of the set criteria, they prove themselves to be canonical. External data is used to validate the legitimacy of the documents that claim to be the word of God. Thus, an established set of *criteria* become the determining factor for what is (or is not) canonical.

Third, others argue (including myself) that the word of God is self-authenticating. In other words, the documents themselves provide the standards by which they are to be judged. This approach differs fundamentally from the first two approaches. Both of the above approaches seek to establish the authority of the canon by appealing to an authority *outside* the canon: by human choice or by certain humanly established criteria. But this immediately poses a problem: the documents themselves claim ultimate authority. Once an outside authority is used to judge the legitimacy of its claims, the Scripture ceases to be the ultimate authority. If the Scriptures have the ultimate authority they claim, then they must also provide the framework for how that authority is to be recognized. And this framework for recognizing the canon is exactly what we find in the Scriptural documents.

The Scripture's Self-Authenticating Framework¹⁰

⁹ What follows is a summary of Michael J. Kruger, *Canon Revisited: Establishing the Origins and Authority of the New Testament Books* (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway, 2012), chaps. 1–3.

¹⁰ What follows is a modified summary of Kruger, chap. 3.

There are at least three components to what we might call the framework of the self-authenticating model. First, we can infer from Scripture that God would providentially expose us to his words. His church cannot recognize what she has not been exposed to. Throughout Scripture, God's pattern is to relate to his people through written covenantal texts. After Israel's redemption, God gave her a Book of the Covenant that would govern his relationship with them and placed it in his dwelling place among them (Ex. 24:4, 7; cf. 24:12; 34:27-28). Similarly, Christ, as the Mediator of the new covenant (Luke 22:20; Heb. 9:15; 12:24), ensured through his Spirit the apostles would remember his words (John 14:26; 16:12-14). The apostolic circle was appointed to preach the word of Christ (Luke 24:47-48) and by implication produce the corresponding new covenant documents. So, for the church to recognize these canonical documents, it follows she must be exposed to them. It also follows that if she was not exposed to them, God did not intend those particular documents for the canon of the universal church.

Second, the Scriptures themselves provide (or infer) the criteria by which they are to be recognized. In other words, the Scriptures indicate what kind of attributes all canonical books possess. Canonical documents will (1) evidence divine qualities, like transforming power, superlative beauty, ultimate authority and unified harmony with other Scriptural books since they come from God himself (2 Pet. 1:21). When examined over time, the church has come to recognize divine qualities in all 66 books. They will (2) clearly have apostolic or prophetic origins since one of the foundational roles of an apostle was to oversee the transmission of Christ's truth to the church (John 15:15-16; 1 Cor. 2:12-13; Eph. 2:20; cf. 1 Cor. 14:37; Col. 4:16; 1 Th. 5:27; 2 Tim. 4:13). All 27 New Testament books can be traced back to an apostle or can be justifiably demonstrated to have been overseen with apostolic approval (such as Mark, Luke or Hebrews). And Scripture will (3) be widely received by the universal church because Jesus said his sheep would recognize and submit to his voice (John 10:3, 16, 27). While there has not been *total* unity regarding which books are canonical, there has been overwhelming unity. The "core" New Testament books were established very early and widely, likely by the end of the first century. The remaining New Testament books were also recognized widely by the middle of the fourth century.

The last component of this framework involves the role of the Holy Spirit in the ability to perceive truth. The Scriptures indicate that to come to recognize and believe its truthfulness requires the regenerating and illuminating power of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 2:13-16). Only the Spirit working through the Scripture can overcome the noetic effects of sin and grant the ability to perceive and submit to truth. Thus, it is the Spirit himself who testifies to us that the 66 books of the Bible are the very words of God.

These three components are the framework for the self-authenticating model. God preserved the Scripture for us. The Scripture tells us about its own attributes to look for. And the Spirit testifies to us of their truthfulness. In these ways, then, the Scripture imposes itself on the church and is judged by nothing other than itself.

Is the Canon Open or Closed?¹¹

In one sense, the canon is always closed. Mere men cannot add to it or take away from it (Deut. 4:2; 12:32; Rev. 22:18-19). However, God himself has the prerogative to add to his canon, which he has done throughout redemptive history (see Josh. 24:25-26 for an example). But the redemption accomplished in Christ has a finality to it (Heb. 1:1-2). God has spoken in him through his apostles. The apostles and prophets are the foundation upon which the church is built (Eph. 2:20). Their word is once, for all. Timothy, part of the second generation of the New Covenant, is commanded to preach this word (1 Tim. 4:6, 13; 2 Tim. 4:1), stay faithful to it (1 Tim. 4:15-16), guard it (1 Tim. 6:20; 2 Tim. 1:14) and pass it on to other faithful men (2 Tim. 2:2)—not seek new words. Yet God still speaks to us *through* Scripture.

When was the Canon Closed?¹²

In one sense, the canon was closed when John penned the last words of Revelation. In this case, ‘canon’ is defined as the books given to us by God the moment the last writing is recorded. In another sense, the canon is closed when the church comes to a final consensus on which books are canonical in the fourth century. In this case, ‘canon’ is defined in terms of corporate reception. Both of these senses (and underlying definitions) of canon are helpful. My preference is to speak of the canon being “closed” after the final book is written, being “recognized” and “used” by Christians immediately, and being “universally received” or “settled” by the fourth century.

¹¹ In this section, I consulted John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God, A Theology of Lordship* (Phillipsburg, N.J: P&R Pub, 2010), 138–39.

¹² This section is a summary of Kruger, *Canon Revisited*.