

The Tests of Canonicity

Throughout the time when the canonical books of the Bible were written and afterward, other literature was produced which was asserted to be the word of God. This led godly believers to develop certain tests, based on the canonical books of the Bible, by which to judge the validity of these claims. The application of these tests does not impart canonicity, for the canonicity of any literature is determined by God. However, these tests enable us to recognize whether or not any literature is canonical. They follow in question form.

The Test of Divine Inspiration

Does the book claim to be divinely inspired? Is it inspired?

The Test of Human Authorship

Is the book written, by an accredited agent of God, such as a prophet, the Lord Jesus Christ, or one of His apostles? If not, did the writer have the gift of prophecy (David, Daniel) or a relation to a prophet or an apostle (Mark, Luke) that would raise his book to the level of their writings? Can the book be traced back to the time and/or the writer from who it professes to have come?

The Test of Authenticity

Is the book factually true? It is noteworthy that Bible authors did not use the false philosophical and scientific opinions of their times.

The Test of Testimony

Was the book universally recognized by the Jews and/or by the Christian church as being God's Word? Does the Holy Spirit bear witness to the regenerated reader that the book is His Word?

The Test of Agreement

Does the book agree doctrinally with the teachings of known canonical books? While there is progression in the Bible's revelation of doctrine, there is no contradiction. Is the content of the book of such spiritual character that it is in harmony with the dignity and majesty of God?

May I repeat again that these tests are based on what is known of the sixty-six canonical books of the Bible. When these tests are applied to ancient or current non-canonical literature that claims to be divine revelation, they readily show the falseness of this claim. They reveal that non-canonical literature does not meet the standard that is set by the Bible. Any literature that does not meet this standard is not God's Word. We praise God for His self-revelation by the written Word. As the psalmist of old, let us strive to meditate on it day and night (Ps. 1.1-3). They who do are blessed of God and lead happy and productive lives.