

## **Dr. Robert A. Peterson, Revelation & Holy Scripture, Session 20, D. A. Carson's FAQs, Enduring Authority Resources from NotebookLM**

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

### **1. Abstract of Peterson, Revelation & Holy Scripture, Session 20, D.A. Carson's FAQs, Enduring Authority, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL**

**Dr. Robert A. Peterson** presents **Session 20** of his teachings on **Revelation and Scripture**, focusing on **D. A. Carson's** responses to frequently asked questions from his book, "**The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures.**" Peterson highlights Carson's arguments against the notion of a theologically diverse early Christianity, asserting instead a foundational unity from which heresies emerged. The session further explores topics such as the relationship between God and his Word, the necessity of believing the whole Bible, the concept of divine and human authorship of scripture, and interpretations of the Genesis creation account. Finally, Peterson addresses the significance of literary genres in understanding biblical authority, the clarity of scripture, the New Testament's use of the Old Testament, and the Christian perspective on the Quran compared to the Bible.

**2. 22 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Peterson, Revelation & Holy Scripture, Session 20 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Theology → Theology, Peterson → Revelation & Scripture).**



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on20.mp3**

### 3. Briefing Document: Peterson, Revelation & Holy Scripture, Session 20, D.A. Carson's FAQs, Enduring Authority

#### Briefing Document: Key Themes and Ideas from Peterson's Review of Carson's "The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures" (Session 20)

This briefing document summarizes the main themes and important ideas presented by Dr. Robert A. Peterson in Session 20 of his teaching on Revelation and Holy Scripture. This session focuses on reviewing frequently asked questions (FAQs) from D.A. Carson's book, "The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures," highlighting key arguments and insights regarding the nature, authority, and interpretation of the Bible.

#### I. Theological Unity vs. Diversity in Early Christianity:

- Peterson addresses the claim that early Christianity was highly diverse theologically, with unity being imposed later by an orthodox group. He refutes this "Bauer thesis," popularized by Bart Ehrman, stating that **"the actual evidence runs in the other direction."**
- Carson argues that **"from one shared theological vision, many diverse heresies sprang up,"** rather than a triumphant theological stance emerging from many.
- Evidence supporting this view includes:
- **Significant theological unity within the New Testament itself:** Peterson notes, **"within the pages of a New Testament, careful what Jesus shows, there was far more theological unity than is sometimes alleged."**
- **Apostolic connection of the Gospels:** All four Gospels have **"discernible connections with specific apostles,"** unlike later, non-apostolic documents.
- **Traceable trajectory of proto-Orthodoxy:** The theological tradition preserving the apostolic teaching stands in contrast to other groups lacking this connection.

#### II. The Relationship Between God and His Word:

- While God and His word are not ontologically identical, Scripture imbues the word with divine authority. **"Scripture doesn't confuse God and his word, but it invests his word with the authority of God himself."**
- Believing and obeying God's word is equated with believing and obeying God.

### III. Believing the Gospel vs. Believing Everything in the Bible:

- While individuals may claim to believe the Gospel without accepting the entirety of the Bible, this stance is deemed **"not possible to do... consistently."**
- The Old Testament witness, apostolic witness, and Jesus' teaching link the Gospel and the appropriate response to it with the entirety of God's self-disclosure in Scripture.
- The Christian life extends beyond simply believing the Gospel.

### IV. The Dual Authorship of Scripture (Divine and Human):

- The concept of divine and human authorship can be challenging, and it's crucial to be faithful to the biblical language itself.
- Pitting the human against the divine author is problematic.
- The historical concept of "divine dictation" should not be misunderstood as reducing human authors to mere secretaries. The intent was to emphasize that **"the words of scripture are indeed God's words,"** while acknowledging the full contribution of the human authors. **"To claim that the church has held to divine dictation is to confuse the use of that language with the result of the bible... with a theory of inspiration, that is divine dictation of the word through mechanical authors functioning as mechanical secretaries, which is simply problematic."**

### V. Genesis and Ancient Near Eastern Creation Myths:

- While parallels exist between Genesis and myths like the Babylonian Enuma Elish, responsible analysis must consider the significant differences in worldview. **"Careful study discloses massive differences in worldview between Genesis and Enuma Elish."**

### VI. The Authority of Scripture and Literary Genre:

- Christians have sometimes overemphasized confessional settings in discussions of biblical authority and underemphasized the insights from university settings on literary genres.
- Increasing attention is being paid to the relationship between authority and genre.

- Biblical narratives establish historical reality and lead to the revelation of Jesus Christ. Different genres (law, prophecy, etc.) underscore God's authority in their specific appeals. **"Each genre not only has its own way of making its appeal but underscores the authority of God in making the demands or issuing the, for example, rebuke."**
- Studying literary genres enriches our understanding of Scripture and reveals more than previously understood.

## VII. Advantages of the Bible's Diverse Literary Genres:

- The Bible's diversity engages our humanity fully. **"The Bible's diversity... tells us that the authority of the bible... is the kind of authority that fully engages with our humanity."** (Barry Webb quoted)
- It speaks to our weaknesses and struggles, presenting a **"gracious, rather than a coercive authority."**
- This contrasts with the Quran, where God's participation in humanity is seen as potentially threatening to his deity. The God of the Bible interacts with humanity in diverse ways and supremely through the incarnation. He is the God **"who not only gave us a book and prophet but gave us himself."**

## VIII. The Clarity of Scripture:

- Clarity does not mean every part is equally easy, there's no need for teachers, or all interpretations are equally valid.
- It is a **"generous gift of a gracious father."** (Mark Thompson's title referenced)
- God's choice to reveal his redemptive purposes in human language presupposes clarity. Jesus' repeated question, **"have you not read?"** highlights this.
- The Spirit is involved in both the provision and reception of God's Word.
- **"The clarity of scripture is that quality of scripture which, arising from the fact that it is ultimately god's effective communicative act, ensures the meaning of this text is accessible to all who come to it in faith."** (Mark Thompson quoted)

## IX. Circularity in Establishing Jesus' View of Scripture:

- Appealing to the Gospels (part of Scripture) to establish Jesus' view of Scripture involves a **"softer circularity"** which is often unavoidable when considering ultimate authorities.

- Avoiding this would lead to an **"infinite regression"** of needing external authorities to validate each other.
- Some degree of circularity is acknowledged and even considered desirable by many scholars.

#### **X. The New Testament's Use of the Old Testament:**

- The New Testament's use of the Old Testament is **"variegated and complex."**
- Connections range from simple linguistic connections to direct fulfillment of prophecy, contextual echoes, *sensus plenior*, and typological connections.
- Carson argues that the New Testament uses the Old Testament responsibly, in contrast to some parallel Judaism of the first century.

#### **XI. Moving from Scripture to Theology:**

- Various approaches exist (adding up teachings, deriving principles, following trajectories), each with potential dangers.
- It's easy to make abstract principles inferred from the text more authoritative than the concrete particulars.
- God has given teachers, the history of the church, and the Spirit to help us be **"mastered by the text,"** rather than mastering it through our own principles.

#### **XII. Epistemology and Knowing God:**

- Epistemology (the study of knowledge) is crucial for understanding how we know or think we know God.
- It addresses what constitutes justified or warranted belief.
- Numerous factors (cognitive, moral, human finiteness, sinfulness, evidence, reason, revelation, faith) are intertwined with this discipline, making it complex but worthy of study.

#### **XIII. The Term "Inerrancy":**

- The need for qualifications and distinctions surrounding "inerrancy" is not unique; many theological terms require similar clarification.
- Paul Helm's simple definition: **"an expression, an assertion, a sentence, a formula, a document, a part of a document may be said to be inerrant if it is wholly true without error."**

#### **XIV. Interpretive Communities:**

- Interpretive communities (groups studying the Bible together) are increasingly relevant in a globalized Christian context.
- Listening to diverse interpretations can lead to richer understanding and even corrections.
- However, not all interpretations are equally valid or faithful to Scripture. Warnings against false doctrine must be heeded.
- Scripture should stand over us as the final judge, not the other way around.

#### **XV. Science and the Bible:**

- When science and the Bible seem to conflict, Scripture has final authority, but our interpretation of Scripture does not.
- Humility and careful listening are essential.
- Scientific theories are revisable. Christians should avoid being intimidated by every new scientific claim.
- Scripture and science should be allowed to speak in their own terms, avoiding the forcing of Scripture to address contemporary science.

#### **XVI. Holy Books of Scripture and World Religions:**

- The common view that all holy books essentially say the same thing is **"irresponsible"** and indefensible.
- These scriptures contain mutually contradictory statements on fundamental concepts (the nature of God, the person of Christ, salvation, etc.).
- Such a view insults devout believers and hinders serious interreligious dialogue, which requires acknowledging and respectfully engaging with differences.

#### **XVII. The Bible's Self-Attesting Claims:**

- The Bible's self-attesting claims are circular but not **"viciously circular."**
- Some degree of circularity is unavoidable when establishing the authority of an ultimate authority.
- Attempting to establish biblical authority through an external, greater authority would undermine the Bible's supreme status.

### **XVIII. Christian and Muslim Views of Their Holy Books:**

- While both Christians and Muslims view their holy books as authoritative, the similarities are "**superficial.**"
- Key differences include:
- **Authorship:** Bible - many human authors inspired by the Holy Spirit (double authorship); Quran - direct words of God without human mediation.
- **Language:** Bible - three languages; Quran - Arabic only.
- **Timeframe:** Bible - over 1500 years; Quran - approximately 22 years.
- **Structure:** Bible - historical arc; Quran - surahs of broadly descending length, primarily God's direct address.

This session provides a robust defense of the enduring authority of the Christian Scriptures by addressing common challenges and misconceptions. It emphasizes the importance of careful interpretation, recognizing the Bible's unique nature and its divine and human dimensions.

## 4. Study Guide: Peterson, Revelation & Holy Scripture, Session 20, D.A. Carson's FAQs, Enduring Authority

### Revelation and Scripture: D.A. Carson's FAQs

#### Quiz

Answer the following questions in 2-3 sentences each.

1. According to the text, what was Walter Bauer's thesis regarding the origins of Christianity, and who is a prominent modern popularizer of this view?
2. What are two pieces of evidence cited in the text that challenge Bauer's thesis and support the idea of early theological unity in Christianity?
3. Explain the relationship between God and his word as presented in the text, emphasizing whether they are considered ontologically identical.
4. While acknowledging that people can believe the Gospel without fully embracing the entire Bible, what does the text suggest about the consistency and long-term implications of such an approach?
5. How does the text address the notion of divine dictation of scripture, and what does it emphasize regarding the role of human authors?
6. According to the text, what are some important considerations when comparing the creation account in Genesis with ancient Near Eastern creation myths like the Babylonian Enuma Elish?
7. How does the text explain the relationship between the authority of scripture and its diverse literary genres? Provide an example of how a specific genre contributes to this authority.
8. What does the text mean by the "clarity of scripture," and what are some things it does *not* imply?
9. Why does the text argue that a certain degree of "soft circularity" is unavoidable and even desirable when establishing the supreme authority of something like scripture?
10. According to the text, what are some key differences between the Christian view of the Bible and the Muslim view of the Quran?

#### Answer Key

1. Walter Bauer's thesis claimed that early Christianity was highly diverse theologically, and doctrinal unity was imposed later by a group that deemed itself orthodox. Bart Ehrman, a former evangelical Christian, is presented as a prominent modern popularizer of this view.
2. The text cites the significant theological unity evident within the New Testament itself, reflecting the influence of Jesus on the apostles, and the credible apostolic connections of the four Gospels, unlike later non-canonical texts.
3. The text states that while God and his word are not ontologically identical, scripture repeatedly insists that believing, obeying, or disobeying God's word is equivalent to doing the same to God. Therefore, scripture is invested with God's own authority.
4. While acknowledging that people can initially believe the Gospel selectively, the text argues that this approach is inconsistent because the Gospel and the appropriate response to it are inherently linked to the broader scope of God's self-disclosure in his word throughout the Old and New Testaments.
5. The text clarifies that while some theologians used the term "dictation" to emphasize that the words of scripture are indeed God's words, they generally did not intend it to mean a mechanical process devoid of human contribution. The human authors made significant contributions beyond mere transcription.
6. When comparing Genesis to myths like Enuma Elish, the text emphasizes the importance of evaluating not only superficial parallels but also the massive differences in worldview. Furthermore, it suggests considering various explanations for any apparent similarities.
7. The authority of scripture is interwoven with its diverse literary genres, as each genre has its own way of appealing and underscores God's authority in its specific mode of communication. For example, narrative establishes historical revelation, while law makes authoritative demands.
8. The clarity of scripture does not mean every passage is equally easy, that teachers are unnecessary, or that all interpretations are equally valid. Rather, it refers to the accessibility of the core meaning of the text to those who approach it in faith, as a generous gift from God.
9. The text argues that when establishing a supreme authority, appealing to an external authority leads to an infinite regress. Therefore, a degree of "soft

circularity," where the authority's claims are considered in establishing its authority, is unavoidable and even desirable to avoid this regression.

10. The Bible has many human authors, was written over a long period in three languages, and comprises diverse literary genres tracing a historical arc with the concept of double authorship (divine and human). In contrast, the Quran is believed by Muslims to be the direct, unmediated words of God in Arabic, revealed to Muhammad over a shorter period, lacking the concept of human authorship and presenting itself in surahs without a historical narrative arc.

## Essay Format Questions

1. Discuss the implications of either accepting or rejecting the Bauer thesis regarding the theological diversity of early Christianity and the subsequent enforcement of orthodoxy. How does this perspective influence one's view of the New Testament and the development of Christian doctrine?
2. Analyze the relationship between believing the Gospel and accepting the full authority of scripture as presented in the text. What are the potential consequences of separating these two, and how does the text argue for their interconnectedness?
3. Explore the concept of the dual authorship of scripture (divine and human) as described in the text. What are the challenges in understanding this concept, and how does the text attempt to navigate them, particularly in relation to the idea of divine dictation?
4. Discuss the significance of recognizing the diverse literary genres within the Bible for understanding its authority and message. How does paying attention to genre enhance our comprehension of scripture, and what are some examples of how different genres function authoritatively?
5. Evaluate the argument for a "soft circularity" when establishing the authority of scripture. What are the potential strengths and weaknesses of this approach, and how does it address the challenge of justifying ultimate authority?

## Glossary of Key Terms

- **Bauer Thesis:** The historical-critical theory, popularized by Walter Bauer, suggesting that early Christianity was characterized by diverse theological viewpoints, with the eventual dominance of one orthodox perspective occurring over several centuries through enforced unity.
- **Proto-Orthodox:** A term used to describe the early Christian groups that scholars believe represent the historical trajectory leading to what became mainstream orthodox Christianity.
- **Ontologically:** Relating to the nature of being or existence. In the context of the text, it distinguishes between God's being and the being of his word.
- **Inerrancy:** The doctrine that the Bible in its original manuscripts is completely truthful and without error in all that it affirms.
- **Hermeneutical:** Relating to the theory and practice of interpretation, especially of biblical texts.
- **Census Plenior (Fuller Sense):** A method of biblical interpretation suggesting that a passage of scripture may have a meaning beyond its immediate historical context, intended by God and often revealed later in scripture.
- **Typological Connection:** A way in which the New Testament interprets the Old Testament, seeing persons, events, or institutions in the Old Testament as foreshadowing or prefiguring realities in the New Testament, particularly Jesus Christ.
- **Soft Circularity:** A form of argument where the authority of a source is established, in part, by the claims the source itself makes, deemed acceptable when establishing ultimate authority to avoid infinite regression.
- **General Revelation:** God's communication of himself to all people at all times through nature and human conscience.
- **Special Revelation:** God's specific communication of himself to particular people at particular times through supernatural means, most notably through the incarnation of Jesus Christ and the Holy Scriptures.
- **Sensus Divinitatis:** A Latin term meaning "sense of divinity" or "divine sense," referring to an innate human awareness or intuition of God's existence.

## **5. FAQs on Peterson, Revelation & Holy Scripture, Session 20, D.A. Carson's FAQs, Enduring Authority, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)**

### **Frequently Asked Questions on the Authority and Nature of Christian Scripture**

#### **1. How does the Christian understanding of the Bible address the claim that early Christianity was theologically diverse with unity only imposed later?**

The evidence suggests the opposite of this popular claim, often attributed to Walter Bauer and popularized by Bart Ehrman. Rather than multiple competing theologies eventually coalescing into orthodoxy, the New Testament reveals a foundational theological unity stemming from the teachings of Jesus and his apostles. Diverse heresies arose *from* this shared vision, and the early church identified and rejected these deviations, indicating a pre-existing standard of belief rather than a later imposition of uniformity. The close relationship of the Gospel writers to the apostles further supports this early theological coherence, unlike later non-canonical texts lacking such credible connections.

#### **2. If God and his Word are not the same, how can the Bible possess such profound authority?**

While Scripture does not equate God with his Word ontologically, it consistently portrays a profound connection. Believing God's Word is presented as believing God, obeying it as obeying him, and disobeying it as disobeying him. This indicates that God invests his Word with his own authority. Therefore, while distinct, the Bible is not merely a human document but carries the weight and authority of God himself as a means of his self-disclosure.

#### **3. Is it possible to accept the core message of the Gospel while disregarding other parts of the Bible?**

While individuals may selectively believe parts of the Bible, such an approach is ultimately inconsistent. The Old Testament witness, the teachings of Jesus, and the apostolic witness in the New Testament consistently link the Gospel message itself and the appropriate response to it with the broader scope of God's revelation in Scripture. Rejecting parts of this divinely inspired Word makes it questionable whether the true Gospel is genuinely understood and believed in its entirety.

**4. How should we understand the concept of dual authorship (divine and human) in the Bible, especially considering terms like "divine dictation"?**

The concept of dual authorship acknowledges that the Bible is both the Word of God and the product of human authors. It's crucial to avoid pitting the divine and human aspects against each other. The term "divine dictation," when used by theologians like Calvin, emphasized the divine origin and authority of the words, not necessarily a mechanical process devoid of human contribution. The human authors were not mere scribes but actively contributed their own styles, perspectives, and research within God's overarching inspiration. The focus should be on the faithful outcome: the words of Scripture are truly God's words, expressed through human agency.

**5. Given the Bible's diverse literary genres, how does this impact our understanding of its authority?**

Christians have rightly paid attention to the Bible's various literary genres, recognizing that authority is communicated differently through narrative, law, prophecy, poetry, and other forms. Each genre has its unique way of appealing to the reader and underscores God's authority in its specific manner. Understanding these genres allows for a richer and more nuanced comprehension of the unified revelation of God. The diversity itself reflects God's engagement with the fullness of human experience, making its authority gracious and relevant to our weaknesses and struggles.

**6. What does "the clarity of Scripture" mean, especially since many find the Bible difficult to understand?**

The clarity of Scripture does not imply that every passage is equally easy to grasp or that teachers are unnecessary. Rather, it refers to the fact that the core meaning of God's redemptive purposes, revealed in the language he gave humanity, is accessible to all who approach the Bible in faith. Jesus himself presupposed this clarity when he urged people to consider what they had read. The Holy Spirit also plays a role in both providing and illuminating God's Word, making its essential message understandable to believers.

**7. Isn't it circular reasoning to use the Gospels to establish Jesus' view of Scripture, since the Gospels are part of Scripture?**

While there is an element of "soft circularity" in such arguments, this is often unavoidable when establishing the ultimate authority in any domain. To appeal to an external authority to validate the supreme authority of the Bible would inherently place that external authority above it, leading to an infinite regress. Many scholars acknowledge this necessary aspect of self-attestation. The circularity is not "vicious" but rather a consequence of recognizing the Bible's ultimate and self-sufficient authority.

**8. How does the Christian view of the Bible compare to the Muslim view of the Quran?**

While both religions hold their respective books as holy and authoritative, the similarities are largely superficial. The Bible has numerous human authors writing in three languages over centuries, encompassing diverse literary genres and tracing a historical narrative from creation to consummation. Christians believe these human authors were divinely inspired, resulting in a God-breathed text with dual authorship. In contrast, Muslims believe the Quran is the direct, unmediated word of God in Arabic, revealed verbatim to Muhammad over a period of approximately 22 years. There is no concept of dual authorship in Islam. Structurally, the Quran is organized into surahs (chapters) of generally descending length and primarily features God's direct address, unlike the Bible's historical and diverse narrative structure.