

Criteria of Authenticity

- **The Christian's chief criterion of authenticity**

- "...Our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority [of the Holy Scripture] is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts." (*Westminster Confession of Faith* 1.5)

- **Critical scholars' criteria of authenticity**

- *Embarrassment*: Material is likely to be authentic if it could be seen to undermine the author's credibility or case.
 - Examples:
 - Jesus came from Nazareth
 - Jesus was baptized by John
 - Jesus' own family doubted him
 - Jesus was accused of having a demon ("Beelzebul")
 - Jesus predicted the imminent coming of the kingdom
 - Jesus' own disciples often doubted and fumbled
 - Jesus was crucified
- *Semiticisms*: Material is likely to be authentic if it shows evidence of a Hebrew/Aramaic source rather than Greek, or if it shows knowledge of Palestinian geography and customs.
 - Examples:
 - *Talitha kourai* meaning "Little girl, get up!" (Mark 5:41)
 - *Ephphatha* meaning "Be opened" (Mark 7:34)
 - *Abba* meaning "Father" (Mark 14:36)
 - *Raca* meaning "fool" (Matthew 5:22)
 - *Eli Eli lema sabachthani* meaning "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46)
- *Multiple Attestation*: Material is likely to be authentic if it is found in several independent sources.
 - Examples:
 - "Is a lamp brought in to be put under a basket, or under a bed, and not on a stand?" (Matt. 5:15; Mark 4:21; Luke 11:33)
 - "Why does this generation seek a sign? Truly, I say to you, no sign will be given to this generation." (Matt. 12:39; Mark 8:12; Luke 11:29)
- *Double Dissimilarity*: Material is likely to be authentic if it is different from earlier Judaism or later Christianity.
 - Examples:
 - Jesus' table fellowship with sinners
 - Jesus' proclamation of the coming kingdom of God
 - Jesus' self-description as the Son of Man
 - Jesus' teaching through parables
 - "The criterion of dissimilarity posits a huge rupture between a movement founder and his or her subsequent movement that is simply absurd. You

end up with a Jesus who said, thought, and did nothing that his earliest followers believed he said, thought, and did. Jesus becomes a free-floating iconoclast artificially insulated from the movement that took its name from him, claimed to follow his teachings, and memorialized his deeds and actions.” (Michael Bird, *How God Became Jesus*)

- *Double Similarity and Double Dissimilarity*: “When something can be seen to be credible (though perhaps deeply subversive) within first-century Judaism, *and* credible as the implied starting point (though not the exact replica) of something in later Christianity, there is a strong possibility of our being in touch with the genuine history of Jesus.” (N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*)

- **The problem with the criteria**

- What about material that doesn’t meet these criteria?
 - No good criteria to assess their authenticity.
 - If inauthentic, then there’s no plausible explanation for their origin.
 - If inauthentic, then why were they included in the gospels?
 - Apply the “trilemma” to the disciples

- **From the trees to the forest: Criteria of a plausible portrait of Jesus (3 C’s)**

- *Comprehensible*: Jesus’ message and ministry must have made sense for one coming from, and speaking to, a first-century Palestinian Jewish context.
- *Crucifiable*: Jesus’ message and ministry must have been offensive enough for the Jewish leaders to want to kill him.
- *Consequential*: Jesus’ message and ministry must have accounted for the rise of the early church, along with its confession of him as the risen Son of God.