Reframing the Question of Canon

Much scholarship on the formation of the canon known as the New Testament has focused on the “when” and the “how” questions: When did certain books become part of the canon and how were they selected? In The Question of Canon, however, New Testament scholar Michael J. Kruger takes up the “why” question, namely, why did Christians have a canon at all? And fundamentally attached to this question is another: Does the canon exist because of some later decision on the part of the second- or third-century church, or did it arise more naturally from the beginning of the Christian faith itself? In other words, is the development of the canon extrinsic or intrinsic to early Christianity?

“Our goal is not to deny the truth of the extrinsic model in its entirety, but to offer a well-intended corrective to its assessment and interpretation of some of the historical evidence,” Kruger notes in the introduction.

As opposed to serving up yet another standard introduction to canon, Kruger focuses on five tenets of the extrinsic model, offering an assessment of and response to each:

1. The Definition of Canon: Must We Make a Sharp Distinction Between the Definitions of Canon and Scripture?
2. The Origins of Canon: Was There Really Nothing in Early Christianity That May Have Led to a Canon?
3. The Writing of Canon: Were Early Christians Averse to Written Documents?
4. The Authors of Canon: Were the New Testament Authors Unaware of Their Own Authority?
5. The Date of Canon: Were the New Testament Books First Regarded as Scripture at the End of the Second Century?