

Title: Chain of Belief
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Scripture Reading: John 1:19-34
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Introduction:

- I. As a preacher, I often assume that those listening accept the truth of the Scriptures and would agree with statements like these below:
 - A. “Alien sinners need to be baptized for the remission of their sins.” (Acts 2:38)
 - B. “Christians need to observe the Lord’s Supper on the first day of the week, following apostolic example.” (Acts 20:7)
 - C. “Everyone should love their neighbors, even their enemies.” (Matthew 5:44; Romans 13:9).
 - D. Some might ask, “Why should I do these things? Says who?”
- II. Recognizing these statements as true and authoritative, however, involves the acceptance of several premises.
 - A. The premises are not unrelated; each premise stems from the previous.
 - B. I am going to refer to the sum of these premises as the “chain of belief.”
- III. Purpose of our study:
 - A. Survey the “chain of belief,” the premises that lead to the authority of biblical commands.
 - B. Introduce a series of sermons on the individual premises of the “chain of belief.”

Body:

I. The Foundation of Faith

A. The importance of faith

1. **Hebrews 11:1 (ESV)** ¹ Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.
2. **Hebrews 11:6 (ESV)** ⁶ And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.
3. **2 Corinthians 5:6–7 (ESV)** ⁶ So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, ⁷ for we walk by faith, not by sight.

B. Christians are sometimes ridiculed for their “faith,” i.e., blind belief.

1. Many unbelievers view faith as wishful thinking, belief that is unsupported by any evidence.
2. A blind faith is subjective, i.e., it has its source and confirmation in the believer. There is no real reason for such faith other than its desirability for the believer.
3. A blind faith only motivates toward a particular action until a more desirable belief/action appears.

C. Biblical faith, however, is belief that has indirect objective evidence as its foundation.

1. John identified his purpose in writing his gospel account:
 - a. **John 20:30–31 (ESV)** ³⁰ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.
 - b. Note that John’s testimony (his account of the signs) is indirect evidence. We did not see the signs, but John testified to these miracles of Jesus as an eyewitness.
 - c. “in the presence of the disciples” - they could be witnesses of Jesus’ signs
2. Other passages that mention the evidence supporting belief:
 - a. **Acts 2:22 (ESV)** ²² “Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know—
 - b. **Hebrews 2:3–4 (ESV)** ³ how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, ⁴ while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.
3. The indirect evidence behind faith is often testimony. Note these statements about John the Baptist.
 - a. **John 1:6–7 (ESV)** ⁶ There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him.
 - b. **John 1:19, 32–34 (ESV)** ¹⁹ And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?” ... ³² And John bore witness: “I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. ³³ I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ ³⁴ And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.”
4. The apostles were eyewitness of the resurrected Christ. Example passages:
 - a. **Acts 2:32 (ESV)** ³² This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses.
 - b. **Acts 3:15 (ESV)** ¹⁵ and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses.

II. Links in the Chain

A. “Why should I do these things? Says who?”

1. Answer: “Because God says so.”
2. “How do you know what God says or thinks?”
3. Answer: “The Bible reveals the will of God.”

B. Existence of God

1. **Psalms 19:1 (ESV)** ¹ The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.

2. **Romans 1:20 (ESV)** ²⁰ For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.
 3. If there is no God, then every man can do what is right in his own eyes.
 - a. **Judges 17:6 (ESV)** ⁶ In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.
 - b. **Judges 21:25 (ESV)** ²⁵ In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.
- C. Need for special revelation
1. Not everyone believes that God has an expressed will for mankind.
 2. God's existence can be seen in the natural creation, but the creation doesn't reveal His will.
- D. The Bible: Divine Revelation
1. If God has expressed His will for mankind, how did He reveal it to man?
 2. Is the Bible God's revealed will? Are there other documents that also reveal God's will?
 3. Examples:
 - a. The Koran
 - b. The Book of Mormon
 - c. The Vedas of Hinduism
- E. Inspiration: All of Scripture or Just Part?
1. If one accepts the Bible as divine revelation, the question remains: all of Scripture or just part of it?
 2. Some would say that the Bible contains divine revelation, but not all the Bible is divine revelation.
 3. Illustration: The Jesus Seminar (see details at end of outline)
 4. Illustration: Those who believe that the apostle Paul's teaching about the role of women reveal his misogynistic tendencies (women can't serve as elders, preachers, submit to men in marriage, etc.)
- F. Transmission Process: Accurate?
1. Even if one accepts the idea that the original authors of the New Testament books were guided by the Holy Spirit, have those original documents been accurately transmitted by means of scribal copying through the centuries?
 2. Is the Bible full of errors, as some allege?
 - a. Illustration: Professor Mashoko studied with a man who visited the Hillside congregation and took exception to Professor's teaching that baptism is essential to salvation.
 - 1) From Professor's report (Feb., 2022): "He strangely believes that baptism is optional and everyone should be told to decide whether they want to be

baptised or not. To him baptism has nothing to do with salvation and therefore it is left to an individual to choose. I opened a couple of passages to show it was him in error not those who teach baptism as compulsory. I gave in when he blatantly said the Bible was full of error so he wanted me to close it and we use our wisdom to decide whether people should be baptised or not.”

3. Including translation of manuscripts in this transmission process, is a particular version of the Bible an accurate translation?
 4. As versions of the Bible multiply, cultural trends are creeping into some translations.
- G. Interpretation - are we understanding the Bible as God intends?
1. Interpretation would involve:
 - a. Recognizing the character of biblical statements: literal or figurative?
 - b. Understanding commands that are peculiar to first century culture and others that are not.
 - 1) Example: Foot washing
 - 2) Example: Greeting one another with a holy kiss
 - c. Respect for context (covenant, topic, etc.)
 2. Some would argue that the Bible is too complex for anyone to be confident of correctly understanding it. Wouldn't that make God's revelation of His will rather futile, if it is impossible for humans to understand it correctly?

Conclusion:

- I. Illustration: The strength of a chain is only as strong as the weakest link.
 - A. Demonstrate with one chain of metal links - strong resistance
 - B. Demonstrate with a paper link chain - very little resistance
 - C. Demonstrate with two metal chains joined by a paper link - very little resistance
- II. Our faith is like one of those chains - which one?
- III. I believe that there is evidence for faith in the existence of God and the Bible as God's inspired and inerrant word.
 - A. It is my intention to present a series of sermons (non-consecutive) to address the questions that I have posed in this study.
 - B. It is my purpose to strengthen each of the links of this "chain of belief" by presenting evidence to support each premise.

Invitation:

- I. In the Bible we have testimony that asserts the deity of Jesus - He is the resurrected Son of God.
- II. Jesus commands all people to believe in Him and be baptized for the remission of sins.
- III. Will your faith cause you to obey His will?

<https://www.westarinstitute.org/projects/the-jesus-seminar/>

The Jesus Seminar was organized in 1985 to renew [the quest of the historical Jesus](#) and to report the results of its research to the general public, rather than just to a handful of gospel specialists. Initially, the goal of the Seminar was to review each of the sayings and deeds attributed to Jesus in the gospels and determine which of them could be considered authentic.

Thirty scholars took up the challenge at the initial meeting in Berkeley, California. Eventually more than 200 professionally trained specialists, called [Fellows](#), joined the group at various phases. As the editors of the Seminar's 1993 book *The Five Gospels* explain in their Preface, the Fellows of the Jesus Seminar represent a wide array of Western religious traditions and academic institutions. They have been trained in the best universities in North America and Europe. [» More about Westar Fellows](#)

The Seminar met twice a year to debate technical papers that were prepared and circulated in advance. At the close of debate on each agenda item, Fellows voted using colored beads to indicate the degree of authenticity of the words and deeds attributed to Jesus in the gospels. Dropping colored beads into a box soon became a trademark of the Jesus Seminar. [» More about voting](#)

Among the findings is that, in the judgment of the Jesus Seminar Fellows, about 18 percent of the sayings and 16 percent of the deeds attributed to Jesus in the gospels are authentic.

The Jesus Seminar comprised three phases:

- Phase 1, [Sayings of Jesus](#) (1985-1991)
- Phase 2, [Deeds of Jesus](#) (1991-1996)
- Phase 3, [Profiles of Jesus](#) (1996-1998)

Why Vote?

First, Jesus Seminar Fellows had to agree how they would reach their decisions. After extended debate, they adopted voting as the most efficient way of determining the degree of scholarly consensus on a given point.

Voting also makes it possible to report the results to a broad public that may not be interested in the arcane details and extended arguments that went into those votes.

This is in contrast to the usual scholarly procedure of making up one's mind privately, publishing opinions in some scholarly journal, and then waiting to see whether other specialists agree. The process is glacially slow, painful, and usually indecisive.

However, voting is not without precedent in biblical scholarship. Committees creating a critical text of the Greek New Testament under the auspices of the United Bible Societies vote on whether to print a particular text and what variants to consign to notes. Translation committees, such as those that created the King James Version and the Revised Standard Version, vote in the course of their deliberations on which translation proposal to accept and reject.

Voting does not, of course, determine the truth—it only indicates what the best judgment is of a significant number of scholars sitting around the table. It was deemed entirely consonant with the mission of the Jesus Seminar to decide whether, after careful review of the evidence, a particular saying or parable did or did not fairly represent the voice of the historical Jesus.

How Voting Works

In an example from Phase 1 of the Jesus Seminar, [Sayings of Jesus](#), Jesus Seminar Fellows adopted four categories to indicate authenticity:

- Red: likely authentic
- Pink: somewhat likely
- Gray: somewhat unlikely
- Black: unlikely to be authentic

Each color was assigned a number rating, so that votes could be quantified with a weighted average.

“When in doubt, leave it out.”