

Chain Reference: the Bible

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Introduction.

- A. The other day, I was hauling dirt in my backyard, as I tend to do a lot these days, when my next-door neighbor Vic came out to check on his pool. I said hi to him, and we got to talking. I nudged the conversation toward religious matters whenever I had opportunity, and pretty soon, we got on the topic of the Bible itself. Vic said that there are so many different ways to interpret the Bible, that as far as he could tell, it didn't make much difference how you read it. Of course, I didn't agree with that, and said in reply that the Bible is something that each one of us can individually understand and learn the truth from. We chatted on amiably for a little while longer and then went our separate ways, but I intend to bring the subject up again with him.
- B. I'm sure, though, that of all of us in this congregation, I'm not the only one who knows people with different views on the Bible itself than we hold. That makes this an important topic for us to study with them. After all, if someone believes that he doesn't have to read the word, or that he can't understand it even if he does read it, he will never become a Christian. It's a battle we have to win before we go on to anything else.
- C. To that end, we're going to have another chain-reference study on this subject. For those of you who haven't heard one of these lessons before, here's the way it works: On a page in the back of your Bible, write down the words "the Bible," and next to them, write 2 Timothy 3:16-17. That's going to be our first Scripture of the evening. Then, once we turn to 2 Timothy 3:16-17, in the margin next to it, write 1 Corinthians 2:12-13, which will be our second Scripture. If you continue this process through all eight Scriptures this evening, here's what you'll have at the end: a study you can go through with someone without remembering anything more than that it starts on that page in the back of your Bible. Every time you turn to a passage, the next passage to turn to will be written next to it. Let's develop, then, this chain reference on the Bible.

I. The Nature of the Bible.

- A. As I said just a moment ago, the first passage we're going to be looking at is **2 Timothy 3:16-17**, so write that one down on one of those blank pages in the back, next to the words "the Bible," and then turn there with me. This is a passage that many of us are already quite familiar with, but it's an important place to begin our study of the word. It tells us that unlike any other writings in the world, the books of the Bible are inspired.
- B. Here's why this is important. In my life, I've read a lot of books. Some of them have said things I agreed with; some of them haven't. In all cases, though, it was up to me to pick and choose what I wanted to listen to, because I figured I had as much right to decide as the guy who wrote the book in the first place. Because the Bible is from God, though, we do not have the right to pick and choose what we want to listen to in it. Instead, it is God who has the right to decide what we should do. We are not on the same plane as He is. We are His inferiors. Just like in the army, the private doesn't argue with the general, in life, we don't argue with God. Once we accept that the Bible is from God, we are duty-bound to obey all of it.
- C. However, it is not true that just the main thrust of the Scripture was given by God, and its various authors filled in the blanks as they saw fit. Instead, we see the truth about this idea in **1 Corinthians 2:12-13**. This is the next link in our chain, so write this Scripture reference down next to 2 Timothy 3:16-17, then turn to it with me. In this passage, Paul is telling us something critical about the process of inspiration. The Holy Spirit didn't just nudge him and send him off to preach a sermon; it told him what words to use.
- D. There are plenty of folks out there who don't like this idea of word inspiration. They prefer to believe instead that the Bible is kind of inspired, but that it has a bunch of non-inspired bits of human wisdom mixed through it like nuts in a coffee cake. This is a really convenient belief to have if the Bible says some things that you don't like, like, for instance, Paul's instructions that women are not to exercise authority in the church. If you don't believe in word inspiration, you can say, "That's just Paul being a chauvinist" and do what you want.
- E. That's not an option that 1 Corinthians 2 gives us. Paul says every word he wrote came from God. That leaves us, then, with two choices. Either Paul is a liar, and we should reject everything he says, or Paul is telling the truth, and we must accept everything he says. If we believe Paul, then we must also believe that every word in the Bible, down to the tense of each verb it uses, is precisely the way that God wanted it to be. Even the most obscure parts of it are vitally relevant to us, because they are God speaking to us.
- F. It's just as important, though, to note what Jesus reveals about the Scripture in **John 17:17**. This is our next stop, so write John 17:17 in the margin next to 1 Corinthians 2:12-13, and then turn to the passage. Here, Jesus tells us quite simply that the word of God is truth. Anything that the Bible says, we need to believe, because the Bible tells it exactly like it is. It is the most reliable witness possible to any fact or event.
- G. This, too, is an idea that comes in for a lot of attack. Scientists want us to believe that mankind evolved from critters swarming in the primordial soup; liberal scholars want us to believe that Jesus was just a man who died on the cross and stayed dead. Those folks, and plenty more besides, want us to believe in something

that man came up with instead of in something that God revealed. Brethren, that's a ridiculous notion. If there's one thing that's true about humankind, it's that we aren't nearly as smart as we think we are. It's easy for us to look back and laugh at the scientists 200 years ago who believed that malaria came from breathing swamp gas, but it's a lot harder, especially for scientists, to recognize that they might be just as badly mistaken today. People are fallible. God isn't. When God tells us something is true, let's believe Him.

- H. Just as the Bible is true, so too is it complete. We see this, among other passages, in **Jude 3**. Jude, of course, has only one chapter, so there isn't a chapter reference. Write Jude 3 down next to John 17:17, then turn there and read it along with me. There are two keys to understanding this passage. The first is getting a handle on what Jude means when he says "the faith." This isn't faith in the sense of the belief that we have in God. This is THE faith, in other words, the entire system of Christian doctrine that we believe in. It was "once for all" delivered to us, and "once for all" is our second key. It tells us that all the inspired teaching we will ever have from God was delivered once, during and shortly after the time when Christ lived on earth. This means, then, that the Bible is the complete record of everything that God wants us to know. It's all we need.

II. Our Reactions.

- A. However, simply because the Bible is inspired, true, and complete doesn't mean that everyone who reads it is going to come away with the truth. Along these lines, we need to look at **2 Peter 3:15-16**. This is our next passage, so scribble it down next to Jude 3, and then turn there with me. At first glance, this is a somewhat gloomy take on Scripture. Peter here says that some things that Paul writes are hard to understand and that people can twist and distort them to the point where it will cost them their souls.
- B. This tells us two very important things, though. First, it tells us that we need to be totally honest with ourselves and with the text when we read the Bible. If we come to the Scripture wanting to justify our own beliefs and desires, rather than wanting to find out what God says, we will probably be able to find enough passages to twist and pervert to feel good about ourselves. The problem is, though, that that kind of dishonest, self-serving reading of Scripture is worthless, and we'll pay for it on the day of judgment.
- C. Second, though, this passage tells us that we absolutely cannot trust anyone else to read the Scripture for us. I can keep watch over my own heart to make sure that I'm being honest, but I can't keep watch over anyone else's. That means that when some preacher gets up in the pulpit and tells me that the Bible says thus and such, I have to study the word myself to see whether that's true. If I don't check up on him, I'm entrusting my own soul to someone I don't know is honest. Folks, we wouldn't give our house keys to someone we weren't sure was honest! Why in the world would I entrust my soul to anybody but Jesus?
- D. On the flip side, though, is the idea that we can understand the word if we are honest. We find this in **Ephesians 3:4**, so write that down next to 2 Peter 3:15-16, then turn there with me. One of the most important thoughts in the Bible is this idea right here, that when I read I can understand. Not only is the minister up front not to be trusted, I can use my Bible to check up on him myself, and if I'm being honest with the text, I can get out of it what God wants me to get. I can use my common sense to learn His will.
- E. This is such an important thing to understand, and it's something that 99% of the so-called Christian world doesn't understand. Just like my next-door neighbor, they're content to sit in the pews on Sunday morning and trust in some other man to tell them the truth. Friends, let's not trust in men. Let's trust in God's word.
- F. Even more than that, though, it is not merely possible for us to read the word. It is something that God expects. This is evident from what Jesus says in **Matthew 19:3-4**. This is our next Scripture, of course, so jot it down next to Ephesians 3:4, then turn there so we can look at it together. Notice the way that Jesus deals with the Pharisees here. They come to Him with a question about divorce, a question they think cannot be answered. Jesus, though, doesn't think so. In fact, He thinks that the Pharisees should already know the answer to the question, and they should know because it's in the Hebrew Scriptures, and they should have read it and understood it. This is just common sense, folks. If God has given us minds that are capable of understanding the word, and if He has given us a word that is understandable, He clearly expects us to put those two things together. If we don't, Jesus may well ask us someday, "Have you not read?"
- G. In fact, if we don't study the Bible, it is certain that we will suffer the consequences someday, because the word is going to be our standard of judgment. Jesus tells us so in **John 12:48**, so write that Scripture in your Bibles next to Matthew 19:3-4, then turn there with me. It'll be the last Scripture in the study. What Jesus says here, of course, doesn't mean that the word is going to transform into Word-Man and talk to each one of us on the last day. Instead, He means that the word is the law by which we will be judged. God is going to go through our lives, consider every last thing we've done, and compare each action to what His word said we should do. If we haven't lived according to that standard, He will condemn us to hell for eternity.
- H. Now, the application here is obvious. When I'm driving down the highway, I keep a close eye out for changes in the speed limit, and I follow that speed limit, so that I won't get pulled over and written up for violating the law. In the same way, we know what the standard is for our lives. God isn't going to be sneaky and change the standard on us without notice. However, He is going to hold us to it. We need to live up to it.

Conclusion. If you haven't been living according to the standard, repent and return while there's still time.