

The Sad Truth about the Jesus Seminar

The scholars of the Jesus Seminar, which came to Sarasota and which forms the content basis for much of what we see about the “historical Jesus” in the media, maintain that theirs is the intellectual and rational approach to Christianity. The sad truth is that their approach is tainted by skepticism and poor technique. While their conclusions appeal to the unfaithful masses and secular media, believers in Jesus Christ should reject them.

Problem 1: Their approach to the scriptures is skeptical.

The scholars of the Jesus Seminar approach scripture with skepticism that taints their investigations and thus taints their conclusions. For example, when analyzing the gospel accounts, they employ a skeptical type of “form criticism.” Form criticism can be useful as a literary device to help us interpret small sections of scripture. But the scholars of the Jesus Seminar employ it in a whole different way: they challenge the accuracy and truth of every line of Scripture.

They start by *assuming* the gospels are not accurate, and so they seek to get under the “theological overlay” to the “more genuine” Jesus material. They *assume* that the gospel writers changed the true stories to suit the needs of their individual church communities. There are three obvious flaws in this assumption. The first flaw in this logic is the failure to account for the thousands of eye witnesses to the events recorded in the gospels. Because of all these eye witnesses, it is not possible that falsified gospels would have become the accepted record of Jesus. Notice too that Luke gives the impression of careful research among the eye witness accounts, both in what he said about his approach and in the detail of what he wrote. Hundreds of details in his historical account have been verified as accurate by outside sources.

The second flaw in this logic is the assumption that the gospels were written for small church communities. The nature of the writing makes it clear that they were intended for wide distribution. The third flaw is the unwarranted assumption that the gospel writers were each so completely dishonest that in their zeal to serve the God of truth they would construct a totally falsified account of the words and actions of the Savior. There is no basis for this negative assumption about their character, and much to commend the view that they were honest recorders of what they knew to be true.

Problem 2: They impose arbitrary criteria for proof.

Because the scholars of the Jesus Seminar approach the biblical text with skepticism, they have imposed *arbitrary* criteria upon the text to prove itself. In reality, there is no reason to challenge the biblical text: the burden of proof should be on these scholars who challenge its accuracy, but instead they think it is rational that they can just *assume* inaccuracy and then place the burden of proof on the text.

One aspect of their skepticism is the *arbitrary assumption* that the text was corrupted by Jewish and Greek influences. Thus, one of the criteria for proof they arbitrarily impose on the text is called “dissimilarity.” This means they arbitrarily assume that a passage is

less likely to be true if it has anything to do with the Jewish or Greek cultures of the day. As a result, they cast doubt on passages which explain Jesus using Old Testament scripture and imagery! Thus, they cast doubt on one of the most important authenticating aspects of the gospels, the evidence that Jesus was the promised Messiah!

Another *arbitrary* criterion for proof they put on the text is called “double attestation,” which means they doubt anything from the gospels that does not show up in two or more “independent” places. Ironically, while the scholars of the Jesus Seminar impose these arbitrary criteria on the biblical text, they *assume* the accuracy of non-biblical texts such as the supposed “gospel” of Thomas. Most other scholars agree that this document is from a time period well after that of Jesus’ apostles and reflects Gnostic thought, not Christian. Yet, while challenging the Bible to prove its accuracy, the scholars of the Jesus Seminar *assume* the accuracy of this text which promotes a post-apostolic corruption of Christian thought.

Problem 3: They conclude half of the gospel content is false. The skeptical assumptions and methods of the scholars of the Jesus Seminar inevitably led them to skeptical conclusions. In their estimation, only about 20% of the biblical gospel accounts are accurate, with maybe another 30% essentially true. Thus, they have chosen to doubt about half of the words of God in the gospels! It reminds one of the serpent’s trick with Eve, casting doubt in her mind about what God really said.

You have to ask yourself, without the Bible, on what basis can you believe in Jesus? Without the Bible, what basis is there for Christian faith? What the scholars of the Jesus Seminar have done is cast doubt on over half of the gospel accounts, the only historically accepted written records of Jesus’ life and teachings. This has now allowed them to invent their own “historical” Jesus the way they want him to be, and allowed others to begin remaking true Christianity into something that is antithetical to real Christian faith.

According to the website of Westar Institute, sponsor of the Jesus Seminar research, the following local churches have identified themselves as open to this kind of thinking: First United Methodist Church; First Congregational Church of Christ; and Unity Church. It is no surprise to see Unity Church on this list. They are self-identified as a “New Thought” church, which does not acknowledge Jesus as part of the Trinity, as the divine Son of God. Instead, on their website they argue “Jesus was a special person in history who expressed perfection and thereby became the Christ.” They also deny his saving work at the cross, saying “He did not relieve us of the necessity of working out our own salvation, but His example and teachings show us the way.” These are the folks aligned with the Jesus Seminar, so believers beware!

The sad truth about the Jesus Seminar: Their lack of faith and poor research methods have led them astray. If you believe Jesus was who he said he was, the Son of God and promised Messiah [Christ], and if you believe Jesus did what he said he would, sacrifice himself on the cross to offer salvation to us, then you want to stay away from the teachings of the Jesus Seminar. They have gone astray, and are leading others there too. Warn those you love.