

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

SPREADING THE SOUL-SAVING MESSAGE OF JESUS

BIBLE AUTHORITY

Lesson 2

Introduction by narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST. Spreading the soul-saving message of Jesus. And now, Kevin Pendergrass.

Welcome to the second lesson in our study of Bible authority. To summarize the things we learned in our initial lesson on Bible authority, we first defined (using the Bible) what authority is. Authority is the power or permission to act (Acts 4:8-10). Second, we then saw who has “all authority.” The Lord has all authority (Mt. 28:18). We must seek His authority before we can commit a certain act if we want to be pleasing to God. We cannot say simply, “This feels right to me,” or “I’ve always done it this way.” Because the Lord has all authority, we must have His permission before we do something. Third, we then examined where God gives us permission. He does not speak to us directly, address us through a dream or vision, or whisper to us. Rather, authority comes from the Word of God. The Bible is our standard (Rom. 10:17). Fourth, we stressed how important it is for us not to go to wrong sources of authority such as our feelings or emotions. We must make sure that we do not look to preachers to tell us what to do, but instead must go to God’s Word.

Now we need to understand that if we are going to go by the Bible, we must go by the Bible and only by the Bible. We cannot go to manmade manuals or creed books, and view them as being just as authoritative as the Word of God—because they are not. We need to devote a whole lesson to understanding the condemnation involved in adding to or taking away from God’s Word. Here is a great example. Picture in your mind a buffet where you would go to eat dinner. What will you do if you see on the buffet something that you do not like, and thus do not want to eat? Are you going to put some of that food on your plate and consume it anyway? Of course not—because it’s something you do not like or want. You will pass it up, and when you find something you do like, you will take some of it. That is how a lot of people treat the Bible—as if were some sort of “Bible buffet.” They come to the Bible and say, “I like this about grace, and I like this about love.” But then they go to James 2:24-26, which teaches that “faith without works is dead,” and all of a sudden they don’t like what they see. Thus, they decide just to pass on by it without spiritually consuming such a teaching. We cannot do that with God’s Word. We cannot pick and choose the things that we want to obey, while passing up the things we do not want to obey. The Bible is not a buffet. We must take all of the Word of God.

In Malachi 3:6 we see God’s unchanging nature. “I am the Lord; I do not change.” Throughout human history, whenever God tells us to do something, we are not to add to it or take away from it. This principle pertains to the unchanging nature of God. God has not changed, and will not change. We must learn this important lesson so that we understand that we must not add to or take away from God’s Word.

The Bible contains specific statements that condemn adding to or taking away from God’s commands as found within His Word. These passages specifically tell us not to add to or take away from God’s Word. I want us to look at these first so that we understand in very clear language what God has revealed to us. The first passage is found in Deuteronomy 4:2. “You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may

keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you.” The context has to do with God and physical Israel under the Old Testament. God was dealing with His people. He gave them commands, and told them not to add to or take away from those commands. It would be hard to misunderstand what God said in Deuteronomy 4:2. In fact, He said the same thing to the Israelites in Deuteronomy 12:32. “Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it.” Not only are we not to add to or take away from God’s Word, but we are to “be careful” not to do those things. This was a warning from God. We must make sure that we are not doing those things. We may accidentally do it, but it is still wrong. So we must be careful to make sure that we do not fall into such a trap. Under the Old Law, could God’s people add to or take from His Word? Absolutely not! They were specifically condemned when they did such things. In Proverbs 30:6 we read, “Do not add to His words, lest He rebuke you, and you be found a liar.” This is common sense. If someone were to add to the words that we had spoken, then we would know that they were a liar. If someone says that we said a certain thing, but we did not say it, then we would know that the person was lying. It is the same way with God. When God has told us in His Word to do something, and we add to it, what are we doing? We are lying, and the Lord will rebuke us. When we alter God’s commands in any way, we are lying because we are not saying what God told us to say. In fact, that also is why the Bible says that those who alter God’s commands are false teachers. Those people need to be rebuked and corrected because they have add to or taken away from God’s Word. Today when people add to or take away from God’s commands, they are teaching false doctrine. Not only will they be lost and go to Hell if they do not repent, but the people who listen to them will be lost as well. We need to heed God’s warnings.

In the New Testament, we see that in Galatians 1:6-10 Paul was warning the Christians in Galatia not to listen to another source of information. Paul started by saying, “I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel...” Why was Paul “marveling”? Paul had been with those Christians. He had worked with them in order to ground them in the truth by teaching them. He could not believe that they were listening to another gospel, and that they were adding to and taking away from God’s Word. In verse 7 Paul went on to say about that “other gospel,” which “is not another.” Paul said that the “good news” that these other people were preaching was not good news at all. Rather, it was bad news because it was not the truth. He went on to say, “There are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ.” Not much has changed since that time. Today, people still want to pervert the Gospel of Christ. Under the Old Covenant, people wanted to pervert it. And under the New Covenant, people still want to pervert it. People have always wanted to add to or take away from God’s Word. Paul said that he was having trouble believing that the Christians in Galatia were listening to people who were doing those types of things. In verse 8 Paul warned, “But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.” Paul even told the Galatian Christians, “Even if I tell you something that you know is not from God, you are not to listen to me.” He said that even if an angel from Heaven came to them to tell them that they had “additional information” from them or “another book” that they needed to begin teaching alongside the Bible, they were not to believe that angel, who was “accursed.” A strong condemnation was placed on anyone who would do such a thing. In verse 9 Paul repeats himself by saying, “As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed. For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? If I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ.” This is a strong warning (and condemnation) about adding to or taking away from God’s Word. Verse 10 reveals a lot. The reason that people add to or take away from God’s Word is not because

of God, but because of man. Paul said that he was not trying to please man, but God. He wanted to do what God told him to do. Thus, in Galatians 1:6-10 we see a condemnation pronounced under the New Law regarding the fact that even if any angel from Heaven were to try to get us to add to or take away from the Word of God, we are not to do such a thing. That is strong language. If an angel from Heaven cannot alter God's Word, then certainly a human preacher or teacher with whom we come in contact cannot do such a thing with God's approval.

In Galatians 3:15 we see something else that Paul wrote: "Brethren, I speak in the manner of men: though it is only a man's covenant, yet if it is confirmed, no one annuls or adds to it." No one can add to a man's covenant. It cannot be added to or taken from. No one can alter it in any way. If that is true with a man's covenant, how much more true is it of God's covenant? We must make sure that we are not trying to alter it, add to it, or take away from it. We must be sure that we are not changing what God has given us.

In the Book of Revelation we see that the apostle John had seen certain visions that he was to record to give to the seven churches of Christ spread across Asia Minor. In Revelation 22:18-19 he wrote,

"I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book."

In the very last book of the Bible, we read a warning against adding to or taking away from God's Word. We see such warning found throughout the Bible. Are we heeding these warnings, which are specific commands that tell us not to add to or take away from God's Word? We need to stay far away from such things.

The next point in this lesson has to do with "principle statements" that condemn adding to or taking away from God's Word. By "principle statements," I am referring to passages that may not come out and specifically say, "Do not add to or take away from God's Word," but that contain the principle teaching us not to alter God's Word in any way. For example, in Deuteronomy 5:32 and Deuteronomy 17:11,17 we see that we are not to turn to the right or to the left. Joshua 1:7 teaches,

"Only be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go."

We are not to turn to the left or the right, but are instead to walk the straight and narrow path (Mt. 7:13-14). A person can go too far to the right or the left. That is why we must walk the narrow path. We must "walk in the light as He is in the light" (1 Jn. 1:7) so that we do not go off or add commands to God's Word, and so that we do not "loose" God's commands. We must make sure that we are not going to either the right or to the left. Ecclesiastes 3:14 says, "I know that whatever God does, It shall be forever. Nothing can be added to it, and nothing taken from it. God does it, that men should fear before Him." The principle here is that we must not add to or take away from God's Word.

In the New Testament we find Paul writing to the church at Corinth, which had a lot of problems. There was a lot of division in the church in Corinth (1 Cor. 1). There were some people who wanted to follow the person who had baptized them. Paul told them not to do that. How can problems be resolved so that we can all be unified? In 1 Corinthians 1:10 Paul said that we are all to speak the same thing, be of the same mind, and be of the same judgment. Some people might think that is impossible. But in 1 Corinthians 4:6 Paul

provided the way to carry out that command when he wrote, “Do not think or go beyond that which is written.” There was a problem in the church in Corinth (or the problem could have arisen) of people being puffed up. Paul told them not to think or go beyond that which is written. People today might say about something, “I know the Bible doesn’t say anything about it, but I don’t have a problem with it.” If someone has such an attitude, he is thinking or going beyond what is written. The Bible condemns that. We must not do such a thing. When do problems come into play? It is when people leave the Word of God, or add to it or take away from it. Paul says that we are not to go beyond what is written. If people would obey this command, it alone would clear up a lot of confusion that people have. This principle teaches us that we are not to add to or take away from the Word of God.

In 1 Timothy 1:3 we see the principle that if we are so excited about something that we want to tell someone else about it, and we call that person on the phone, will we wait an hour into that conversation to tell him about it? No. We will want that topic to be the first thing we say because it is something that is very important. At the very beginning of his letter to Timothy, Paul said, “As I urged you when I went into Macedonia—remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine.” Paul told Timothy to urge people not to teach any other doctrine, and to make sure that he did not teach any other doctrine. If we take things away from God’s Word, are we teaching another doctrine? Yes, we certainly are. If we add things to God’s Word, are we teaching another doctrine? Yes, we certainly are. The principle that Paul gives to Timothy is not to add to or take away from God’s Word. No one has the authority to teach “another doctrine.”

Some people attitude seems to be, “I understand what the Bible says. But big deal! What happens if I decide to take away from it or add to it? God’s not going to do anything to me, is He? It’s nothing that big. God will understand. Adding one or two things won’t change much, will it? Is it that big a deal?” Let’s look in the Bible at some examples of people who did such things. In Genesis 3:4 we see Satan (as a serpent) talking to Eve. He changed one word of the command that God had given Adam and Eve. The Lord had said, “Do not eat from the tree in the midst of the garden. If you do, you shall surely die” (Gen. 2:17). Satan, however, came along and changed just one word by saying, “You will **not** surely die.” That changed everything. Adam and Eve had been in fellowship with God, but no longer were. They were in sin because they listened to someone who changed just one word. Some people say, “Well, everyone will teach a few things incorrectly.” But that is not what the Bible teaches. That may be what some preachers teach, but that is not what the Bible teaches. Just one word changed everything for Adam and Eve. And it was wrong. Not only was Satan wrong, but Adam and Eve were, too, because they listened to what Satan said. We also read of the sacrifices that Cain and Abel made (Gen. 4:3-7). Abel’s sacrifice was acceptable to God, while Cain’s was not. It was because he did not act by faith (Rom. 10:17). He did not listen to God, and he did not do what God had told him to do. He then became angry, and ended up killing his brother. One sin, most of the time, ends up leading to another sin. Cain did not do what he was supposed to do. His brother Abel did, which made Cain mad. So, he murdered Abel. Then he lied. One sin leads to another. We start altering God’s commands, and so many different things happen to us because we did that one thing.

In Genesis 19:26 we see Lot’s wife being told, as she was about to leave Sodom and Gomorrah, “Do not look back.” That seems simple enough, doesn’t it? But is “looking back” really that big a deal? Yes, God said not to do it. But some might say that it was ridiculous. Still, God said not to do it. What did Lot’s wife do? She looked back—and she immediately turned into a pillar of salt!

The Israelites were to observe the Sabbath. We do not do that today because we are not under that covenant (Heb. 7-9). Israel was told to gather food in six days, but not on the seventh day. People thought, "We've been gathering it six days, so what's the big deal about going out on the seventh day?" But God told the people not to do that. They were to gather enough on the sixth day so that they did not have to gather food on the seventh. But people altered God's commands. They added to or took away from what God told them to do (Ex. 16:27-28).

We see this same thing in the example of Nadab and Abihu. They did something for which they had no authority. If you read Leviticus 9, you will see specific commands God gave in regard to offering sacrifices. They had done all of that correctly. But Leviticus 10:1-3 says,

"Then Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it, put incense on it, and offered profane fire before the Lord, which He had not commanded them. So fire went out from the Lord and devoured them, and they died before the Lord. And Moses said to Aaron, 'This is what the Lord spoke, saying, "By those who come near Me I must be regarded as holy; and before all the people I must be glorified.'" So Aaron held his peace."

Nadab and Abihu did one thing that was not authorized, and that they were not supposed to do. What happened? They died on the spot. Someone might say, "Well, they did everything else correctly." That is how people justify their actions today. They say, "At least I'm better than this person. At least I'm doing this." But we must do everything God's way if we want to be pleasing unto Him.

In 2 Samuel 6:7 we read of Uzzah. The Ark of the Covenant was not being carried the correct way. The oxen stumbled, and it appeared to Uzzah as if the Ark was going to fall to the ground. Uzzah knew that the Ark was not allowed to touch the ground. But Uzzah wasn't supposed to touch it either. In a knee-jerk reaction, he grabbed the Ark—and the Lord struck him dead. Why? In 1 Chronicles 15:13 it talks about the reason why God struck him dead: "Because you did not do it the first time, the Lord our God broke out against us, because we did not consult Him about the proper order." We must consult God about the proper order. We cannot use mechanical instruments of music in New Covenant worship. The Bible teaches us in Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 that we are to sing to one another. We are not authorized to have praise groups or choirs. Rather, we are to sing one another as we sing to God. We are not to use mechanical instruments because they are not authorized. Someone might say, "I hadn't even thought about that." We need to begin consulting God regarding the proper order to ensure that we are not adding to or taking away from His commands.

What are some reasons why people alter God's commands? Why do people add to or take away from what God has said? The Bible warns us concerning why people do such things. Some people add to or take away from God's Word because they want to try to justify their actions and what they want to do. If they know that what they are doing is not in the Bible, then they will just change the Bible so they don't have to change their lives. Romans 12:2 tells us that we must change our lives. We are to transform, not conform, to the world. Many people have the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life (1 Jn. 2:15-17). They want to justify their own actions. Jeremiah 6:14 says, "They have also healed the hurt of My people slightly, saying, 'Peace, peace!,' when there is no peace." People wanted to justify their actions by crying, "Peace, peace!" People will say, "This preacher told me something that I didn't like. Even though he used the Bible, I didn't like it. It didn't fit my lifestyle. I'm going to go down the road and find a preacher who will tell me that I can live the way I want to live." That is justifying what a person wants to do, and alters God's commands.

Another reason why people add to or take away from God's Word may have to do with the fact that they simply are ignorant. Perhaps they have never studied the matter, and simply do not know any better. But is that an excuse? According to 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9, it is not. We must know God, and we must obey His Gospel. Ignorance is no excuse. Acts 17:30 tells us, "Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent. Hosea said, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Hos. 4:6). Just because a person is ignorant will not provide that person with an excuse. A person will not be able to say to God, "I just didn't know any better. No one ever taught me." We are to search for the truth and study the Word of God. We must make sure that we are not ignorant regarding adding to or taking away from God's Word.

Another reason that people may add to or take away from God's Word could be that they are apathetic. They simply do not care. In Acts 24:25 Paul talked to a person who did not care. "Now as he reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and answered, 'Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you.'" Felix did not like what Paul was saying. It scared him. He said to Paul, "Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you." Felix might have thought about what Paul said, but in the long run he really wanted "a more convenient time." He was apathetic.

Perhaps some people add to or take away from God's Word for fame, power, or money. In Jeremiah 5:30-31 we see false teachers who relished the idea that people liked what they were saying. Some people might think, "If I preach another Gospel, people will like me more." So, instead of doing what the Bible says, they alter God's commands by preaching another Gospel. They claim that they are doing what the Bible says, but when you actually test their teaching by God's Word, it is clear that they are not. In Philippians 1:15-16 we find a warning about people who preach the Gospel for the wrong reasons and as a result of the wrong motivations.

We must be sure that we are not altering God's commands regarding His plan of salvation. We must do exactly what He has commanded us to do. Are you a Christian? Have you been baptized in water for the forgiveness of your sins (1 Pet. 3:20-21; Acts 22:16)? If you are not a Christian, we pray today that you will obey the Gospel of Christ.

Narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

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STUDY QUESTIONS FOR BIBLE AUTHORITY (LESSON 2)

1. According to Malachi 3:6, what is one important characteristic of God?
2. In Deuteronomy 4:2, what command did God give His people?
3. In Deuteronomy 12:32, what did God tell His people?
4. What urgent principle is contained in Proverbs 30:6 regarding God's Word?
5. In Galatians 1:6, what caused the apostle Paul to "marvel"?
6. According to the last section of Galatians 1:7, what did some people during Paul's time want to do?
7. In Galatians 1:8, what did Paul have to say about humans or angels preaching "a different gospel"?
8. In Galatians 1:9, what pronouncement did Paul make about those who preached "a different gospel"?
9. In Galatians 1:10, what did Paul say about someone who tried to please men rather than God?
10. What point was Paul making in Galatians 3:15 when he contrasted human covenants with God's covenant?
11. What important spiritual principle is contained in Revelation 22:18-19?
12. What important spiritual principle is contained in Deuteronomy 17:11?
13. According to Matthew 7:13-14, what path must a person walk if he wants to respect God's authority?
14. According to 1 John 1:7, how are Christians to walk?
15. What important spiritual principle is found in Ecclesiastes 3:14?
16. What important spiritual principle is found in 1 Corinthians 4:6?
17. According to the last phrase in Leviticus 10:1, what was wrong with what Nadab and Abihu did?
18. According to 1 Chronicles 15:13, what mistake did some of God's people make on one occasion?
19. According to 1 John 2:16, what causes some people to ignore God's instructions?
20. According to Jeremiah 5:30-31, what "astonishing and horrible" thing had taken place?