

# *THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST*

SPREADING THE SOUL-SAVING MESSAGE OF JESUS

## **BIBLE AUTHORITY**

### **Lesson 1**

#### **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 our study on Bible authority. This is our first lesson in our study. Today we are going to have an introduction to study what authority truly is. If you ask any elementary school or high school teacher, they will tell you that they have trouble with some of their students obeying authority. The same often is true with government. People today no longer want to follow the governing authorities. But what about authority when it comes to religious authority? What does the Bible have to say about authority?

We first need to give a biblical definition of what authority is. It is a word that we might not use as much as people used to use. What is authority? Authority is simply the power or permission to act. We are talking about what a person can or cannot do—that is, what we have the authority to do. We are talking about what pleases God, versus what does not please God. In Matthew 7:21, Jesus said, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.” It is vital that we understand authority, because unless we know and understand Bible authority, we cannot be sure of anything that we do. You may be wondering why it is so important for us to study and understand Bible authority. Colossians 3:17 says, “Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.” Everything we do in word or deed, we are to do “in the name of Jesus Christ.” What does that mean? According to Acts 4:8-10, it means that we do it by His power or authority. We must have authority for everything we do. This is why it is important to understand what authority is. If we do not, then how can we know if we are being pleasing to God? How can we know if we are following Jesus’ command in Matthew 7:21 about doing the will of God? The answer is that we cannot know unless we understand this important subject. So, when we are talking about authority, we are speaking about the permission or power to act (that is, what we can or cannot do).

The next question we need to ask is, “Who has all authority?” Do you have “all authority?” Do I have “all authority?” Can we simply make decisions on our own, and have the idea, “Well, because we want to do it, it must be right” or “Because I chose to do it, God must be pleased with it”? Of course not! The Lord has all authority. In Matthew 28:18 we see that Jesus had just been resurrected from the dead on the first day of the week (Mk. 16:9), which proved that He was Who He said He was, and that He had fulfilled all prophecy. Upon being resurrected and meeting with His disciples, He spoke these words: “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.” Does the Bible say, “Some authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth?” No. Does the Bible say that “most authority” has been given to Christ? No. Jesus said, “**All** authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.” If Jesus, the Lord, has “all authority,” how much does that leave for anyone else today? If the Lord has “all power” and “all authority,” how much does that leave for us today? The answer is: None. We do not have the option to say, “We can do this, and God will approve of it just because we decided that we want to do it.” We do have the choice,

of course, to follow the Lord or not follow the Lord. But if we want to be pleasing to Him, we must realize that He is the One who has “all authority.” In Romans 13:1 we find a similar passage. Paul was discussing the governing authorities, and how we must be obedient to them (unless such obedience would conflict with God’s established law). We know from Acts 5:29 that “it is better to obey God rather than man.” In Romans 13:1, Paul was dealing with the things that did not conflict with God’s established law. Paul said, “Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.” Who has authority over the people we would think of as being “the highest authority”? The Bible teaches us that the Lord does. It is God Who has “all authority.”

If God has all authority, this means that we cannot give ourselves permission to something if God has not first given us permission. We need to understand this because it is a point that many people miss in the religious world. We cannot do something, and have God be pleased with our action, if we do not first have permission from Him. This can be difficult at times. In Proverbs 3:5-6 we are told, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.” This can be difficult. But the Bible admonishes us to trust in the Lord with all our heart, and not to lean on our own understanding. There may be things in the Bible that are difficult to do. There are things from which we must abstain, which we wish we could do. But we must trust in our heavenly Father, knowing that He knows best. It is the Lord Who has all authority.

We will be spending a great deal of time on the next point in this lesson. How does God reveal His authority to us? What is the source of our authority? We know that God has “all authority.” But how does He make it known to us? Does He come down and whisper in our ears? Does He come into our hearts and guide us in some miraculous way? The Bible does not teach either of those things. The Bible teaches us that God has made known His will and His authority to us through His Word. In John 17:17 Jesus was praying that all of His followers would be united. He said, “Sanctify [which means “set apart”] them by Your truth. Your word is truth.”

What is truth? God’s Word (the Holy Bible) is truth. It is what the Lord has given us as our source of authority. It is how we know what is right and what is wrong. In John 12:48 Jesus said, “He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day.” What will be our judge in the Last Day? Some might say, “The Lord will be our Judge.” That’s true. But we already have the standard by which we will be judged—the Word of God. Some feel that it’s going to be God saying, “I know what the Bible says, but I’ll let you in anyway,” or “I know you didn’t do what the Bible says, but I’m going to let you in anyway.” John 12:48 tells us it is not going to be like that. We are going to be judged by the Word of God, which is our standard by which we can know what the right thing is and what the wrong thing is. That is why we can know if we are in a proper fellowship with God (1 Jn. 5:13). We also can know if we are not. How? Based upon the standard of the Word of God.

In 2 Timothy 3:16-17 we are told the various reasons why God has given us Scripture. “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” Now let’s go back and look at this passage and see why the Scriptures have been given to us. We are told that all Scripture is “given by inspiration” (or is God breathed). This shows the authority—because it is God’s Word. It came from God, not men. The Bible was not written by a bunch of men who tossed in their own opinions and passed them on down the line. The Bible is God breathed (inspired by God).

The Bible also is “profitable for doctrine.” What does the word “doctrine” mean? It means “teaching.” When we want to be taught, where do we go? Should we go to some manmade church? No. Should we go to some man to get his opinion? No. If we want to be taught sound doctrine so that we have good teaching, where do we go? The Bible says that is what Scripture is for. We go to the Word of God because it is what He has given us to teach us how to get to Heaven. We also are told that Scripture is for “reproof.” We are told in 1 John 4:1 to “test the spirits” (or test the teachers) to whom we listen. How do we do that? By God’s standard—the Word of God. The Bible also is given to us for correction. If we are going to correct someone, we cannot do so by using our own standard. We cannot say, “I don’t like what you’re doing, and I have no reason other than the fact that I just don’t like it. But you still need to change.” If we are going to correct someone, it must be by the Scriptures. And if we are going to be corrected, it must be by the Scriptures. The Bible says that the Scriptures are given to us “for instruction in righteousness.” We are to be righteous people. Romans 6 tells us that we no longer are to be slaves to sin if we have obeyed the Gospel. Instead, we are “slaves of righteousness.” We need to want to be instructed on how to be more righteous. Where can we go to get such instruction? We must go to the Word of God—the Scriptures. When we talk about instruction, we understand what that means. If I go to the store and buy a cabinet that has to be assembled, there will be an instruction manual. If I want to put the cabinet together the way it needs to be put together, I need to use the instruction manual because that is where I will be instructed on how to do that. If we are to be righteous (and we are!), then where are we supposed to go to learn how to be righteous? The Bible says that the instructions for righteousness are contained in the Word of God. That is where we must go. It is through the Scriptures that we can have the knowledge that will make us “complete and thoroughly equipped for every good work.” Some have said, “The Bible is not enough any longer. We can’t be complete. We need more knowledge than just what God has given us. We need more than just the Bible in order to be complete.” The Bible teaches us that through the Scriptures, we can be “complete, and thoroughly equipped for every good work.” That is why we have the Scriptures—so we can know the difference between right and wrong, so we can be instructed as how to live a righteous life, and so we can be “complete and thoroughly equipped for every good work.” Such knowledge and authority come only from the Word of God.

When we talk about “the Scriptures,” we are not talking just about the Old Testament, but also about the New Testament. In 2 Peter 3:15-16 we see that the New Testament writings also were considered as “Scripture.”

“Consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.”

Peter’s point was that people take writings and twist them. He was speaking about Paul’s writings, which he spoke of as being “Scripture.” So, both the Old and New Testaments are considered to be “Scripture,” and are inspired by God. In Acts 17:11 the Bible tells how the Bereans were “more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.” Why did the Bereans search the Scriptures daily? Why didn’t they just use their emotions or feelings, and then say, “If it feels good, do it”? The reason is because they understood that their authority came only from the Scriptures—which is why they made sure that the things they were being told were found in the Word of God. They “tested” Paul by going to the Word of God. The same could be said of the goings-on in Revelation 2 and

3. As the letters were being written to the seven churches of Asia Minor, the end of each letter said that people should listen to what the Spirit had to say: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says." How were they to listen to what the Spirit said? Was it a tingling feeling of some kind? Was the Holy Spirit going to come to them in a dream and tell them something? No. How were people to listen to what the Spirit said? It was through the letters they were being written. As they read and studied those letters, they would know what the Spirit was revealing to them. When we read and study the Word of God, we can know what the Spirit is telling us. The Word of God is where we receive our information. What Paul and the rest of the New Testament writers were writing is, in truth, God's Word. In 1 Thessalonians 2:13 the Bible says,

"For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe."

We already have seen that what Paul wrote was considered to be Scripture. Here, that is confirmed when he said, "When you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe." The men who wrote the New Testament were being guided by the Holy Spirit to write such things. According to Jude 3, the faith has now been "once for all delivered." We have that in what we call "The Bible." Some people like to attack the New Testament by saying, "Paul was a good moral man who had a lot of good insight, and who wrote some good letters." But Paul said what he wrote was "the Word of God." That is the way the Bereans received it. Those people had seen the miracles Paul had performed. They knew that Paul was speaking on behalf of God—which 1 Thessalonians 2:13 confirms. In 1 Corinthians 14:37 Paul said, "If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord." The things Paul wrote were just as authoritative as the things that Jesus said. We must go to the Bible.

Now let's put all of this into a practical application. Hebrews 11:6 teaches us that we must have faith: "Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him." We cannot please God without faith. What is faith? Some people believe that faith is a blind leap; it's when you close your eyes and love God, but you really don't know what you're doing. The Bible never defines faith that way. Romans 10:17 tells us that "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." If we are going to have faith, we must have the Word of God. People say, "I pray every day to have faith." But I would ask, "Are you studying? Are you going to the Word of God, because it is impossible to have faith without going to the Scriptures, since they are the source of our faith?" Faith does not come from our mothers, fathers, grandparents, preachers, or best friends. Faith comes from the Word of God. We cannot be pleasing to God unless we have gone to the Word of God to study, and to ensure that what we believe is in accordance with what the Bible teaches (1 Cor. 1:10). The Bible teaches that that which is not from faith is sin (Rom. 14:23). That is a very powerful statement. It does not say, "That which is not from faith is 'inappropriate.'" Some people say, "Well, I wouldn't do that. They might be doing something wrong, but I wouldn't do it." If it is not in the Word of God, not only is it something that people should not do, but it is sin. And those who participate in and approve of such activities will be lost if they continue in them (Rom. 1:32). That which is not from God's Word is sin. In 2 Corinthians 5:7 we are told that "we walk by faith, not by sight." If we are walking in faith, then we will be walking according to God's Word. The psalmist said, "Your word is a lamp unto my path, and a light unto my feet" (Ps. 119:105). The Bible is what guides us. We are to walk according to God's Word, because it is the light that reveals to us where we need to walk.

Where there is no Word of God, there can be no walking by faith. The question we need to ask ourselves is: Where does the Bible teach this? Where can we go to find in the Word of God the justification for what we are doing so that we know it to be scriptural? If we cannot do that, we cannot do what we are doing “by faith”—which means that we are in sin. If we cannot prove by the Word of God that what we are doing is correct, then we are sinning. The first question we need to ask is: “What does the Bible have to say about this?” Sometimes people get into a group and one of them says, “I don’t have a problem, do you?” The next fellow says, “I don’t have a problem. Do you?” The next person says, “No.” So, no one has a problem. But they have forgotten to consult God and His Word. If we are going to be pleasing to God, we must go to the Bible.

The last point in this lesson is where I want to reinforce the idea that we are to use the Bible alone as our authority. We are not to go to other sources for authority. I want us to look at a few wrong sources of authority. Many times people will say, “I believe we are supposed to go only by the Bible.” But when it comes to actually doing that, they really do not go just by the Bible. They end up going to wrong places as their source of authority.

One wrong source of authority is our thoughts and/or feelings. People say, “I know what the Bible says, but my feelings and thoughts tell me something different.” That is not the source of our authority. Isaiah 55:8-9 says, “

“‘My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,’ says the Lord. ‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.’”

God’s ways are not our ways. Just because we think a certain way or feel a certain way does not make it right. That is not where we are to go for our authority. In 2 Kings 5 we see that Naaman wanted to have his leprosy cleansed. He was told to go dip in the River Jordan seven times. The text reveals in 2 Kings 5:12-13 that he was angry because he thought that the prophet was going to come out and wave his hand over his leprosy in order to make it go away. Naaman “thought,” or “said to himself.” That’s the danger. We start letting our feelings be our guide instead of the Word of God. Then we get angry when the Bible reveals to us what the right thing is. In Acts 26:9 Paul “thought” he was right. “Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.” Paul “thought” he needed to do those things. But he was wrong. He was not supposed to do such things. He had the right intent, and he had zeal (Rom. 10:1-3). But it was “zeal without knowledge.” He “thought” he was doing the will of God. He was zealous in doing what he “thought” was the will of God. But he was not allowing God’s Word to be his guide. Rather, he was letting his own thoughts guide him instead of truth. Thoughts are a wrong source of authority upon which many people rely.

Another wrong source of authority is our experiences. Proverbs 16:25 says, “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.” There are those who say, “I know what the Bible says, but when I had such-and-such an experience, I changed my mind.” Those people are allowing human experiences to guide their lives rather than God’s Word. Experiences will not change what the Word of God says. You can have 101 experiences, but they will not change the truth of God’s Word. Jeremiah 10:23 says, “O Lord, I know the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps.” We cannot direct our own steps by saying, “My experiences have led me here,” or “My experiences led me there.” It must be God’s Word that directs our steps. We are to “walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7). Proverbs 18:2 says that “a fool has no delight in understanding, but in expressing his own heart.” That kind of person has no delight in what the Bible says. He just wants to express his own heart. That is wrong, because our experiences are not a true source of authority.

Another wrong source of authority is the traditions of men. People say, "This is the way we have always done it." In Mark 7:6-7 Jesus said that we are not to go by traditions of men: "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, 'This people honors Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'" Traditions are not our source of authority.

Others follow the majority. Matthew 7:13-14 tells us that the majority will be lost in Hell. So if you are following the majority, then unfortunately, you will be there also. We cannot follow a crowd to do evil (Ex. 23:2).

Some people listen to their preacher. They say, "My preacher told me I'm OK. He did not give me any Bible, but he told me I was OK, and that I didn't have to worry about anything." In 1 John 4:1 we find a warning: "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world." This does not mean that these false prophets will always be insincere folks. This does not mean that every false teacher is trying to be a false teacher. But even when false teachers are sincere, they are sincerely wrong. Sincerity does not change the fact that they are still wrong. Was Paul sincere? Absolutely! But he was sincerely wrong. In 1 Peter 4:11 we are told, "If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God."

Have you submitted to the authority of God? Have you gone to the Word of God as your only source of authority? Do you understand that everything we do must have God's approval, which comes only from His Word? Are you a Christian? Have you heard what the Bible has to say (Rom. 10:17)? Have you believed that Jesus Christ is the Son of God (Jn. 3:16)? Have you repented of your sins (Acts 17:30)? Have you confessed Jesus Christ as Lord (Rom. 10:10)? And have you been baptized for the forgiveness of your sins (Acts 2:38)? 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 1)

1. What is the definition of “authority”?
2. What did Jesus have to say in Matthew 28:18 about authority?
3. What, according to John 12:48, is to be the source of authority by which all accountable people will be judged at the Last Day?
4. What does Matthew 7:21 have to say about our attitude toward God’s Word as our final authority?
5. What does Colossians 3:17 admonish us to do?
6. What does Proverbs 3:5-6 admonish us **to** do, and **not** to do?
7. According to John 17:17, what is God’s Word?
8. What important point is contained in Acts 5:29?
9. How, according to 2 Timothy 3:16-17, was “all Scripture” given to humankind?
10. Using 2 Timothy 3:16-17 as your point of reference, name four things for which the Scriptures are to be used.
11. According to the last section of 2 Timothy 3:17, for what purpose did God give us the Scriptures?
12. What does 1 John 4:1 admonish us to do?
13. In Acts 17:11, for what were the Christians in Berea commended?
14. What statements is found in Revelation 2:7 that still applies to people today?
15. In 1 Thessalonians 2:13, the apostle Paul offered a comparison between two different kinds of “words.” What were they?
16. How, according to Paul’s statements in 2 Corinthians 5:7, are Christians to carry out their lives?
17. What, according to Romans 10:17, is the source of the type of genuine faith that is acceptable to God?
18. What does Psalm 119:105 tell us about God’s Word?
19. What important point is contained in Isaiah 55:8-9?
20. According to Romans 10:2, what was wrong with the zeal possessed by the people of whom Paul was speaking in that passage?