

# *THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST*

SPREADING THE SOUL-SAVING MESSAGE OF JESUS

## **BIBLE AUTHORITY**

### **Lesson 4**

#### **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 the last lesson in this series. In this lesson, will be looking at how we can ascertain Bible authority by studying basic Bible principles relating to Bible authority. However, before we do that, I would like to summarize the things we have learned from our first three lessons.

In the first lesson we learned what authority is. When we talk about authority, we are talking about the power or permission to act—that is, things we can do versus things we cannot do. We looked at Romans 13:1 and Matthew 28:18, and saw that the Lord has all authority. If we want to do something, we must seek the Lord's permission. The way He gives us permission is only through His Word. Romans 10:17 tells us that faith comes from the Word of God. That is where our authority must originate if we want to be pleasing to God. Then we looked at some wrong sources of authority so that we could be sure that we are not relying on our feelings or thoughts (Is. 55:8-9). We also studied the fact that we are not to add to or take away from the Bible. We must not use any types of creed books or denominational manuals like so many people today do. We are use only the Bible—not any type of catechism or handbook. We must not add to or take away from the Bible. In our previous lesson we studied the differences between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant.

Today we are going to learn how to make these things practical, so that we can bring in principles of Bible authority for those times when we are studying the Word of God. There are three dispensations of time in the Bible, and each of them had its own law system. First, there was the Patriarchal Dispensation, which lasted from Adam to Moses (Genesis through much of Exodus). It was the dispensation when God spoke directly to patriarchs (leaders of families) and told them what He wanted or did not want. This would have included Adam, Noah, and Abraham. God spoke directly to these men. In the Garden of Eden, God spoke directly to Adam and Eve to tell them not to eat of the tree that stood in the midst of the garden. God spoke to Noah about the building of the ark. He spoke to Abraham regarding physical circumcision. God spoke directly to the patriarchs. This, then, was known as the Patriarchal Dispensation.

Second, there was the Mosaical Dispensation (or Judaic Dispensation). This lasted from Moses up to Pentecost (Exodus through Acts 2). This was the time when God gave physical Israel His first covenant.

Third, we read of the Christian Dispensation, which goes from Acts 2 until the Second Coming of Christ (2 Pet. 3). This is the dispensation under which we live today.

You may wonder why it is important for us to understand these different dispensations. It is important because this type of understanding will help us with our Bible study. We will understand the different time periods, and the different laws giving during those periods. During each of these periods, there was a different law system in existence. Those people living in the Christian Dispensation are not under the Patriarchal Dispensation. Those peo-

ple who lived during the Patriarchal Dispensation were not under the laws in effect during the Mosaical Dispensation. It is important that we understand the dispensation under which we are living, and the specific law that we are to obey. Romans 3:19 says, "Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God." This tells us that the only law that speaks to us specifically is the law under which we live. Imagine for a moment that you are driving down the road. The speed limit is 60 miles per hour. But you are doing 70 miles per hour because in the city in which you used to live, the speed limit was 70. You are still driving 70 miles per hour, even though the law has changed where you are. Suppose a police officer notices that you are going 10 miles over the speed limit, and he pulls you over. Can you tell him, "Officer, I used to live in another city where the law said that I could drive 70 miles per hour," and then have him say, "Oh, well, since I know that, I'm not going to give you a ticket"? No. He will tell you that you are not under that law system any more because you are under a different law system, in which the speed limit is 60 miles per hour. That is the law that speaks to you (as opposed to some other law in some other city) because it is the law under which you are living currently. It is the same thing today. This has always been the case for those who are trying to be obedient to God. We must understand the law that speaks to us, and we must abide in that law, rather than trying to live under some other law that does not speak to us.

The Bible teaches that we cannot be under two law systems at the same time. As individuals, we cannot obey two different law laws. In the illustration I used earlier, one of the law systems said I could go 60 miles per hour, while the other said I could go 70. It is impossible to obey both of them at the same time. Paul discussed this in Romans 7:1-4.

"Do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law), that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives? For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man. Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another—to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God."

Here, Paul is saying that a woman cannot be married to two men at one time. If a woman does such a thing, she becomes a polygamist. Some people were trying to follow the Old Law and the New Law. They wanted to say, "Yes, I'll be a Christian, but I'll also be a Jew, and will live under both law systems." Someone might say, "I want to be a 'Patriarchal Christian.'" That is not possible. As individuals, we can live under only one law system at a time because there will be contradictions between those two law systems. We are to live only under the law system that is available for us today. We cannot be a spiritual polygamist. The Bible teaches that the law under which we live today is the law system of the Christian Dispensation. Romans 3:27 speaks of "the law of faith." Romans 6:1-2 speaks of "the law of Christ." James 1:25 speaks of "the perfect law of liberty." That is the law under which we live today during the Christian Dispensation. Hebrews 1:1-2 speaks about this.

"God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds."

There was a time when God spoke directly to the patriarchs. Then there was a time when He spoke through prophets, dreams, or visions (Heb. 1:1). But now He speaks to us through His Son and the Word of God (Jn. 12:48). We are under the Christian Dispensation today.

Let us now examine some additional principles that deal with Bible authority. When God commands something for people who are living under that law system, we are obligated to obey those commands. If we receive a command from God, in order to go Heaven, we have to obey that command. We are obligated to obey. We are all under the New Covenant law system. We must do what that law says if we want to go to Heaven. If we are not willing to obey God, then we cannot go to Heaven. We cannot refuse to do what God has told us to do. In Luke 6:46 Jesus said, "Why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do the things which I say?" In Hebrews 5:8-9 we are told that the Lord is the "author of eternal salvation" only for those who obey Him. If we do not obey, the Lord will not be the author of our eternal salvation because we have not done what He commanded us to do. In John 14:15 Jesus said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments." People sometimes want to talk about love as a warm, fuzzy feeling. We can hear false teachers on the television saying, "We are going to be talking about love and grace." But listen to what 1 John 5:3 says love is: "This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome." The love of God is not us sitting around a campfire, roasting marshmallows, and singing "Kum Bay Yah." Love is keeping God's commandments. When people do not say what the Bible says, they cannot be saved. This is the first principle of authority that we need to understand. When God gives us a law, and when He tells us to do something, we must do it. Today people are saying, "We do not have to be baptized for the forgiveness of our sins." Acts 2:38 tells us that we must be baptized for ("in order to") have our sins remitted. The Bible teaches that. In Mark 16:16 Jesus said, "He who believes and is baptized shall be saved." These are laws that people are not keeping. Denominations do not keep these laws. They do not follow even the simplest laws and rules that the Bible gives us to obey. We are under those laws. And if we want to go to Heaven, we must do what God has commanded us to do.

Another principle of authority is that when God specifies what He wants, it eliminates everything else. Let me give you one secular example of this principle, and then several Bible examples, so that we can understand this matter clearly. When God specifies what He wants, it eliminates everything else. This is a commonsense principle. It is something that everyone understands. We use this principle all the time. Suppose a mother tells us her 12-year-old son to go to the market down the street in order to buy one loaf of bread. She says, "Son, here is \$10. I want you to go to the store and get me one loaf of bread." And that is all she tells him. The boy goes to the store, and he buys the loaf of bread that his mother usually buys. But he realizes that the bread is only a couple of dollars. He has \$8 left over, so he decides that he will buy himself some candy. He comes home and says, "Mom, I bought you the loaf of bread you wanted." She says, "Son, where is the rest of the money?" He says, "I spent it. I bought candy with it." She then says, "Son, wait a minute. I did not tell you that you could buy candy." He then says, "Well, you didn't tell me that I couldn't." We do not use the principle of "You didn't say I couldn't," because we understand that when someone specifies what they want, it eliminates everything else. When the mother told her son to purchase a loaf of bread, that specified exactly what she wanted, and also eliminated everything else. Can you imagine what it would be like if the mother had to tell her son everything in the store that she did not want to buy? It would take her days to say, "Don't get peanut butter. Don't get jelly. Don't get candy. Don't get drinks." That would be ridiculous. We understand the principle that when we specify something, it eliminates everything else.

The same is true of the Bible. Let's examine some biblical examples. In Acts 15:24 the Bible says, "We have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, 'You must be circumcised and keep the law'—to whom we gave no such commandment." There were some false teachers saying certain things. But

Paul said that he did not give them the authority or the commandment to teach that people had to be circumcised. Paul did not have to say, “Don’t preach this or don’t preach that,” in order to specify all the false doctrines. What Paul told them to preach was the Gospel. When he specified what they were to preach, that eliminated everything else. Paul had given them no command to teach that people had to be circumcised. Someone could have said, “Well, Paul, you didn’t say that we couldn’t teach that.” Paul did not have to say that—because he specified what they were to teach.

Another example is found in Galatians 3:16 where Paul was writing to the churches in Galatia. “Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, ‘And to seeds,’ as of many, but as of one, ‘And to your Seed,’ who is Christ.” Paul specified “seed,” not “seeds.” Someone could have said, “It didn’t say “not seeds.” Paul was making the point that the Old Testament specified “seed,” and that therefore eliminated everything else. If the text specified the singular, it eliminated the plural. The text did not have to say “...and not seeds.”

Hebrews 7:14 is the last example I want us to examine. “It is evident that our Lord arose from Judah, of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood.” The only tribe from which earthly priests could originate under the Old Covenant was the tribe of Levi. Here, however, the writer of Hebrews makes the point that Jesus could not have been a priest after the Levitical priesthood in the Old Covenant because He had come from the tribe of Judah, not Levi. Did the Old Testament have to say, “Priests could not come from the tribe of Benjamin or other tribes?” No, it did not have to say that because it specified where the priests were to originate under the Old Covenant. The writer of Hebrews is that the Old Testament did not say anything about the tribe of Judah. He did not have to say, “You cannot be a priest if you come out of the tribe of Judah.” Why? Because he made it clear that the only earthly priests under the Old Covenant had to come from the tribe of Levi. When God specifies what He wants, it eliminates everything else.

Another secular example that proves this point is something you experience several times a week (if not every day). When you go out to eat, the waiter or waitress asks, “What would you like?” You might say, “I want a hamburger and an order of French fries.” What if the waitress brought you exactly what you ordered, except that she also brings you steak, mashed potatoes, green beans, salad, and dessert”? She then hands you the check and says, “You owe me \$780.” You say, “Wait a minute. I don’t owe you this because I didn’t order these extra things.” If the waitress was to look at you and say, “But you didn’t say you didn’t want all of these things, so you owe me this money because I went ahead and brought them to you,” would that be right? Of course not—because we understand that when we specify what we want, it eliminates everything else.

Let’s examine some scriptural examples to see how this works. Consider the Lord’s Supper (Mt. 26:28; 1 Cor. 11:11-26). When we talk about the contents of the Lord’s Supper, we read about the unleavened bread, which represents the body of Jesus. We also read about the fruit of the vine, which represents the blood that He shed. Nowhere in the Bible does it say that we cannot use cheese on the unleavened bread. Nowhere does it say that we cannot put ketchup on the unleavened bread. Nowhere does it say that we cannot put jam or jelly on the unleavened bread. The Bible does not say that we cannot do those things. But the Bible specifies what we are to use—unleavened bread and fruit of the vine. We cannot add to that. Nor can we subtract from it. If we can subtract, then we can add. If we can add, then we subtract. The Bible teaches us that we are to use unleavened bread and fruit of the vine. The Bible does not have to tell us that we cannot use pizza. It does not have to tell us that we cannot use water (as Mormons do). But Jesus said that we are to use the fruit of the vine. Someone might ask, “But did Jesus ever say that we cannot use water?”

No—because He did not have to. When He specified something, it eliminated everything else (just as in the restaurant example I used earlier). When we specify something, no one has the authority to alter our instructions. If we want to please God, we cannot change His instructions. When He specifies what He wants, it eliminates everything else.

Another example has to do with our singing in worship (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). We are to speak to one another by singing and making melody in our hearts. This specifies what we are to do (“speak to one another”), how we are to do it (vocally), where we are to do it (in our hearts), and what we are to sing (psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs). This specifies what we are to do and how we are to do it—which eliminates all other type of music such as mechanical instruments, hand clapping, etc. Sometimes people may say, “I believe those things are wrong, but I let my child go to a youth rally and clap his hands or listen to ‘rock Christian bands.’” That is wrong and sinful because it is unauthorized. God specified how psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs are to be used. They are not to be used by choirs, singing groups, or praise teams. Rather, we are to sing to one another while we also are singing to the Lord. This is an example of the fact that when God specifies what He wants, it eliminates everything else.

The next principle is that when God does not specify what He wants, it then becomes a matter of personal judgment. In Matthew 28:19-20 the Bible tells us to go into all the world to teach the Gospel. Nowhere does the Bible tell us how to travel to do that. If the Bible had said, “Go into all the world by plane to teach the Gospel,” then that would mean that we could go only by plane. If Jesus had said, “Go into all the world and teach the Gospel by walking,” that would mean that we could go only by walking. But the Bible does not give us specifics on this matter as it did in regard to the Lord’s Supper and singing. The Bible simply says, “Go,” but it does not tell us how to do that. We can take a boat or a plane. We can walk. We can run. We can use all of these methods because God did not specify a certain one. He commanded us to go, and then left it up to our personal judgment as to how we would travel.

Hebrews 10:25 provides another example. We are commanded not to forsake the assembly. Implied in that command is the fact that we must have an assembly. But is it stated specifically where we must assemble? Under the Old Law, people had to worship in the temple. But today it does not matter where we worship, so long as we worship “in spirit and in truth” (Jn. 4:23-24). We can worship anywhere, as long as we are worshiping in the manner that God has commanded. But Hebrews 10:25 does teach that we must have a place to meet (whether it is inside, outside, upstairs, or downstairs). Any place is authorized, as long as it is a place where we can assemble to teach the truth and worship God the way He has commanded us to. These are some examples of generic authority (where we can use our own judgment regarding how to carry out something that God has told us to do).

However, just because God may have approved of an action at one point in time, does not mean that He always approves of it. In Exodus 17 the Israelites were complaining (as they so often did). God had just delivered them from Egyptian bondage. They had entered the Wilderness of Sinai, and they were thirsty. They were complaining to Moses, saying, “We want water.” Moses took the matter to the Lord, Who said, “Strike the rock, and water will come forth.” Moses took his rod and struck the rock as God had told him to do. Water then came out, and everyone was happy. Moses did what God had told him to do. It wasn’t too much longer after that where we see (in Numbers 20) the Israelites complaining again because they were thirsty. They said, “You have brought us here to die. Why could we not die in Egyptian bondage?” Moses took the matter before the Lord. But this time God told Moses to speak to the rock. Moses, however, struck the rock—in the same manner he had

in Exodus 17. Because of Moses' disobedience, God disapproved of what he had done since it was not what God had told him to do. As a result, Moses was not allowed to enter the Promised Land because he had violated God's command. Although God may have once commanded an action, if it is not what He has told us to do today, then we cannot get away with saying, "But God, You allowed me to do this at one point in time." Could Moses have made such an argument by saying, "Lord, I know this is what You told me now, but previously You told me to strike the rock. So is it really that big a deal?" Yes, it is. Just because God once approved of an action does not mean that God always approves of it. We must go to the law under which we live to see what God has told us.

People today might say, "David used mechanical instruments in worship under the Old Law." But we are no longer under the Old Law. Romans 3:19 tells us that. If we are try to go back to that law, then we become spiritual polygamists because we are trying to live under two laws. We cannot do that. Rather, we must use the law under which we live today, which tells us to sing.

Finally, we need to understand the importance of expediency. Just becomes something is authorized does not necessarily mean that it is expedient. We need to ask questions such as, "Is this practice authorized by God?," "Has God told me what to do?," or "Has God specified how to do it?" If so, then that sets forth how we are to act. But if God has not spoken specifically regarding the matter under consideration, then we have some freedom regarding how or what we can do. But even when it comes to freedom in doing something that is authorized, we have to ask, "Is my action expedient, and will it help me and others get to Heaven?" In 1 Corinthians 6:12 we read, "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any." Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8 go into great detail to tell us that even if we have freedom in a certain matter, if something we do might offend a brother or sister in Christ or damage our Christian influence, then we should not do it (even if it is authorized) because it is not expedient. Perhaps the Bible teaches that we have the freedom to do a certain thing. But if it is going to offend someone else, then we do not need to do it. Now, if God has told us to do something, then we must do it regardless. Of course, the first thing we need to know is whether or not something is authorized. And if it is, is it the most-expedient thing to do? If it is not, then we do not need to do it.

Are you a Christian? Are you abiding in the authority of Christ? Have you listened to the command to repent and be baptized for the remission of your sins (Acts 2:38)? If you are not a Christian, we pray today that you will submit to God's authority by obeying the Gospel of Christ.

### **Narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:**

*THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST* is brought to you by loving, caring members of the church of Christ. The McLish Avenue church of Christ in Ardmore, Oklahoma, oversees this evangelistic effort. For a free CD or DVD of today's broadcast, please write to:

***THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST***  
**607 McLish Ave.**  
**Ardmore, OK 73401**

You may call **580-223-3289**. Please visit us on the web at [www.thegospelofchrist.com](http://www.thegospelofchrist.com). We encourage you to attend the church of Christ, where "the Bible is loved and the Gospel is preached."

## STUDY QUESTIONS FOR BIBLE AUTHORITY (LESSON 4)

1. What is the definition of Bible authority?
2. According to Matthew 28:18, how much authority does the Lord have?
3. According to Romans 10:17, what is the sole source of biblical faith?
4. What three dispensations are discussed in this lesson?
5. Explain the meaning of Romans 3:19 (“Whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law”).
6. Using Romans 7:1-4 as your guideline, what would it mean if it was said of a person, “He is a spiritual polygamist”?
7. According to James 1:25, what do Christians today possess?
8. According to Hebrews 1:1-2, how does God speak to people today?
9. According to John 12:48, what will one day be our judge?
10. What important question did Jesus ask in Luke 6:46?
11. What, according to 1 John 5:3, is the biblical definition of love?
12. What important spiritual principle is set forth in the discussion about physical circumcision that is found in Acts 15:24?
13. Explain the importance and meaning of the statement, “When God specifies what He wants, it eliminates everything else.”
14. What type of singing does Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 authorize?
15. Does Matthew 28:19-20 give Christians offer a commandment to Christians regarding the specific manner in which they are to “go into all the world” to teach people the Gospel, or does it offer generic authority that allows Christians to use personal freedom regarding how to “go into all the world” to teach people?
16. Hebrews 10:25 teaches Christians not to forsake the assembling of themselves together. But what else is implied by the statement in that passage?
17. Under the Old Covenant, mechanical instruments of music were sometimes used in worship of God. According to the principle found in Romans 3:19, can Christians today use mechanical instruments of music in their worship of God?
18. What did the apostle Paul mean when he said in 1 Corinthians 6:12, “All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.”