

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

SPREADING THE SOUL-SAVING MESSAGE OF JESUS

SOUL-SAVING LESSONS

“The Authority and Application of the Bible”

Introduction by narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

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

The chief priests and the elders came to Jesus with two questions: “By what authority are you doing these things?”; and “Who gave you this authority?” Jesus responded by saying that He wanted to ask them a question, and that if they could answer it, then He would tell them by what authority He was doing the things He was doing. Jesus asked, “The baptism of John. Where is it from—Heaven or men?” The Jews reasons among themselves by saying, “If we say that it is from Heaven, then He will ask us, ‘Why did you not obey it?’ But if we say that it is from men, the crowds will cause us great problems because they all believe that John is a prophet of God.” Thus, they simply chose to respond by saying, “We do not know.” Jesus then said, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I have done these things.” Jesus did not fail to answer these people. Rather, He showed them that there are only two possibilities when it comes to authority. There is authority from Heaven, and there is authority from men. Where do we get Bible authority today? I am convinced that this is the most fundamental of all lessons that we need to understand. It affects our salvation. It affects the way we worship. It affects every part of our lives. Today, we need to understand that the only authority for man comes from Heaven. Heavenly authority is the only one that is divine in its nature. It is the only one we can trust that will not change over time. In Malachi 3:6, God said, “I am God; I do not change.” Heavenly authority is the only authority that will not lie to us and that we can trust at all times.

The authority of men, however, is not like that. Sometimes man’s authority is fallible. And sometimes it is based upon prejudice, bias, and what we like or what we think. We need to realize today that Bible authority is one of the most fundamental and important subjects that we could ever study, and if we understand fully the authority of the Bible and how important it is, then we will understand how to worship God correctly and where to go for salvation. But if we fail to understand Bible authority, then we may think that “anything goes” in religion. I we think like that, however, it will undermine principles that we use in our everyday lives. When we talk about authority, we recognize the necessity of authority in other areas of life. The principle of authority is not something new to us. In everyday life, we recognize that there is authority that exists and laws that must be followed. For example, think about traffic laws. Let’s say that you come to a traffic light that is composed of three different colors—red, yellow, and green. We know that red means stop, yellow means slow down, and green means go. What if we pulled up to the red light and we decided to simply “throw authority out the window”? What if we ignored the standards and said to ourselves, “Let’s make the red light mean ‘go,’ and the green light mean ‘stop’”? How would that work in the world around us? What would it do to the traffic laws? Think about how such an action would affect everyone’s driving. There would be wrecks left and right, and there would be great chaos on the roads. We recognize in everyday life that there are laws.

Think about the standards that we recognize in matters relating to weights and measures. What if “a gallon of gas” meant one thing to one person and another thing to someone else? Imagine how that would affect everyone. In government, there are laws that must be followed, and in sports there are rules that must be obeyed. There are certain symbols of authority that we must respect and obey. The president and congress make the laws, and we must respect their authority. Thus, in everyday life the issue of authority is not something new. But what is so odd is that we sometimes come to religion and we simply ignore the issue of authority. Somehow we think that God must have left matters “open” so that we can simply do whatever we want regardless of what God has said in His Word. So, yes, there is an authority and a standard for us to obey in everyday life.

Today, first of all, I would like us to consider some wrong sources of authority. If we are not careful, we may think that something is a source of authority when, in fact, it might not be. We can look to some person or some book, or we can simply follow the crowd, thinking all the time that **they** are the authority when, in reality, they are **not** the authority. The first wrong source of authority is what we think or assume is right. What we think or assume to be right may not be right in God’s sight. The Bible teaches us not to put our own interpretation into Scripture. The text of 2 Peter 1:19-21 tells us that the Scriptures are of “no private interpretation.” We cannot simply take the Bible and say, “This is what I think,” or “This is what I want this to mean.” The fact is, God meant for it to say exactly what He said, and we must figure out according to Scripture what that is. Consider the words of Proverbs 16:25—“There is a way that seems right to a man, but the end thereof is the way of death.” What **we** think and what **we** feel may actually be the total opposite of what **God** wants us to do. And it may lead to spiritual death. Thus, we must not place emphasis on what **we** think is right as a source of authority. The Bible says in 1 Peter 3:15, “Always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you.” To do that, we must follow the Scriptures. In 1 Thessalonians 5:21 there is a very important passage regarding this. Paul said, “Prove all things; hold fast to that which is good.” It is our responsibility not merely to “assume” or “think” that something is right, but instead to come to the Scriptures in order to prove what God’s will is.

A second wrong source of authority is the religious world in general. The religious world in which we live is not our authority today. Neither religious leaders nor the head of a certain religious group is our authority. We are not to look to them. Denominational conventions should not tell us what to believe and what to think. Nor are books written by men supposed to serve as our authority today. Jeremiah 10:23 gives us important insight into the fact that man cannot save himself. Jeremiah wrote, “O Lord, I know the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps.” Man cannot save us. A religious leader—regardless of any title that men may bestow upon him—cannot get us to Heaven. A denominational convention cannot tell us what to believe or think. Why? Psalm 119:89 tells us that God’s Word is already “settled in heaven.” Regardless of what men may decide to vote on or approve, or what they may vote on and cast out, their views on such things are not our authority. The Bible is our only authority in religious matters. The books of men are not what we need to trust as our source of authority. We need to trust **God’s** Book—the Bible. It is the **inspired** Word of God, according to 2 Timothy 3:16. It is that which will judge us in the last day (Jn. 12:48).

Another wrong source of authority is our feelings. We should not trust in our feelings as a safe authority today. Consider what the apostle Paul said in Acts 23:1—“I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.” Paul “felt like” he was doing the right thing. In Acts 7 when he stood by and held the coats of those who stoned Stephen, he “thought” that he was doing right. But it was not. In Acts 8, when he was dragging men and women

who were Christians out of their homes and throwing them into prison, he “felt like” that was the right thing to do. But it was not! As we think about our feelings, we must recognize that they are not a safe guide. They are not to serve as our source of authority. Although what we “feel” is right may give us a wonderful feeling deep down in our hearts, it is not to be trusted as a proper source of authority.

Another wrong source of authority is “the majority.” We do not need to put our trust in what the majority is doing. In fact, the Bible tells us not to trust the majority as our guide, and it instructs us not to follow the majority. Exodus 23:2 says, “Do not follow a multitude to do evil.” Thus, we must not follow what “the crowd” is doing. What is popular, or what may be the latest fad, cannot serve as our authority. Yet too many times that is what people want to do. They want to be like the rest of the world. Whatever is popular, or whatever the majority is doing, seems to become the standard and the authority in religious matters. Jesus said in Matthew 7:13 that when we follow the multitude, it will prove to be detrimental to our souls. Jesus said, “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it.” Jesus taught us that many people—most of the Earth’s population!—will travel down the wrong path, which leads to destruction. That ought to tell us that we must not trust “the majority.”

Another wrong source of authority is our ancestors or our families. Regardless of what your family has or has not done in matters of religion, they are not the authority. Today, I want to encourage you **not** to trust what your mother and father, brother and sister, or grandfather and grandmother have done as it relates to religion. Rather, trust what the Bible says. Paul had to learn this lesson the hard way. Paul was one who was following family tradition. He was following in the footsteps of his ancestors in stoning Christians or dragging them to prison. Paul learned that his actions were not right. In Galatians 1:14 he wrote, “I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers.” Paul did not say that he was zealous in regard to what the Law said, but that he was zealous in regard to the traditions that his family had followed. Today, please do not put your trust in your family and what it has done in matters of religion. Instead, trust God and His Word.

Where do Christians get their authority today? Where do people who love and serve God find their authority in matters of religion? We must look to the chain of authority that is given to us in the Bible. In this chain of authority, God is the first link. All authority resides with God because He is the Creator, the originator of life, and the One Who is in charge. He created all things (Gen. 1:1). Hebrews 12:9 teaches us that He is our Father. God is the first link in the chain of authority, and we must look to Him. But God has delegated authority to Jesus Christ. Christ was given authority by God, as we see in Matthew 28:18. Jesus said, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.” John 5:27 teaches us that Jesus has authority over all flesh. Thus Christians are told in Colossians 3:17 that whatever we do “in word or in deed” must be done by the authority of Jesus Christ. But since Christ is not here with us today, how do we get our authority? Jesus promised His apostles that the Holy Spirit would come after He left, and that the Spirit would guide them “into all truth.” In three passages—John 14:26, John 15:26, and John 16:13—Christ promised that the Comforter (the Holy Spirit) would come, and that He would guide them into all truth (Jn. 16:13). Thus, God is the first link in the chain of authority. He then gave authority to Christ. Christ promised that the Holy Spirit would come and that He would guide the apostles into all truth. The apostles then wrote down in the Word of God the truth about religion and the authority that we have today. Where is our authority? It resides in the Word of God. What we are to follow today is the Bible. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 14:37, “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.” In John 12:48, Jesus said that it would be God’s Word that judges us. In 2 Peter 1:21, we are told that “holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.” We therefore receive our authority today from the Word of God. That is how it comes to us. When we get our authority, it is through reading and studying the Bible. In Ephesians 3:4, we are told that when we read, we can understand the will of God. Revelation 22:18-19 teaches us that we are not to add to or take away from God’s Word, but that we are to carefully follow everything that God’s Word says. Think about Paul’s statements in 1 Corinthians 4:6 as they relate to our source of authority today. Paul said, “Do not go beyond that which is written.” Thus, the chain of authority for Christians today is very simple. We follow the Bible. We do not listen to other men. We do not follow other teachers. Rather, we come to the Scriptures to see what we are to do and how we are to live.

There are certain Old Testament examples which teach us that following exactly what God says is essential to our salvation. Think about two priests—Nadab and Abihu. In Leviticus 10, the Bible tells us that these men offered “strange fire” (some versions say an “unauthorized fire”) before the Lord “which He had not commanded them.” Fire rained down from Heaven and killed both of them. The point is that it was something that God had not commanded them to do. We do not know exactly what they did, but we do know that they did not follow God’s authority. Instead, they offered something other than what God had commanded. As a result, they lost their lives. Think, too, of the example of King Saul. He was told in 1 Samuel 14:15 to completely wipe out the Amalekites. But Saul decided on his own to spare certain animals, and even the king of the Amalekites. When Samuel heard the bleating of the sheep and he questioned Saul about this, Saul’s excuse was that he had done it for God. But Samuel said to Saul, “Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of lambs” (1 Sam. 15:22). The principle we learn is that we must not go beyond the boundaries that God has set forth in His Word. We must not add to or take away from God’s Word. Nor should we insert what we “think” might make things better. Thus, we are taught quite clearly in the Scriptures to faithfully follow the Bible and it alone. We must not trust men unless they are saying what God has said. We must trust the Bible. And unless a person can show us what the Bible is saying, then we must not accept what they say.

Now let’s turn our attention to the application of the authority that we find in the Bible. How is the authority of the Bible relevant to our lives today? How is the authority of the Bible relevant in worship? The fact is that the Bible is our sole authority in worship today, and we must understand that this is a very practical subject because it relates to how we worship God in an acceptable or unacceptable manner. Here is a perfect illustration. In many places today a person can view drama or acting as a part of worship. Some group might be presenting a play, a show, or a skit. They might be “acting out” the Gospel. A person who is really trying to please God needs to ask, “Where is the authority for drama and acting found in the Bible? You can search the Scriptures all the way through, and you will never find those things listed as approved methods for teaching the Gospel. In fact, the approved method is found in 1 Corinthians 1:21—“God chose the foolishness of preaching” (the oral proclamation of the Gospel) to save people from their sins. God did not choose drama or acting. Someone might say, “Well, but those things weren’t a part of first-century society.” History begs to differ, for history tells us that in Corinthian society amphitheaters and play areas were available, and that they represented a very popular method of entertainment during that time. However, instead of saying “Go act out the Gospel,” Paul said that God chose the foolishness of preaching to save those who are lost.

Authority in worship also is seen as it relates to the type of music that Christians are supposed to use according to the New Testament. One of the clearest examples of how we must apply biblical authority to New Testament worship is found in singing. As we search from Matthew through Revelation, we do not find instruments of music being used by the New Testament church. Remember, of course, that we are not under the Old Law today. Colossians 2:14 and Ephesians 2:11-16 teach us that the Old Law has been nailed to the cross. We do not follow the Old Law because we are under the New Law today. Inside the pages of the New Testament, we do not find instruments of music being approved for use in worship. In fact, God tells us to sing. Colossians 3:16 says that we are to admonish "one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." Ephesians 5:19 (the parallel passage) tells us that we are to speak "to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord." These passages together show us that God has told us exactly what He wants. He wants Christians to sing with their voices and to make music in their hearts. The text of 1 Corinthians 14:15 tells us to sing "with the spirit and with the understanding." We are to give God the glory as we teach the lost through our singing. Yet, never does God tell us to use instruments. What is interesting about this is that when God wants us to do something, He tells us what He wants, and that is **all** He wants. God does not expect us to add to His Word. And we understand this principle in everyday life. Supposed you send your child to the grocery store with \$5. You tell him that you want him to purchase a loaf of bread and a gallon of milk. The child purchases both of those things, but he also buys a lot of candy. If you ask him, "What are you doing with this candy? I told you to get a gallon of milk and a loaf of bread," and the child says, "Well, you didn't say **not** to get any candy," would that be acceptable? No, it would not. When you said exactly what you wanted, that meant that you did not want anything else. That is the way God is. Imagine how gigantic the Bible would be if God told us not only **what** He wanted, but He also had to tell us exactly what He did **not** want! If God had said, "I want you to do this, but I do not want you to do this, or this, or this..." it would be redundant. When God tells us what He wants, that is exactly what He wants.

As we think about the authority of the Bible in worship, we also need to note that this relates to women's role. We live in a society where women are thought of very highly. And they ought to be! Women have an important place in Christ's kingdom today. But in the New Testament, it is clearly taught that women should not have a leadership role where men are available. The text of 1 Timothy 2:9-12 teaches, "I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence." The idea there is clear. Women are not to teach or be in authority over men. That is very clear. Women should not preach. They should not be in places of authority. And where there are Christian men available, it would be a sin for a woman to teach a man the Gospel in such a setting. We must be very careful to follow the teaching of the Scriptures and the application of that teaching to Christian living.

The application of authority also is seen in matters of salvation. The authority of the Bible is so essential as it relates to matters of salvation. When we ask the question, "What must one do to be saved?" we are not asking what the religious leaders of the day think, what we "feel" we must do to be saved, or what some man has written about salvation. We are asking, "Is there any word from the Lord?" (Jer. 37:17). There are some examples that we could consider of how the authority of men is causing men not to find salvation today. For example, where is the authority in the Bible for saying "the sinner's prayer" to be saved? Have you ever thought about that? Where is the sinner's prayer in the Bible? Some today say, "You need to pray this prayer: 'Dear Jesus, I receive you into my heart and I accept you as my Lord and Savior.'" Where is that found in the Bible? You can search from Mat-

thew through Revelation, and you will not find a single account of someone being told that in order to be saved they needed to “pray the sinner’s prayer.” It simply is not there. That is not something that the New Testament teaches. Yet hundreds of thousands of people are being told that this is what they must do in order to be saved. Think about this. If it is not in the Bible, yet we are being told that this is what we must do to be saved, are we really being saved? Or, are we simply following the teaching of men, which according to Proverbs 16:25 leads to death?

Another way in which the authority of God, as it relates to salvation, is seen very clearly among us today is seen in the doctrine of “faith alone.” Where does the Bible say that faith alone will save us? The Bible certainly says that we are saved by faith. The Bible teaches that belief is essential. Jesus said in John 8:24 that if we are not willing to believe that He is the Son of God, then we will die in our sins. So, yes, belief is essential. But where does the Bible say that “faith alone” is what we must have to be saved? The Bible does not say that. In fact, the Bible says the exact opposite of that. In James 2:24, the Bible says, “You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.” Make a note of this. The only time in the Bible that the phrase “faith only” occurs is when the Bible says the exact opposite of what many in the religious world today are teaching. So do you see how essential the authority of the Bible is in matters of salvation? Do you see how important it is to follow God’s Word? We can all understand the Bible alike because we can all read from the same pages of the Bible and come to it, knowing that it is the inspired Word of God. As we trust it as God’s inspired Word, we **can** all understand it alike. How can we do that? Here is the key to all of us being able to understand the Bible alike. We must set aside our prejudice, our bias, what family members may have believed for years and years, and we must take the Word of God exactly as it is—the truth on salvation. The Bible is the only truth that we have today. Jesus said, “Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth” (Jn. 17:17). We are told that the Word of God is the only source of truth for us today. It is the only way we can be saved. In John 8:32, Jesus said, “You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” If it is the truth that makes us free, and if God’s Word is truth, then we need to come to the Bible and the Bible alone to see what we must do to be right before God.

What does the Bible say that a person must do to be saved? We are not asking what men say. They are not our authority. We are not asking what books written by men say or what people have done in the past. Rather, we are asking: What do the Scriptures teach that a person must do to be saved?

First, a person must hear God’s Word. He or she must, as I have pointed out in this lesson, recognize that the Bible is the only authority in matters of religion. Once we recognize that and have heard the Word of God, then, second, we must trust in Jesus and have faith in Him as the Savior of the world. Jesus said in John 8:24 that if we do not believe that He is God’s Son, we will not be saved. Once we believe in Jesus, then, third, we must turn **from** a life of sin and turn **to** God. Peter preached in Acts 2:38 that those people had to repent to be saved. The same is true today. Fourth, once we have repented, then we must confess Jesus as our Savior. Paul said in Romans 10:10, “For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” Yes, we must confess Jesus orally to be saved. But, fifth, the Bible also says that we must be baptized in water for the forgiveness of our sins. In Acts 2:38, Peter said, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins.” Jesus said, “He who believes and is baptized will be saved” (Mk. 16:16). Today, I want to plead with you to accept the authority of the Bible and to live your life only by it. As you follow the authority of God’s Word, may God bless your life.

Narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

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STUDY QUESTIONS FOR “THE AUTHORITY AND APPLICATION OF THE BIBLE”

1. What two questions did the chief priests and the elders ask Jesus?
2. What question did Jesus ask the chief priests and the elders in return?
3. What point was Jesus making when He asked the chief priests and elders the question He did?
4. What is wrong with making a man or group of men our authority in matters of religion?
5. Give an example of how we understand from everyday life the importance of having a recognized standard of authority.
6. What does Exodus 23:2 have to say about following “the majority” as our authority?
7. What does Proverbs 16:25 have to say about following a man or group of men as our authority?
8. What does 2 Peter 1:19-21 have to say about “private interpretation” of the Bible?
9. According to Jeremiah 10:23, what can man **not** do?
10. What, according to Jesus’ statement in John 12:48, will judge us on the Day of Judgment?
11. What lesson is contained for us today in Acts 23:1?
12. According to Matthew 28:18, what does Jesus have?
13. What important principle is taught in John 5:27?
14. According to John 16:13, what would the Holy Spirit do for Christ’s apostles?
15. According to 2 Peter 1:21, who wrote the Bible?
16. What do the examples of Nadab and Abihu and King Saul teach us regarding authority in matters of religion?
17. Name four incorrect sources of religious authority.
18. Where in the Bible is the “sinner’s prayer” found?
19. What important teaching is found in 1 Timothy 2:9-12?
20. According to 1 Corinthians 1:21, what method of disseminating the Gospel message did God choose?
21. According to John 17:17, what is our ultimate source of authority today?