

discipleship essentials

Essentials for Spiritual Leadership
Study Guide

CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

LESSON 4: THE AUTHORITY OF THE BIBLE

INTRODUCTION

This lesson is part of a Discipleship Essentials module titled Christian Doctrine. This series of lessons examines doctrines which are foundational to our faith, with an emphasis on how incorrect doctrine can negatively impact true faith. Doctrine is the set of beliefs that determine how we practise our faith. It is critical that Christians understand correct doctrine about the nature of God and salvation, especially if they are engaged in teaching and discipling. This module examines scriptures related to a number of core doctrines of the Christian Church, and also some of the areas of confusion and error associated with each doctrine.

The Study Guide is intended for an individual to look deeper into a specific lesson on their own. The lessons can be used in conjunction with other Discipleship Essentials materials, such as the video and audio productions found on www.discipleshipessentials.org.

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CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

LESSON 4: THE AUTHORITY OF THE BIBLE

WHAT IS IT ABOUT?

This lesson examines the authority of the Bible, emphasizing that all Scripture is true, without error, and inspired by God.

JUST SO YOU KNOW...

It is commonly believed among Protestant Christians that our faith is based on the Word of God alone, not on traditions. We may criticize others for being too reliant on tradition and not using God's Word as their only authority, but we must remember that tradition helps us to understand God's Word too. God's Word is the ultimate authority for life and matters of faith, and teaches that Christians are to obey all their leaders, including civil authorities, because they have been placed in our lives by God ([Romans 13:1-7](#)). God's Word instructs us to pass the teachings down to others ([2 Timothy 2:2](#)). The Church has been given the doctrines of God to safeguard, teach and uphold. Therefore, the church has some authority, but God's unchangeable and powerful Word is our *final* authority. If God's Word contradicts what we have been taught, we must always side with the clear teaching of the Bible.

GETTING STARTED

1.

What are some ways that God teaches us who He is and what matters most to Him?

2.

If you had a dream from God telling you to do something, and a Christian friend told you to do otherwise, who would you obey? How would you decide what to do? Why?



STUDY

❖ **GOD REVEALED TO US:** How is it that we know who God is and what He desires of His creation? Creation, through the world around us, testifies to the living God in many ways. Creation shows us how great and powerful God truly is, moving us to worship Him. But creation doesn't reveal everything, and some questions, such as *how* we are to worship God, remain. However, creation reveals to us the existence of God, leaving unbelievers without excuse.

- Even with the testimony of creation, humanity far too quickly reverts to idolatry – the worship of created things over the Creator, or the worship of false or distorted gods.
- To counter this, God has made Himself known to us in many ways. In the chart below, read the verses, and write down the way that God has revealed His nature to us.

Romans 1:18-20 Psalm 19:1-4	
Matthew 11:1-6 John 1:18 Hebrews 1:3	
Galatians 5:22-26 Hebrews 2:3-4	
Romans 15:4 Romans 10:17 2 Timothy 3:16-17	
John 14:26 John 16:13 Romans 5:5	

- One of the most prominent ways God reveals Himself is through His Word. This is called special revelation, also known as prophecy, described by Peter in 2 Peter 1:21. In order to be preserved and made known, these revelations were put into written form in what we now call the Old and the New Testaments that make up the Bible.
- **We can state the doctrine of God's Word this way: the Bible is special revelation from God, verbally inspired by the Spirit and inerrant in its original form. The whole of the Bible is necessary, sufficient, and the final authority for faith and life.**

❖ **THE NATURE OF THE BIBLE:** The historical church has a specific set of teachings about what the Bible is, and while it may vary somewhat from tradition to tradition, the core beliefs essential for Christian faith are what we know as the doctrines of the Bible. The Bible is unlike any other book in the world. Consider that God used the hands of men and women over thousands of years to compose it, and yet it is completely unified in its message and description of God! It is not a collection of disjointed thoughts on who God is penned by wise people, but claims to be the very words of God.



- Read these verses below and write down what you learn:

2 Timothy 3:16	
Isaiah 40:8	
Hebrews 4:12	
Romans 15:4	
Proverbs 30:5-6	

- From the previous verses, what is the Word of God capable of? Why has it been given to us?

- **The Bible is inerrant:** The Bible is our authority because it is inerrant – that is, it does not contain error. It is perfect, complete and true. This statement is usually made about the original writings, allowing for the possibility that human error in translation into modern languages may occur. There are several reasons that the Church has traditionally upheld the inerrancy of Scripture as doctrine:

- **The Author is perfect:** We believe that God who created all things is capable of creating a unified book and without error, written by many chosen and inspired people. The Bible reflects the One who created it, who Himself is perfect. If we trust the Author, we can trust His work (Psalm 18:30).
- **It claims to be perfect:** The Bible itself claims that it is without error and is wholly true – not just in part (Proverbs 30:5-6, Psalm 19:7, Psalm 12:6). Within the Bible itself, individual authors refer to other portions of the Bible as ‘the words of God’.

What does Acts 1:16-21 say about the words of Psalms 69:25 and 109:8? Notice the broader context of these verses.



What does Jesus say in Matthew 4:4 about passages of the Old Testament?

- **Our faith relies on it being wholly perfect:** If there were errors in some of the Bible, the whole of it would be an untrustworthy document because we would not know which portions were tainted with error. We must either believe that the whole of it is perfect, or that there are errors and the whole of it is untrustworthy. If we say we believe God, we must believe that the Word He has given us is true (Matthew 5:18, 2 Peter 1:21).
- **The Bible is necessary:** The Bible is our authority because it is necessary – that is, the words of God contained in the Bible are necessary for our knowledge of salvation, the will of God, and growth in our faith. While God reveals His existence and nature through creation, there is so much more God wants us to know!
 - **For salvation:** What does Romans 10:13-17 tell us we must do in order to believe the Gospel?
 - **For conviction of sin:** God’s words show us our sin, and bear witness to God’s unchanging standards for our lives. The law in the Old Testament revealed to people their sin and need for a saviour. So do the words of Christ and the writings of the Apostles. God’s Word teaches, reproves, corrects us, and judges the intentions of our heart (Hebrews 4:12, 2 Timothy 3:16).
 - **For growth in faith:** The Bible shows us that we must take in spiritual nutrition (the Word of God) just as we eat food for our physical bodies. God’s Word is often compared to food (Matthew 4:4, 1 Peter 2:2), and it is through our ‘daily bread’ that God continually teaches, encourages, and trains us for righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16, John 6:63).
- **The Bible is sufficient:** The Bible is our authority because it is sufficient – that is, the Word of God contains all that we need for salvation, and to learn how to trust Him



and obey Him. God's Word contains the principles needed to guide us through life in a way that honours Him.

- o **God has given us exactly what we need:** The people of God who lived before Christ only had the Law and books of the Old Testament. However, that was sufficient for them as they learned to put their faith in God while looking forward to the coming Messiah. After Christ the Saviour came, the New Testament teaching about Him enlightened our understanding of the Old Testament, explaining clearly how to be saved and how to live for Christ. God has always provided exactly what we need to know (2 Timothy 3:15).
- o **We must not add to or take away from Scripture:** If the Bible was God-breathed and God-given, then it was not given to us by mere men. Nothing that humankind has devised is capable of giving us salvation. We also must not let anyone take away or add to the Word of God (Deuteronomy 4:2, Revelation 22:18-19).
- o **We must not put so-called 'new' revelations on the same level as Scripture:** The Apostle Paul warned the church in Colossae to not be distracted by false teachings or new ideas (Colossians 2:8). We must not consider any words of men as equal in value to the words of God. This is idolatry.

Why do people sometimes mistakenly put 'new' revelation on the same level as Scripture? Consider how they respond to preachers, writers or pastors?

Some false teachers will try to pass off writings produced much later than the original Gospels as the real truth of Jesus. These were not included in the Bible because they preached a conflicting message and were of unverifiable authority. These false books must not be confused with the true Word of God.

- **The Bible is the final authority:** When we say that the Bible is our final authority for life and faith, we are saying that it is of greater importance than our own opinions, traditions of the Church, or the teachings of men. While we must be subject to all authorities (such as government leaders, church leaders or pastors) since they are from God (Romans 13:1-7), we must always rely on the Bible for truth. We should consider every doctrine and teaching in light of the Bible (Acts 17:11, Ephesians 4:14).
- What are some ways that people act when they do not accept the authority, necessity, inerrancy and sufficiency of the Bible as the Word of God in their life?



- How could a church demonstrate the authority, necessity inerrancy and sufficiency of the Bible through their practices and worship?

❖ **DOCTRINAL ERRORS AND THE AUTHORITY OF THE BIBLE:** What some people believe about the Bible is not correct. They could have been influenced by popular worldly thought, or have chosen to wander from the commonly held doctrine they learned in their church.

- **Error #1 – The Bible is partially true:** Some people believe that the Bible contains errors, and is therefore only partially true. For instance, they argue that the things Jesus said may be true but because miracles are impossible, they must be a fabrication. They might say we only need to obey and be concerned with the parts that are ‘correct’. The problem with this belief is that there is no objective way to know what is true and what is false. That places them in a position of higher moral authority than God, and essentially they are calling God a liar. Disbelief of one part of the Bible, or failure to obey it, is disobedience to God.
- **Error #2 – The Bible is only a good moral story:** Some people hold that the Bible is good for teaching morals and that it was written as a story rather than history. For this reason, they think they can take from it what they want and learn from it, but are under no obligation to follow its commands or teachings. The problem with this belief is that it denies the authority of the Bible as the true Word of God.
- **Error #3 – The Bible is an authority for our spiritual lives only:** Some people believe that the Bible is a guide about who God is and how to worship Him, but that it applies to our spiritual lives only. This view is problematic because the Bible teaches us not only how to worship God, but also how to live our lives, which should be an extension of our worship. The Bible tells us how to obey God in our ordinary lives as well as our spiritual lives. For the Christian, there is no separation between our so-called ‘secular’ lives and our ‘spiritual’ lives.
- **Error #4 – The Bible is a secondary source of knowledge of God:** Some people believe their primary source of teaching about God should come from the Church or their priest/pastor/teacher. They may have been taught that their leader or teacher has a ‘new’ or ‘special’ revelation from God that sets them apart from other Christians, or that Christianity is corrupt and therefore God has given them a new teaching to follow that is not the Bible. This places the deliverer of this new message in a higher place than the Word of God, which is dangerous. We must always go back to the Bible to



understand if new teachings are true or false. We are warned about adding to what the Bible says, and only false teachers would presume more authority than the Bible.

- ❖ **CONCLUSION:** The basis for our Christian faith is the authority of God's Word, the Bible. It is the highest authority we have for living a life of faith, and is the primary means by which God communicates His will to us. While it is helpful to read and understand God's Word in the context of a Church community, we fall into error when we allow anything to take the place of its authority.

SUMMARY

- ❖ God has revealed Himself through what He has made, through Christ, through His Word, through His Holy Spirit, and through the good works of believers.
- ❖ The Bible is special revelation from God, verbally inspired by the Spirit and inerrant in its original form. The whole of the Bible is necessary, sufficient, and the final authority for faith and life.
- ❖ We know the Word of God is inerrant (without errors) because the author is perfect, it claims to be perfect, and we trust God is able to preserve His Word.
- ❖ We know the Word of God is necessary for salvation, the conviction of sin, and growth in faith.
- ❖ We know the Word of God is sufficient because God has given us everything we need to know. God has told us to not add or take away from these words.



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How do you display your belief in the authority of God's Word? If you believe it is the final authority, what things should you do, or not do?

2. Is there a part of the Bible that you find difficult to believe or obey? Have you wrestled with questions about whether any part of the Bible is true? Where could you go to ask questions and learn more about this passage?