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**“Come, Let Us Reason About the Bible”**  
**What Is the Church of the New Testament?**  
**Bible Study Series**

*And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.”*—(Matthew 16:18)

**LESSON SIX — Who Has Authority in the Church?**

*Estimated Reading Time: 12-15 minutes*

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Take a moment and think about the simple word **authority**. It is used in many ways—parents over children, teachers over students, police officers in society, and governments over citizens. But what does it mean?

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**What Is “Authority”?**

In general, **authority** is the right or power to give orders, make decisions, and enforce obedience. It’s the ability to direct or command with legitimacy. Authority is respected because it keeps order and prevents chaos. Without it, people could just do whatever they wanted—right or wrong—and society would crumble.

Think about what happens **when authority is rejected**. What’s left when there are no rules, no enforcement, and no respect for leadership? The answer is **anarchy**—a state of lawlessness and disorder. It’s every person doing what is right in their own eyes.

The Bible actually speaks of such times. In the period of the judges, when Israel had no king and often turned away from God’s authority, Scripture says:

**“In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”**  
*(Judges 21:25)*

That’s what happens when God’s authority is not honored. Without a standard, there is confusion, rebellion, and ultimately destruction. And this doesn’t only apply to nations—it applies to the **church**, too. If there is no respect for the authority God has placed over us --who is Jesus Christ, first and foremost—then spiritual **anarchy** can take hold in the church. People begin doing what **they** think is best, rather than what **God** has commanded.

Authority is not about control—it’s about **order, peace, protection, and accountability**. Just like a household, a nation, or a sports team falls apart without proper leadership, so does the church.

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## What Is “Biblical Authority”?

Biblical authority is God’s right to rule over His creation, and His choice to communicate that authority through His inspired Word. It means that what God says must be respected and obeyed, especially in the **church**, which belongs to Him. We do not make the rules—**He does**.

This prerogative begins by understanding how and why **God gave authority to His Son, Jesus Christ**, to speak on His behalf and to rule.

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## Jesus Has All Authority

**How did** Jesus come to have this authority?

After His resurrection, Jesus made this powerful statement to His disciples:

**“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.”**

*(Matthew 28:18)*

That’s clear. Not *some* authority—not just over spiritual matters, or just over heaven—but **all** authority, in both heaven and on earth. From that point forward, no one else had the right to speak on God’s behalf except Jesus. He is now the **ultimate authority** in matters of faith, life, and especially in His church.

But this authority didn’t begin after the resurrection. It was part of God’s plan from the beginning. One powerful moment that shows this is what happened at the **transfiguration of Jesus**.

The scene is set in Matthew 17:1 and following.

Jesus took Peter, James, and John up on a high mountain by themselves. There, He was **transfigured before them**—His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became white as light. Suddenly, Moses and Elijah appeared with Him, talking with Him. This must have been an overwhelming sight—two of the greatest figures from Jewish history, standing and speaking with Jesus!

Peter, not fully understanding what was happening, offered to build three tabernacles—one for Jesus, one for Moses, and one for Elijah. But then something even more amazing happened:

**“While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!’”**

*(Matthew 17:5)*

This was the voice of **God the Father**.

Think about what He said:

- “This is My beloved Son” – That’s a declaration of **identity**. Jesus is God’s Son—divine, chosen, and unique.
- “In whom I am well pleased” – That’s a declaration of **approval**. Everything Jesus had done was in perfect alignment with the will of the Father.

- “Hear Him!” – That’s a **command**. From now on, Moses (the Law) and Elijah (the Prophets) would no longer be the ultimate authority. **Jesus alone** would speak for God.

This moment confirmed that **Jesus had been appointed as the final authority** in all things spiritual. It wasn’t that Moses and Elijah were wrong or unimportant—but now, Jesus had taken His place as the **one voice** all must listen to.

Later, Jesus confirmed that He spoke not by His own ideas, but directly from the Father:

**“For I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak.”**

*(John 12:49)*

So when you hear the words of Jesus, you’re not just hearing the words of a wise teacher or good man—you are hearing **the very voice of God**. And the Father Himself says, “*Hear Him!*”

That’s why the authority in the church **belongs to Jesus alone**. Not to Moses. Not to Elijah. Not to any man, tradition, or council. **Only to Jesus**.

As members of His church, we are called to **listen to Him, obey Him, and follow His Word** in everything we teach and practice.

### **A Lesson from Israel’s Past**

Now, look back to the Old Testament for an example. God was always meant to be Israel’s ruler. But over time, **they rejected God’s rule**. They looked at the nations around them and wanted to be like them.

**“Now make us a king to judge us like all the nations.”**

*(1 Samuel 8:5)*

Samuel, the prophet, was upset. But God told him:

**“They have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them.”**

*(1 Samuel 8:7)*

So God gave them kings—but most of them **did not follow God’s commandments**. Kings like Saul, Jeroboam, and Ahab led the people into sin and idolatry. But not all kings were like that. One king, **Josiah**, was different:

**“Now before him there was no king like him, who turned to the Lord with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the Law of Moses; nor after him did any arise like him.”**

*(2 Kings 23:25)*

Josiah shows us what happens when someone respects God’s authority—**blessings follow**. Most kings didn’t, and the consequences were national tragedy and captivity.

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## Analogies for Today

You can relate to this even today. Think about our society. You live under **layers of authority**: national, state, and local. If you break the law, there are **consequences**—fines, jail time, or worse. Authority exists to maintain order and justice.

Now think about sports, for example, **football**. There are rulebooks in football. If a player grabs another's facemask or crosses the line early, the **referee throws a flag**, There's a penalty given. Why? Because the game has rules, and someone is authorized to enforce them.

In the same way, **God has a rulebook for the church**—it's called the **New Testament**. Jesus is the Head, and He has delegated authority through the **apostles**, through **Scripture**, and through **leaders in the local church**.

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## We Must Respect Jesus' Authority

Jesus once asked an important question.

**“But why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do the things which I say?”**

*(Luke 6:46)*

It's not enough to simply call Jesus “Lord.” We must **obey** Him.

The apostles understood this. Paul wrote:

**“And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus...”**

*(Colossians 3:17)*

To do something “in the name of” someone means to do it **by their authority**. Church practices must not be based on personal preference or tradition. The pattern laid out by God in the New Testament must be followed. There are no exceptions or exclusions acceptable to God.

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## Authority and Government

God even expects civil government to be respected.

**“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.”**

*(Romans 13:1)*

Just like the laws of the land must be followed, so must the laws of the **church**. And just as disobedience to the government brings punishment, disobedience to **God's spiritual laws** brings eternal consequences.

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## Authority Within the Church

So who exercises authority in the church, under Christ? God has predetermined **elders**, also called **shepherds** or **bishops**, to be godly men appointed to oversee the local congregation.

**“Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account.”**

*(Hebrews 13:17)*

That’s serious! Elders have a responsibility to guide the church **according to Christ’s teachings**. Members are called to **submit** to them—not blindly, but respectfully—because their work is to **protect souls**.

Peter also wrote to the elders of the church at Ephesus:

**“Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers... not as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.”**

*(1 Peter 5:2-3)*

So elders are not to be dictators—but **spiritual leaders**, modeling Christ’s authority and love.

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## Why Authority Matters

Without proper respect for authority, the church falls into confusion and division. Paul told the Corinthians:

**“For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.”**

*(1 Corinthians 14:33)*

God’s plan is **orderly**, not chaotic. That means respecting Jesus as Head, following His teachings, obeying the leadership He established, and doing all things **by His authority**.

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## Conclusion

So, who has authority in the church?

- **God gave all authority to Jesus.**
- **Jesus speaks through the New Testament.**
- **The apostles and inspired writers revealed His will.**
- **Elders lead local congregations under Christ’s authority.**
- **Members are to obey those leaders, as long as they follow the Word.**

Just like in sports or society, **rules exist** and **violations bring consequences**. But when we follow God’s authority with sincere hearts, we are blessed.

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Remember that authority in the church is not about control—it’s about **order, love, and obedience** to the One who gave His life for us.

**“If you love Me, keep My commandments.”**

(Obedience to God is shown by respecting His authority in all things.)

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### Questions to Confirm Understanding

*Estimated Time to Answer the Questions: 5 - 7 minutes; With Scripture Lookup: 30 minutes*

Read and answer the following set of questions about this lesson, and circle your answer: “True | False” or “Yes | No”. Look up the scriptures provided to confirm your answers. Then compare your answers with the Answer Key provided after these questions.

1. Without authority and obedience, confusion and disorder arise.  
**True | False**
2. God has always granted mankind the freedom to determine spiritual authority for themselves.  
**True | False**
3. All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Jesus. (*Matthew 28:18*)  
**True | False**
4. Jesus said He spoke on His own authority and not from the Father. (*John 12:49*)  
**True | False**
5. God the Father commanded that we should hear His Son, Jesus. (*Matthew 17:5*)  
**True | False**
6. The church today is authorized to follow Moses or Elijah instead of Christ.  
**True | False**
7. Israel originally asked for a king so they could be different from the nations around them.  
**True | False**
8. God told Samuel that the people had rejected Him by asking for a king. (*1 Samuel 8:7*)  
**True | False**
9. Most kings of Israel were faithful to God and led the people in righteousness.  
**True | False**
10. King Josiah was known for turning to the Lord with all his heart, soul, and might. (*2 Kings 23:25*)  
**True | False**

11. People should be allowed to do whatever is right in their own eyes in spiritual matters. *(Judges 21:25)*  
**True | False**
  12. Rules and authority are only necessary in government and sports, but not in the church.  
**True | False**
  13. Christians are commanded to be subject to governing authorities. *(Romans 13:1)*  
**True | False**
  14. There is no authority except from God. *(Romans 13:1)*  
**True | False**
  15. Church members must obey the elders or shepherds in all matters, even those outside the teachings of Christ.  
**True | False**
  16. Elders are expected to lead the flock as examples, not as lords. *(1 Peter 5:2-3)*  
**True | False**
  17. Elders must give account for the souls under their care. *(Hebrews 13:17)*  
**True | False**
  18. Should everything in word or deed be done in the name of the Lord Jesus? *(Colossians 3:17)*  
**Yes | No**
  19. Did Jesus ask, “Why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do the things which I say?” *(Luke 6:46)*  
**Yes | No**
  20. Is it necessary to follow the New Testament pattern of authority in the church today?  
**Yes | No**
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### **Answer Key – Lesson Six: Who Has Authority in the Church?**

1. *Estimated Time to Read the Answers: 7 - 9 minutes; With Reflection and Contemplation: 30 – 40 minutes*
2. **Without authority and obedience, confusion and disorder arise.**  
**Correct Answer: True**  
**Explanation:** The absence of authority leads to chaos. God designed authority to create order in the church and in society (cf. 1 Corinthians 14:33).
2. **God has always granted mankind the freedom to determine spiritual authority for themselves.**  
**Correct Answer: False**  
**Explanation:** God has always revealed His will and required obedience. Jesus was given authority, and God commands that we “hear Him” (Matthew 17:5).

3. **All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Jesus. (Matthew 28:18)**  
**Correct Answer: True**  
*“And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.’”*  
**Explanation:** Jesus clearly states that He possesses all authority, which includes authority over the church.
  
4. **Jesus said He spoke on His own authority and not from the Father. (John 12:49)**  
**Correct Answer: False**  
*“For I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak.”*  
**Explanation:** Jesus did not speak independently; His message was from the Father, showing divine authorization.
  
5. **God the Father commanded that we should hear His Son, Jesus. (Matthew 17:5)**  
**Correct Answer: True**  
*“This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!”*  
**Explanation:** God's direct command at the transfiguration makes it clear that Jesus is the final authority we are to listen to.
  
6. **The church today is authorized to follow Moses or Elijah instead of Christ.**  
**Correct Answer: False**  
**Explanation:** At the transfiguration, God singled out Jesus with the command “Hear Him.” The authority of Moses (the Law) and Elijah (the Prophets) has been superseded by Christ (Hebrews 1:1–2).
  
7. **Israel originally asked for a king so they could be different from the nations around them.**  
**Correct Answer: False**  
**Explanation:** They asked for a king to be **like** the nations around them (1 Samuel 8:5), thereby rejecting God’s unique rule.
  
8. **God told Samuel that the people had rejected Him by asking for a king. (1 Samuel 8:7)**  
**Correct Answer: True**  
*“They have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them.”*  
**Explanation:** God viewed Israel’s request for a king as a rejection of His divine Lordship.
  
9. **Most kings of Israel were faithful to God and led the people in righteousness.**  
**Correct Answer: False**  
**Explanation:** The majority of Israel’s and Judah’s kings led the people into sin and idolatry rather than obedience to God.
  
10. **King Josiah was known for turning to the Lord with all his heart, soul, and might. (2 Kings 23:25)**  
**Correct Answer: True**  
*“Now before him there was no king like him, who turned to the Lord with all his heart, with all*

*his soul, and with all his might...*"

**Explanation:** Josiah was exceptional in his wholehearted return to God's law and authority.

**11. People should be allowed to do whatever is right in their own eyes in spiritual matters.**

**(Judges 21:25)**

**Correct Answer: False**

*"In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes."*

**Explanation:** This verse describes a time of spiritual and moral failure due to a lack of divine leadership—not an ideal to follow.

**12. Rules and authority are only necessary in government and sports, but not in the church.**

**Correct Answer: False**

**Explanation:** Authority is essential in all areas of life, including the church. God has established structure and leadership within the church for order and peace (1 Corinthians 14:33).

**13. Christians are commanded to be subject to governing authorities. (Romans 13:1)**

**Correct Answer: True**

*"Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God..."*

**Explanation:** Civil authority is ordained by God, and Christians are to respect it unless it conflicts with God's law (Acts 5:29).

**14. There is no authority except from God. (Romans 13:1)**

**Correct Answer: True**

*"...For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God."*

**Explanation:** All legitimate authority—civil or spiritual—originates from God.

**15. Church members must obey the elders or shepherds in all matters, even those outside the teachings of Christ.**

**Correct Answer: False**

**Explanation:** Elders must lead according to God's Word. Their authority is not unlimited, and members are only bound to obey in matters that align with Christ's teachings (Hebrews 13:17).

**16. Elders are expected to lead the flock as examples, not as lords. (1 Peter 5:2-3)**

**Correct Answer: True**

*"...not as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock."*

**Explanation:** Elders must lead humbly, by example—not through coercion or authoritarianism.

**17. Elders must give account for the souls under their care. (Hebrews 13:17)**

**Correct Answer: True**

*"...for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account."*

**Explanation:** Elders bear a serious responsibility before God for the spiritual well-being of the congregation.

**18. Should everything in word or deed be done in the name of the Lord Jesus? (Colossians 3:17)**

**Correct Answer: Yes**

*“And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus...”*

**Explanation:** This verse affirms that every action in the Christian life must be done under Jesus’ authority.

**19. Did Jesus ask, “Why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do the things which I say?” (Luke 6:46)**

**Correct Answer: Yes**

*“But why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do the things which I say?”*

**Explanation:** Jesus emphasized that acknowledging Him as Lord means obeying His commands.

**20. Is it necessary to follow the New Testament pattern of authority in the church today?**

**Correct Answer: Yes**

**Explanation:** Since all authority has been given to Jesus and is revealed through the New Testament, it remains the standard for the church in every generation.

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