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Authority

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Lesson One: God and Authority

Who Is God?

All of us have seen paintings or illustrations that depict God. They usually look like Michelangelo's work on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel—old, benevolent dude with a long white beard, floating in the clouds. We recognize, of course, that God is an invisible, spiritual being, and that we should not mistake Biblical metaphor for proof that God has a face, hands, etc.

However, of far greater importance than the pictures of God we may see are the pictures of God that we create inside our heads. Every believer has an idea of what God is like. Some of these ideas are based on decades of careful Bible study; others are the product of little more than wishful thinking. Regardless of how accurate these conceptions are, they

will exert a powerful influence on our behavior. If we think of God as a stern minister of justice, that will lead us to very different behavior than if we believe him to be an indulgent grandfather.

Of course, neither of those thumbnail sketches does our Creator justice. Instead, as we study His word, we should strive to develop a continually more nuanced picture of Him. We must take care, though, that our mental images are not contaminated by our culture. The modern United States is very egalitarian and very anti-authoritarian. Because we have never known a king on earth, we struggle with the idea of a King in heaven. Our prejudices, though, cannot change the truth. God is as He has revealed Himself, and our understanding of Him must be founded on that revelation.

Authority and the First-Century Church: Lesson Thirteen

6. The Old and New Covenants
7. Activities of the Early Church
8. Roles in the Early Church
9. The Collection in the Early Church
10. Support in the Early Church
11. Benevolence in the Early Church
12. The Individual and the Church

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Lesson Thirteen: Review

For each of the lessons listed below, describe the lesson's main point and its applicability to us today.

1. God and Authority
2. Learning God's Will
3. Establishing Authority
4. The Silence of the Scriptures, Part 1
5. The Silence of the Scriptures, Part 2

Authority and the First-Century Church: Lesson One

1. How does the centurion describe himself in Luke 7:8? How does he describe the practical results of this attribute? What does this teach us about the nature of authority?
2. What does Jesus claim for Himself in Matthew 28:18? In light of the previous question, what does this claim mean? Why is this important?
3. Each of the following seven passages of Scripture describes a relationship. For each passage, state the relationship and explain how it helps us understand our relationship with God.
 - A. Matthew 18:23
 - B. Luke 17:7-9

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Lesson Two: Learning God's Will

Communication

One of the age-old questions of human existence is, "How do I know what somebody wants me to do?" Sometimes, particularly in dealings with our family members and spouses, we're expected to Just Know. Our loved one sends us telepathic messages with great intensity, and we're expected to decode and obey them.

God, however, does not resort to the you-ought-to-know-already method of communication. Everyone from any religious persuasion believes that if God wants us to know something, He is going to tell us. However, human ideas for how this ought to work differ greatly. Some men claim that they still receive direct revelation from God today, so we ought to obey them as we would God. Other

men say that God speaks through the word, but that only clergy, with special training and perhaps a special anointing from the Holy Spirit, can understand it.

By contrast, our faith is founded on the idea that God made His word comprehensible to anyone, and that His revelation to the first century church was intended to establish a pattern for the church in every century, until the end of time. If these ideas are correct, they have staggering implications for what our behavior as a church should be. If they are not, we truly have no idea about what Christianity ought to be.

The only way for us to test these ideas is to evaluate them according to the word. Only as we do this can we understand the things that God wants us to understand.

Authority and the First-Century Church: Lesson Twelve

1. To whom is 1 Timothy 5:16 addressed? What are they supposed to do? Why? What general principle does this illustrate?
2. What questions does Peter ask Ananias in Acts 5:4? What is the implication of these questions? What do they teach us about private funds and what they may be used for?
3. To whom is James 1:26 addressed? What does it reveal about the addressee? Is this passage written to an entire church, or to an individual? Why?
4. What subject does James discuss in 1:26? What does it consist of? What sort of actions (regardless of doer) might fulfill the requirements of this passage?

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Lesson Twelve: The Individual and the Church

How Is Important Too

The Bible reveals God's nature and will. Some of these are obvious; others are less so. For example, we know that God is an omnipotent being. If He so chose, He could rearrange the stars to spell out the gospel. He could send an angel to every human being on the planet with the message that Jesus died for their sins. However, God entrusted His word to ordinary Christians, who, at least to our minds, seem less effective than other means at His disposal. Why would God do that?

The answer is twofold. First, when ordinary Christians carry out God's will, they learn to imitate Christ. Second, when God accomplishes His will despite the weakness of His instruments, that glorifies Him.

Similar concerns apply in the realm of benevolence. God's plan has left the feeding of the hungry and the support of the needy to individual Christians. In part, He does this so that we as individuals will learn to love our neighbor. It's easy to drop a check in a denominational collection plate, so that the denominational charity can take care of our duty to do good for us. It's hard to find the time and the will to volunteer at a food bank, or to take on a foster child for several months. However, those good works will teach us more about following Jesus than a lifetime of check-writing. In the same way, most Americans wouldn't notice one more church charity, but when individual Christians are disproportionately involved in doing good, that makes an impression. It leads others to see our good works and glorify God.

Authority and the First-Century Church: Lesson Two

1. Ephesians 3:3-5 describes the process of revelation. Whose revelation is it? Who revealed the message? Who recorded the message? Who reads the message? Why is it important to understand this process?
2. What does Ephesians 3:4 say we are able to do? According to the passage, do we need anyone else's help to accomplish this task? What are the implications of this concept?
3. What does 2 Timothy 3:17 say that the word equips us for? Is there any good work that the word does not equip us for? Does this passage describe a revelation that was completed in the first century, or a revelation that was still incomplete? Why are these things important?
4. What does 1 Corinthians 13:10 say will happen when the perfect (or complete) has come? According to 13:8-19, what are some of these partial things? On this basis, should we expect inspired prophets to continue revealing God's word today? Why or why not?

Authority and the First-Century Church: Lesson Two

5. What command does Paul give in Colossians 3:17? In this context, what does “name” mean? What does this teach us?
6. How does Paul describe his goal for writing to the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 2:9? Is this something that God still wants to see from us today? Why or why not?
7. According to Hebrews 8:5, how did God instruct Moses on Mt. Sinai? Does God appear more interested in imitation or innovation? Why? What about God’s nature would explain this preference? Why is this relevant to us today?
8. According to 1 Timothy 3:14-15, why is Paul writing to Timothy? Does the text imply that these rules are limited to the church in Ephesus, or are they meant to govern the church everywhere? Explain your answer. Why is this important?

Authority and the First-Century Church: Lesson Eleven

9. What command does Paul give in 1 Timothy 5:3? Whom does he except from this in 5:4? Whom else does he except in 5:6? According to 5:5, who is worthy of “honor”? What can we learn from this about church benevolence?
10. In 5:8, what does Paul reveal about the one who does not provide for his family? How harsh is this? What does it teach us?
11. According to 5:9-10, what are the characteristics of the widow who is to be enrolled? What does this list remind us of? What does it help us to understand?
12. What does Paul reveal about younger widows in 5:11? How does he explain this in 5:12-13? In 5:14, what solution does he propose for them instead? What does this teach us?

Authority and the First-Century Church: Lesson Eleven

5. According to Romans 15:25, what is Paul about to do? According to 15:26, where did this aid come from? What was the attitude of the ones who gave it? What does their attitude teach us?

6. What does Paul urge the Thessalonians to do in 2 Thessalonians 3:7? According to 3:8, what did he himself do? In 3:9, how does he explain his conduct? What does this teach us about the importance of examples of industry in church leaders?

7. What comment does Paul repeat in 3:10? In 3:11, what problem does he identify? Can this be a problem today? How should we guard against it?

8. In 3:12, what command does Paul give? According to 3:14-15, what should happen to the disobedient? What does this teach us about the seriousness of this problem?

Authority and the First-Century Church: Lesson Two

9. According to 1 Corinthians 4:17, why did Paul send Timothy to Corinth? Did Paul only teach his ways in Corinth? If not, where did he teach them? What can we learn from this?

10. What rule does Paul state in 1 Corinthians 7:17? Where does he teach this rule? If Paul were still alive today, would we expect him to teach this rule in this congregation? What does this tell us about the teaching of Paul we have recorded in Scripture?

11. What does Paul urge Timothy to do in 2 Timothy 1:13? What does this reveal to us about the nature of God's revelation?

12. Some religious teachers today claim that the Bible is not meant to be a blueprint for the Lord's church. Instead, they say it is merely a love letter, with the message that God loves us. In light of the passages mentioned in this lesson, is this claim valid? Why or why not?

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Lesson Three: Establishing Authority

CENI and the Bible

When we in the church discuss Bible authority, we often resort to the so-called CENI hermeneutic. This is the idea that we learn God's will from His word by looking for His commands, examples of conduct of which He approved, and the necessary implications of what has been explicitly revealed.

This way of reading Scripture has come under a great deal of attack in recent years, usually from people within the ranks of the church. These critics charge that CENI is foreign to the way that God wanted the Bible to be understood, and that it enables us to Pharisaically justify the activities we want to justify, while condemning the activities we want to condemn. In short, CENI has taken us from what God wants us to be.

Although CENI does lend itself to mind-numbing jargon (no outsider has the foggiest idea what a necessary implication is), conceptually speaking, what we do is the same thing that anyone else does when they want to derive meaning from a text. When I first encountered close textual reading of poetry in high-school English, I was struck by how similar the analysis of word and context was to what I had already learned to do in Bible class. Likewise, the way that I learned to read statutes and cases in law school was CENI dressed in different clothes.

There is nothing Pharisaical about CENI. It is a common-sense approach to a text that anyone must use to uncover the author's intent. If we are honest in our application of these principles, they will guide us to an understanding of the will of God.

Authority and the First-Century Church: Lesson Eleven

1. What command did Paul give the Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians 4:11? According to 4:12, what were the Thessalonians to accomplish by doing this? How should this shape our perspective on church benevolence?
2. According to Acts 4:32, what was the overall spirit of the Jerusalem congregation? What was their attitude toward personal property? According to 4:34-35, how did many brethren use their personal property? What of this was unique to the situation of the Jerusalem church? What is applicable to our situation today?
3. What problem arises in 6:1? What does it imply about the Jerusalem church? In 6:2-3, how do the apostles solve the problem? What can we learn from this?
4. What problem is predicted in 11:28? According to 11:29, how do the disciples decide to respond? In 11:30, how do they carry out their plan? How should churches make use of this pattern today?

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Lesson Eleven: Benevolence in the Early Church

General Benevolence

The devil loves nothing more than tempting men to do evil by presenting that evil in the guise of good. In our time, we see this most obviously in the way that many mainline denominations have embraced the practice of homosexuality. "God is love," they reason, "and so God must want us to welcome homosexuals into our community of faith." This emotional nature of this appeal obscures the fact that it is contrary to God's word.

Sadly, many churches succumb to a similar temptation in the area of general benevolence—using church funds to provide for the non-Christian poor. Here too, the emotional appeal is powerful. There are obvious needs all around us. Any "Christian" who can con-

sider the plight of starving children without being moved is no true disciple of Christ. On the basis of that appeal, many congregations eagerly disburse the Lord's money to help the needy.

No one disputes that Christians should help starving children. However, that fact by itself does not establish that the church is the means of assistance that God has chosen. After all, the cities of the first-century Roman Empire were thronged with starving children. Early churches never lacked opportunity to spend church funds to help them. Why, then, do we never have even a hint of those churches engaging in general benevolence. This highlights a basic truth about the nature of the church. God intends for it to feed not the hunger of the world's bodies, but the hunger of the world's souls.

Authority and the First-Century Church: Lesson Three

1. In Acts 15:6-21, what topic is under discussion? In 15:13-17, what does James do? What is the relevance of this to the overall discussion? What can we learn from it?
2. In 15:6-11, what does Peter do? What is the relevance of this to the discussion? What does it teach us?
3. In 15:12, what do Paul and Barnabas do? What is the relevance of this to the discussion? What can we take from it?
4. What does Jesus do in Matthew 8:3? What does He tell the ex-leper to do in 8:4? What does this teach us about Jesus' attitude toward the commands of God's law? Why is this important?

Authority and the First-Century Church: Lesson Three

5. What are Jesus' disciples doing in Matthew 12:1? What do the Pharisees accuse him of in 12:2? In 12:3-5, what does Jesus do to defend Himself? What does this show us about Jesus' attitude toward examples from the Scripture? Why is this relevant to us?

6. What question do the Pharisees ask Jesus in Matthew 19:3? What passages does Jesus cite in response in 19:4-5? In 19:6, what answer does He give? Is this answer stated in any of the texts Jesus quotes? If not, how did He arrive at it? What can we take from this?

7. What does Jesus declare about Himself in Matthew 28:18? On the basis of this, what does He tell the apostles to do in Matthew 28:19? What are some ways the apostles could have obeyed this commandment? What are some ways they could have disobeyed this commandment? What does this teach us?

8. List the modes of transportation described in the following passages: Acts 8:30-31; 9:25; 21:1; 23:23-24, 31. Are all of these means of travel authorized by the command of Matthew 28:19? Why or why not? What conclusions can we draw from this?

Authority and the First-Century Church: Lesson Ten

9. What sort of people does Paul describe in 1 Timothy 6:5? What do they imagine? Are there still people who imagine this today? How should this passage change the way we support preachers?

10. What does Paul advise about elders in 5:17? Which elders particularly merit this? What does this tell us about the work of elders? What does it tell us about how we should respect them?

11. What two Scriptures does Paul cite in support of this statement in 5:18? Where does the first one come from? Where does the second one come from? What does this establish about the financial support of elders? What does it establish about the definition of "Scripture?"

12. Whom does Paul commend to the Romans in Romans 16:1? How is she described? Does she seem to have arrived in Rome on her own business, or on the church's business? What two things does Paul ask the brethren in Rome to do for her? What does this authorize us to do today?

Authority and the First-Century Church: Lesson Ten

5. What does Paul bring up as an example in 9:13? Where did the temple food come from? What similar system does Paul say Jesus set up in 9:14? Why is this reasonable?

6. What does Paul say the Philippians have done in Philippians 4:10? According to 4:11, what was not the cause for his rejoicing? In 4:12, what does he say he has learned to do? What, if any, bearing does Paul's family situation have on his attitude here?

7. What does Paul say about his attitude toward the Philippians' gift in 4:14? How does he describe their behavior in 4:15-16? What does this tell us about the Philippians? How can we imitate them today?

8. How does Paul explain his rejoicing in 4:17? In 4:18, how does he say the gift appears to God? According to 4:19, what will God do for the Philippians? What does all of this teach us?

Authority and the First-Century Church: Lesson Three

9. What command does the first part of Hebrews 13:15 give? If we knew nothing else about the Scripture, what are some methods we might devise to obey this command? How does the second part of 13:15 explain the first? What does this do to the list of methods we made earlier? Why is this important?

10. What are we commanded to do in Hebrews 10:24-25? What are some ways that early Christians fulfilled this command? Acts 5:12; 16:13; 17:19; 18:4, 7 and 19:9 may help. What does this teach us about our places of assembly? Is it lawful for a church to own its own building, even though no church in the first century is recorded as having done so? Why or why not?

11. What command does Paul give us in Ephesians 5:18-19? Does this command authorize us to use hymnals and pitch pipes? Does it authorize us to use pipe organs? What is the difference between the two? Why is this important?

12. What does Paul direct us to do in Romans 13:1? In Romans 13:1-2, how does he explain himself? What does this teach us about the way we should regard the law of the land in which we live?

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Lesson Four: The Silence of the Scriptures, Part 1

The Meaning of Silence

Ever since the Protestant Reformation, there has been an ongoing debate about what the silence of the Scripture means. What is God trying to say when He doesn't say anything? Our answer to this question has a dramatic effect on our practice in nearly every area.

One of the places where this debate most often occurs is in discussions of public worship. Hundreds of years ago, the parties on either side were Martin Luther and his adherents on the one hand, and John Calvin and his followers on the other. Luther preached what is typically called "the normative principle of worship." In other words, as long as some practice was acceptable to the congregation and compatible with public order, it could rightfully occur in

worship. Musical instruments? Fine. Incense? Not a problem.

Calvin, however, took a stricter stance. He adhered to what is often described as "the regulative principle of worship" instead. According to this perspective, anything that the Scripture did not specifically allow was forbidden. As a result, early Calvinist churches did not use musical instruments, and they worshiped in very plain, unadorned buildings.

As interesting as these long-ago squabbles may be, neither the words of Luther nor of Calvin must be our chief concern. The only thing that is important is how God wants us to understand His silence, and the only way we can gain insight into that issue is by returning again to His word. It doesn't matter what others call our behavior, as long as we do what is right.

Authority and the First-Century Church: Lesson Ten

1. What does Paul say he is doing in 1 Corinthians 9:3? In 9:4, what does he ask? In 9:5, what else does he ask? Why bring up spouses here? What is he establishing?
2. What three rhetorical questions does Paul ask in 9:7? What answer does each have? What does this illustrate concerning gospel preachers?
3. What Old Testament passage does Paul cite in support of his position in 9:9? What other rhetorical questions does he ask in 9:9-10? In 9:10, how does he answer them? What does this show about the support of gospel preachers? What does it show about Scriptural interpretation?
4. What rhetorical question does Paul ask in 9:11? What principle does this illustrate? According to 9:12, what does Paul actually do? Why? Why is this important?

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Lesson Ten: Support in the Early Church

Church Workers

As with so many spiritual issues, it is possible to err to both extremes in the area of supported church workers. On the one hand, some Christians insist that located, supported preachers are a sign of denominationalism. According to their perspective, churches should be small enough to meet in the homes of members, and the men of the congregation should do the preaching. On the other hand, some churches do lapse into a denominational attitude toward their preachers. Every year, they schedule "Preacher Appreciation Day", during which the preacher in question can expect to receive anything from a new suit to a new car.

The problems with both of these perspectives should be obvious. The Scripture endorses fully sup-

ported preachers because a supported preacher can devote more time and effort to the Lord's work than any man who must hold a secular job to support himself and his family. Most congregations without that dedicated worker will struggle with evangelism and keeping weak Christians faithful.

The usefulness of a preacher, however, does not justify his elevation. He is not a "pastor", nor a member of some clergy class. He differs from the rank and file of the congregation only in his desire and in his opportunity to devote himself fully to the Lord's work. Taking the day that belongs to the Lord and using it to honor a preacher is wildly inappropriate. The denominational title "minister" obscures a Scriptural truth. The preacher is a useful servant, nothing more, nothing less, and he should be treated accordingly.

Authority and the First-Century Church: Lesson Four

1. What article of sacred furniture does Exodus 25:10-16 describe? In 25:12-15, what arrangements for carrying this piece are described? According to Numbers 4:5, 15, who was to do the carrying? Does God ever forbid any other mode of transportation?
2. In 1 Samuel 6:1, where is the ark? According to 6:2, what do the Philistines want to do with it? In 6:7-8, what method of transporting the ark do the Philistine seers recommend? Does God ever endorse or condemn this method in Scripture?
3. According to 6:10-12, when the Philistines did this, what happened? Did anyone die during this transportation process? Did this mean that God approved of carrying the ark on a cart? What can we learn from this today?
4. In 1 Chronicles 13:3, what does David decide he wants to do? Is this a good idea? How do the people react to it in 13:4? Should they have had a problem with it? Would God have approved this goal? What does this tell us?

Authority and the First-Century Church: Lesson Four

5. What are David and Israel doing in 13:6? According to 13:7, what mode of ark transportation do they choose? Where have they gotten this idea? Who is driving? What can we take from this?

6. What do David and Israel do in 13:8? To all appearances, are these people who sincerely want to serve and please God? Did that guarantee that God would be pleased? What can we learn from this?

7. What happens to the oxen in 13:9? What does Uzza do about it? In 13:10, what does God do to Uzza? Why? Why is this significant?

8. How does David react to this event in 13:11-12? Is this a reasonable reaction? What does it teach us about the difference between human notions of right and wrong and divine justice?

Authority and the First-Century Church: Lesson Nine

9. According to 9:8, what is God able to do for us? What will this give us? What does this enable us to do? How does this explain God's generosity?

10. What passage does Paul quote in 9:9? What does it say? What does this tell us about our prosperity and God's work?

11. What work of God's is described in 9:10? What does He do? According to 9:11, what effect will this have on us? What will it allow us to do? What effect will we then have on others? Why is this important?

12. In 9:12, what two goals does Paul describe? According to 9:13, how will these goals be fulfilled? What does this tell us today about the result of giving generously?

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Lesson Five: The Silence of the Scriptures, Part 2

Silence in the Everyday

In our normal lives, there are times when we consider silence to be restrictive and times when we consider it to be permissive. For an example of the former, we need only turn to the venerable sermon illustration of the child sent to the store to buy bread and milk. Even though his mother said nothing about buying a candy bar (or not), when the child returns home, bearing bread, milk, and Snickers bar, he's likely to be in trouble.

On the other hand, if my wife sends me to the store to buy bread and milk, and I return with an additional Snickers bar, that's certainly not going to be the source of marital discord. Nor, for instance, when the elders ask me to have Brian make a flyer for the upcoming gospel meeting, but I find that

Brian doesn't have the time to spare, and I do it myself, that's not the kind of thing that will have me looking to move next week.

However, even though these examples produce different results, they do so according to a pattern. In the case of the mother and the child, the mother is clearly the superior, the child the subordinate. When I go to the store for my wife, I'm doing her a favor, not obeying orders. Similarly, the elders said what they said because they incorrectly assumed Brian could do it. When he couldn't, their flawed assumption invalidated their instructions.

It's obvious which of these apply to God. He is our superior, not our equal, and His knowledge is perfect, not flawed. He has told us what He wants us to do, and when we exceed that, we disobey.

Authority and the First-Century Church: Lesson Nine

1. In Acts 4:34, what condition is described in the Jerusalem church? According to 4:34-35, what caused that condition? How does this passage authorize the use of a church treasury?
2. In 1 Corinthians 16:1, what "collection for the saints" does Paul refer to? According to 16:2, how is this collection taken up? What is the point of doing it this way? What can we learn from this?
3. What does Paul say happened to the churches of Macedonia in 2 Corinthians 8:1? In 8:2, how does he explain this statement? How do these two ideas connect with each other?
4. According to 8:3, how have the Macedonian disciples given? According to 8:4, what were they doing to Paul? According to 8:5, why did they do this? What does their example teach us about what our attitude should be today?

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Lesson Nine: The Collection in the Early Church

Love of Money

In 1 Timothy 6:10, Paul testifies, "The love of money is the root of all kinds of evils," and nowhere is this more obvious than in the area of religion. Countless men have manipulated and continue to manipulate the faith of the credulous in order to make themselves rich, promising wealth and miraculous healing in exchange for a suitable donation. As churches have grown large and wealthy, the devil has used their wealth to lead them away from the faith, so that they use the church treasury to support all sorts of ungodly enterprises.

As a consequence of this great hunger for wealth, similar problems exist on the collection side of things too. Because so many preachers desire to become rich, because so many churches have

grandiose plans for all sorts of "good works", they must devise any number of strategies to bring in more income. Practically every denomination teaches tithing, so that members are pressured to give 10 percent of their income to the church. Sometimes, churches will hold a special fundraising drive, in which they will lock the doors on Sunday morning and not let the congregation escape until a certain sum has been contributed. Others will descend into outright sin, using gambling to support themselves financially.

The only antidote for these poisonous practices, and many more like them, is the truth. If we wish to avoid sin in the area of finance, we must confine ourselves to the approved practices of the first-century church. Love of money may destroy others, but we can protect ourselves with the word.

Authority and the First-Century Church: Lesson Five

1. What does Exodus 30:1-6 describe? According to 30:7-8, what was Aaron to do on it? When? According to 30:9, what was Aaron not to do on it? Was this a complete list of everything that Aaron might conceivably do on it? If not, why was the list provided?
2. Whom do we meet in Leviticus 10:1? What does each one of them take? What do they do with them? At this point, had God commanded the Israelites to offer incense to Him from a censer? Had God commanded the Israelites not to offer incense from a censer? How must we describe God's revelation with respect to offering incense from a censer?
3. How does the Scripture characterize the fire that Nadab and Abihu offered in 10:1? Did God's silence give them permission to offer this fire, or was God's silence meant to restrict their behavior to what He had revealed? Why is this important?
4. In 10:2, what happens to Nadab and Abihu? How severe is this punishment? Does it appear from the text that they meant to displease God? Instead, what was their likely motivation? What does this teach us today?

Authority and the First-Century Church: Lesson Five

5. In 10:3, how does God explain His judgment? Does God expect this same thing from us today? When we go beyond what has been written, do we treat Him as holy and glorify Him? Why or why not?

6. What prayer does the psalmist offer in Psalm 19:13? What does it mean to be presumptuous? What will the result be for us if we avoid this kind of sin? How does this shed light on what happened to Nadab and Abihu?

7. In Exodus 28:1, whom does God ask for? What does he want these people to do? According to Exodus 29:44, what is He going to do? Does God go through and list all the people He doesn't want to serve Him as priests? Why is this significant?

8. According to Hebrews 7:14, what tribe did Jesus descend from? What did the Law say concerning priests from this tribe? According to 7:13, had there ever been priests from this tribe? What was the consequence of the Law's silence on this subject? Why is this important?

Authority and the First-Century Church: Lesson Eight

9. According to 5:2-3, how is an elder to shepherd the flock? What additional exhortations does Paul give to the Ephesians elders in Acts 20:28-31? How do these things help us to understand the work of an elder?

10. Read the following passages: Acts 11:30; 14:23; 15:2; 20:17; 21:18; Titus 1:5; and James 5:14. What number of elders do we see in each passage? What does this tell us about the number of elders we should have in our churches today? Why?

11. According to 1 Timothy 2:12, what does Paul not allow a woman to do? Instead, what is she to be? What does this word mean? In what context does this instruction occur? Consider 3:15 in your answer. How must we apply this passage today?

12. According to 1 Corinthians 14:23, what gathering is Paul describing throughout this entire context? According to 14:34, what are women not to do in this setting? Instead, what are they to be? What does this word mean? How must we apply this passage?

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5. According to 1 Timothy 3:1-7, what positive characteristics must the elder possess? What kind of a portrait do these characteristics paint? Why would they be useful in a church leader?

6. Also in 1 Timothy 3:1-7, what negative characteristics must an elder not have? How are these important to his usefulness as a church leader?

7. What office is described in 1 Timothy 3:8-13? What is the first characteristic in the list of characteristics here? How do the other characteristics on the list combine to paint this portrait? Why are these things important in a church leader?

8. To whom is Peter speaking in 1 Peter 5:1? In what capacity is he speaking? What basic thing does he encourage them to do in 5:2? What does this tell us about the role of the elder? What does it tell us about the extent of an elder's authority?

Authority and the First-Century Church: Lesson Five

9. What does 8:4 reveal about Jesus? Why is this true? According to 7:12, what had to happen for Jesus to serve as a priest at all? Why would this change of law be necessary, when the Law said nothing about Jesus' fitness to serve as priest?

10. Below, make a list of some of the things that men have done in the Lord's name, concerning which the Scripture is silent. How much would these things alter God's plan if we brought them into the church? Why is this significant?

11. As we saw a couple of lessons ago, Paul and the other apostles intended to establish a pattern or blueprint for the Lord's church. If a home builder takes a blueprint, adds a second story, mother-in-law's quarters, and a screen porch, and constructs the house accordingly, has he followed the intent of the one who made the blueprint? Why? What can we learn from this?

12. As a matter of historical record, once men begin to add to God's pattern on the basis of the silence of the Scripture, do they remain true to God's explicit commandments, or do they soon begin to violate those as well? Why would this be? Why is it important?

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Lesson Six: The Old and New Covenants

Moses and Jesus

The ignorance that the world displays about the Bible is rarely shocking. However, the lack of knowledge that the so-called “Christian” world has about the difference between the two covenants is a bewildering exception to the rule.

One of the places where this plays out is in the continuing debate over homosexuality. Those who favor the practice of homosexuality will often defend it by citing its Mosaic prohibition, then turning to some obviously outdated provision of the Law of Moses and saying, “See? Just like we know it’s OK to mix two different kinds of cloth in the same garments, it’s also OK to engage in homosexuality!” Even denominational ministers will usually not know the correct answer,

which is that the prohibition against mixing cloth was nailed to the cross along with the rest of the law of Moses, whereas God’s condemnation of homosexuality is repeated several times in the law of Christ, which binds us today.

This blindness to the distinction between the covenants is all the more surprising because it is a major theme of the New Testament. Entire books of the Bible, such as Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews, were written to prove that Christians were no longer bound by the Old Law. It’s amazing that anyone could read those three books without grasping that point.

In our Scriptural scholarship, we must do better. We must recognize that the decrees of Moses no longer govern our conduct and submit ourselves fully to the authority of Christ.

Authority and the First-Century Church: Lesson Eight

1. According to Ephesians 4:11, what four classes of men did God give? How does he describe their function in 4:12-13? How does each group still fulfill its function today?
2. In Acts 1:15-26, what do we see a group of early Christians doing? According to 1:22, why are they doing it? In 1 Corinthians 15:8-9, what does Paul reveal about his vision of the risen Jesus? What does this tell us about the possibility of latter-day apostles?
3. What does 2 Peter 1:21 reveal about the process of prophecy? Is it possible to be a prophet without a miraculous gift of the Holy Spirit? Should we expect to see modern-day prophets? Why is this important?
4. What office does 1 Timothy 3:1-7 describe? According to 3:2, what is the first thing that this officer must be? How good a description is this of his overall character? What does this tell us about the way we should understand the rest of the list?

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Lesson Eight: Roles in the Early Church

Disciples of Korah

In Numbers 16:3, the rebel Korah cries out against Moses and Aaron, "Why then do you exalt yourself above the assembly of the Lord?" Even though God has decreed that only Aaron and his descendants should serve as priests, Korah thinks that he's just as good as Aaron, and that he should get to be a priest too. God's decrees are beside the point.

Sadly, the religious world is filled with people who follow in the rebellious footsteps of Korah. Even though God has defined who the leaders of His church are, there are men who challenge those decrees. Even though they are clearly unqualified to serve as elders, they demand leadership roles in the congregation, and will create no end of contention if they are not

given the authority they desire.

Likewise, both in the denominations and even in the church, many women seek a different role than the one God has given them. They want to be preachers. They want to "serve" as deaconesses or even female elders, and they will quite literally deny the inspiration and authority of the parts of the Bible that bar them from such roles.

However, this hunger for position, no matter how desperate, must not lead us into conflict with God's word. He has told us whom He wants serving where, and if we reject those commandments, we are also rejecting Him. Personal agendas and social pressures cannot produce the obedience He desires. Before we enroll ourselves in the ranks of disciples of Korah, we would do well to remember Korah's fate.

Authority and the First-Century Church: Lesson Six

1. What do we see Moses doing in Deuteronomy 4:44-45? What did he instruct Israel to do in 5:1? What did it mean that the Israelites were now under God's law?
2. What does Moses do in Exodus 24:7? How do the people respond? What does Moses do in consequence in 24:8? According to Deuteronomy 7:12-13, how were the Israelites to keep this covenant? How would God keep the covenant?
3. What does God say He is going to do in Hebrews 8:8? According to 8:9, what is this covenant not going to be like? Why? According to 8:6, who mediates this covenant? According to 8:13, what does the new covenant do to the old covenant? Why is this important?
4. How does Paul describe the relationship of the Law of Moses to God's people in Galatians 3:23? According to 3:24, why was the Law put in place? According to 3:25, does this relationship with the Law continue now? Why or why not? Should we look to the Law to justify our actions today? Why or why not?

Authority and the First-Century Church: Lesson Six

5. According to Colossians 2:13, what was our spiritual status apart from God? What did God do for us? According to 2:14, how did He accomplish this? Does this sound like we are still governed by the Law? Why or why not?

6. In 2 Corinthians 3:5, where does Paul say our sufficiency is? According to 3:6, what has God done for us? What is the “covenant of the letter” that Paul is referring to here? Why is this important?

7. According to 1 Corinthians 9:20, was Paul under the Law of Moses? Instead, according to 9:21, what law was he under? Are these things true of us today? Why?

8. What do we see King Hezekiah doing in 2 Chronicles 29:25? Why? Is this commandment repeated in the New Testament? Does its presence in the Old Testament give us permission to use instruments of music in worship? Why or why not?

Authority and the First-Century Church: Lesson Seven

9. Whom do we meet in Acts 13:1? In 13:2, what does the Holy Spirit instruct them to do? According to 13:3, what do they do about it? Does this passage authorize churches today to send preachers to other areas? Does it authorize their support? Why?

10. According to 2 Corinthians 8:18, whom is Paul sending along with Titus? According to 8:19, who else has sent him? Is his primary role on this journey to preach? If not, what is it? What does this tell us about the authority that churches have to appoint men to other godly tasks?

11. What situation does Matthew 18:15 describe? What are we to do about it? If that doesn't work, what does 18:16 tell us to do? If that doesn't work, what next effort does 18:17 prescribe? If none of that works, what is the outcome? How should we practice this today?

12. What potential problem does Paul identify in 2 Thessalonians 3:14? What are Christians to do about that problem? What is the goal of this activity? According to 3:15, what attitude are we to have about it? Practically speaking, what does this mean we are to do?

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Lesson Seven: Activities of the Early Church

Works of the Church

In John 8:39, Jesus makes a telling point in His discussions with the Jews. He says, "If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham." To Jesus, descent was not a matter of physical heredity. Instead, it was a matter of behavior, and the way that one proves his ancestry is by behaving like the ancestor. The Jews didn't act like Abraham, so regardless of what their DNA said, they weren't really Abraham's children.

Today, this point often has relevance in our discussions with people from the denominational world. Ours is not the only church that claims to be the one true church that Jesus established. However, like the Jews of Jesus' day, those who make this claim do it on the basis of descent, not be-

havior. They say that because they can trace their church back to the first-century church, they are its legitimate successors.

Sadly, these people fail the works-of-Abraham test. They claim to be like the first-century church, but they do not act like the first-century church. Whatever their lineage may say, their actions show that they are illegitimate.

By contrast, if we wish to show that we are the one true church that Jesus purchased with His blood, there's only one way to do that. We have to do everything that early church did, and nothing that it did not do. Only as we carry out its works can we claim to be its descendants. It is our responsibility, then, to study that church closely, so that we may use its behavior as the pattern for ours.

Authority and the First-Century Church: Lesson Seven

1. What command does the Hebrews writer give in Hebrews 10:23? According to 10:24, how are we to help others fulfill that command? According to 10:25, what is something that we must not do if we wish to accomplish this? What is something that we must do? How should this change our understanding of the assembly?
2. What basic commandment is given in Colossians 3:16? How is this indwelling to express itself? What is to be our attitude in this expression? What activities does this passage authorize in our worship?
3. Some argue that the Greek word for "psalm" in Colossians 3:16 (*psalmos*) refers to a song accompanied on an instrument. The verb form of this word (*psallo*) is translated "sing praises" in James 5:13. What conclusions can we draw from this? Why?
4. What command does Paul give in 1 Timothy 2:8? How should they do this? Does Paul recommend an attitude of body here, or an attitude of life? Why? What should this passage teach us?