

Thinking
BIBLICALLY

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Preface

The main goal of a renowned Bible college professor was to develop in his students an ability to think Biblically. Regardless of the lecture topic, he provided applications on the subject of thinking Biblically. Often when speaking on this subject, he used his hands to create a visual aid. He would raise his left hand and say that it represented the world and the things it has to offer—good and bad. He would then raise his right hand and say that it represented the Bible.

The professor then placed his left hand (the world) directly in front of his face and placed his right hand (the Bible) extended in front of his left hand. “Most of you in this room approach life in this way,” he stated. “You look at the Bible through the filter of the world. Based on what the world around you values and says is important, you choose what you will study and agree with in the Bible.”

Switching his hand positions, he challenged the students, “What you need to do is look at the world through the filter of the Bible. Only then can you correctly determine what is truly valuable in this life.”

Through this illustration, the professor engrained this lesson in students’ minds: Believers must always look at themselves and the world through the filter of the Bible. That is what the process of thinking Biblically is all about. It is looking at each situation and determining an appropriate Biblical course of action.

This Bible study is designed to help you begin the lifelong process of thinking more Biblically. It is a practical

study that emphasizes how the situations of your life reveal your thought patterns and how those thought patterns need to be different in light of Scripture.

The goal of this Bible study is to help its participants—by the power of the Holy Spirit and the Bible—to think more Biblically. You will get the most out of this study by engaging in it wholeheartedly. Answer the questions thoughtfully and honestly, because the process is beneficial in deepening your understanding. If you are using this material in a group setting, be courageous in sharing your answers and contemplating others' answers. Your brothers and sisters in Christ can contribute greatly to your own learning experience.

Thinking Biblically is a life-long process; each new experience in life requires applications of Biblical thinking. The themes studied in these six lessons can give you a solid foundation that enables you to think Biblically in any situation.



LESSON 1

Authority

“Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths” (Proverbs 3:5, 6).

The alarm clock goes off, informing you it is time to get up. In the relatively short period between rising from bed and arriving at work, you encounter a number of reminders that you are under authority. You brush your teeth based on your dentist’s authority and the authoritative reactions of those around you if you forget. You fasten your seatbelt and follow speed-limit signs for your own safety and because of the authority of the highway patrol. You check your watch as you enter your workplace, noting your prompt arrival—out of deference to your boss’s authority.

The concept of authority is common to everyone. Everywhere we look, we find authorities for our lives. And we feel the presence of some authorities more than others. The more we recognize an authority, the more that authority probably influences us.

CALLING THE SHOTS

1. List three human authority figures in your life right now.

Perhaps you listed your employer, a spouse, a parent, a government official, a homeowners' association board, a teacher, or a pastor. From time to time, these people exert the power of their positions. Some exert their authority in forceful, obvious ways; others are subtler. Some people want everyone to know they are in charge; others seek to empower others with their authority.

2. Describe the specific circumstances surrounding the last time each of the authorities you named exerted authority over you. Include things such as the means of communication, the setting in which this happened, who was present, and the command or request given.

Person	Circumstances

If your experiences are similar to mine, some of your descriptions may have started with phrases such as, “I received a call to come to the boss’s office,” or “I saw lights flashing in my rearview mirror.” Often our first thoughts with regard to authority dwell on the unfavorable. But agreeable circumstances also happen in regard to authority figures. For example, you could receive a favorable annual review by your boss or a commendation by your church’s leadership.

Whether the circumstances you described were favorable or unfavorable, you responded in some way during the experience.

3. Describe the emotional, mental, and physical responses you experienced as you were going through the circumstances described above.

Emotional	Mental	Physical

If you were recalling discouraging experiences, your responses may have included physical reactions, such as feeling sick to your stomach and dropping your head. Perhaps you thought, “He [or she] is wrong! That is not what I did!” Or you may have responded

with emotions such as anger, humiliation, or frustration. Recalling agreeable experiences may have brought to mind physical reactions, such as straightening your back and smiling. Or you may have had such thoughts as “It’s about time”; “Thank you”; or “I’m not worthy of this.” Maybe the experience caused emotional responses of joy or pride.

4. In thinking back on the circumstances and your responses, how would you describe your overall attitude toward authority in each of these circumstances?

5. How would someone who knows both the circumstances and your internal and external responses characterize your perspective toward authority?

THE FINAL WORD

To think Biblically, a person must understand the concept of authority and respond appropriately to authority figures. **Recognizing an authority figure and respecting an ultimate authority are essential first steps toward developing an ethical framework.**

6. Read the following verses, and answer the question regarding each passage.
- (a) Genesis 39:6–9. Who did Joseph say he would be sinning against if he were to succumb to the advances of Potiphar’s wife?
 - (b) Ecclesiastes 12:13 and 14. What events of life are outside God’s view?
 - (c) Matthew 10:37. According to this verse, whose authority supersedes that of the family and calls for more love and loyalty than even a family demands?
 - (d) Romans 13:1. Who controls governments?
 - (e) Colossians 3:23 and 24. Who does any Christian ultimately work for?

Scripture is clear that God is the ultimate authority in every area of our lives. God may establish authoritative structures over us, such as governments, employers, or families, but God is always the ultimate authority.

7. (a) When was the last time God authoritatively demanded a change in your life?
- (b) What did your thoughts and emotions at that time reveal about your attitude toward God's authority over you?

HIS CREDENTIALS

The Bible goes beyond simply stating the fact of God's authority; it also explains why God is the ultimate authority. The picture painted by the Bible shows God to have many impressive characteristics.

8. In the following passages, what characteristics of God affirm His role as the ultimate authority?
- (a) Genesis 1; John 1:3; Revelation 4:11
- (b) Job 36:26; Psalm 90:2; Revelation 1:8
- (c) Genesis 18:14; Jeremiah 32:17; Matthew 19:26; Ephesians 3:20
- (d) Jeremiah 23:23, 24; Psalm 139:7–10

(e) Job 37:16; Psalm 139:1–6; 1 John 3:20

(f) Leviticus 19:2; Psalm 99:9; Hebrews 12:10; 1 Peter 1:16

These characteristics qualify God as the ultimate authority. Let's consider them more closely.

First, God's role as creator exemplifies His authority. All creators have authority over what they have created. For example, parents may tell their child, "I brought you into this world, and I make the rules." Parents believe that because they "created" the child, they have the authority to enforce behavioral standards. An entrepreneur who starts a small business has authority over the business and employees because that individual is the creator of that business. Writers and publishers have copyright authority over their books because they created them. God as the creator of the universe and of mankind is the authority over all.

9. Contemplate God's role as creator. What implications does that role have for your life?

Related to God's perfect knowledge is His wisdom (Psalm 104:24; Romans 11:33–35; Romans 16:27).

Related to God's holiness are His righteousness and justice (Deuteronomy 32:4; Psalm 19:8; Isaiah 45:19; Romans 3:25, 26).

Second, God's authority is established through His timelessness and eternity. There has never been a time when God did not exist. In fact, God created time. In human relations, age often conveys authority. For example, a family's matriarch is able to exert influence over her children and grandchildren. Her age and life experience make her an authority figure. Her family looks to her for advice and direction.

10. What would be different about your life and interaction with God if you were constantly aware that God has always existed?

Third, God's authority is established through His power. God is omnipotent (all-powerful). That power equals authority is ingrained in us from childhood on. The biggest child in our elementary school was regularly the most authoritative. Power equaling authority is also typified in despotic political regimes; dictators rule by means of their power. God's power is not like that of schoolyard bullies or despotic rulers; God's power is characterized by love (1 John 4:8).

Fourth, God's authority is affirmed by the mysterious fact that He is always everywhere present. While God is distinct from creation, no place in His creation is void of His presence.

In the realm of everyday life, business managers, parents, and teachers easily illustrate how a leader's presence conveys authority. For example, employees straighten up and work harder when their manager is present; children may behave better when their parents are around; and students respond more obediently to their regular teacher than to a substitute.

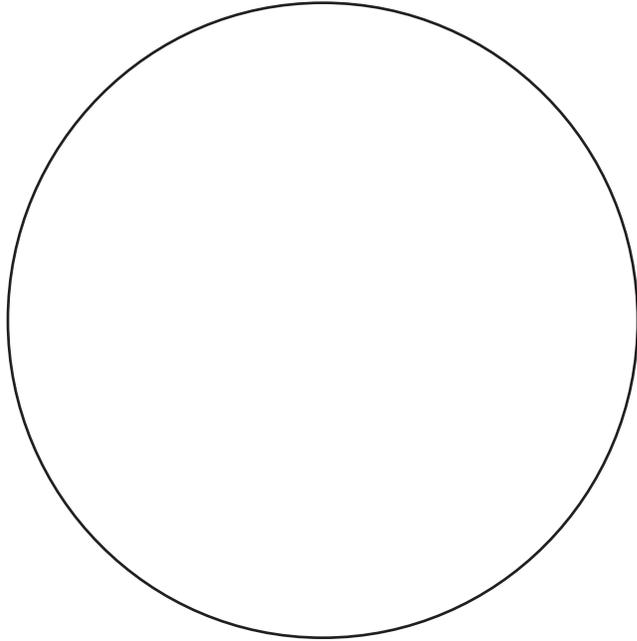
11. Think back over the last three days. How often did you subvert God's authority by your actions? If God had been bodily present during each of those times, how often would you have done the same actions?

Fifth, God's authority is established by His knowledge. God knows every action each of us has ever done; He knows every thought we have ever thought; He knows our every wish and desire. It's intimidating to think of God's knowledge of these things. He is an expert on each one of us. Consider news networks. They have experts for every subject they cover: law experts, weather experts, political experts, entertainment experts, food experts, and many others. These people are experts because of their vast knowledge of a given subject. God knows everything, qualifying Him as the utmost expert, or authority.

Sixth, God's authority is affirmed by His wisdom. In our daily lives, we recognize wisdom as authoritative. We turn to certain

people as our sources of wisdom. They could be a parent, a pastor, or a close friend to whom we look when we need advice. When we make an important decision, it is rare that we don't consult our personal wisdom resources. The counsel we receive likely bears great weight in the decisions we make. Since there is no one wiser than God, His wisdom is beyond comprehension and description.

12. (a) Recall the last major life decision you made. In the circle below, draw a pie chart in which each piece of the pie represents an individual you consulted and the amount of influence that person had on your decision. Include yourself, God, family, friends, and trusted advisors.



- (b) How much of your pie belonged to God?

- (c) How much belonged to others and virtually excluded God?

Seventh, God's authority is asserted by His holiness. The holiness of God refers to God's being separated from sin.

A human example is a courtroom judge. A judge has authority over a case. He or she should be separated from any evil in the case. A judge who is not separate from the evils before him or her may be persuaded to render a guilty verdict because of empathy with the victim instead of objective evaluation of the evidence. Similarly, a judge not separated from the lawyers might rule in favor of one because of preference or relationship rather than on the merits of that attorney's case. Holiness, or separation, allows for impartiality. God, Who is completely separate from the evils of this world, is authoritative because He is not influenced by circumstances that might compromise His judgment.

Eighth, God's authority is validated by His righteousness and justice. God never acts in an unjust manner. No matter what the circumstances, God always makes the right and fair choice. His authority is never to be questioned, because He never makes a mistake.

STATING THE DEMANDS

God is our ultimate authority. Because His authority is absolute over creation—including all of humanity—we must submit to Him in every area of our lives. To do this, we must listen to God when He communicates to us. He communicates to us through nature, history, and conscience (Psalm 19:1–6; Acts 14:16, 17; Romans 1:19–32). While these sources provide general information about God, the primary way God communicates to humanity is through the Bible.

13. What do the following passages tell us about Scripture?

(a) Deuteronomy 29:29; Psalm 119:130

(b) Psalm 119:160

(c) Romans 10:13–17

(d) 2 Timothy 3:15–17

(e) 2 Peter 1:20, 21

The Bible, the written Word of God, is the primary way God communicates to us. It has a divine origin and is necessary for knowledge, sustenance for spiritual life, and

understanding the gospel. Through the Bible God communicates His moral demands. The Bible provides everything we need for life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). It is a profitable, inspired book that enables spiritual maturity and service.

MEETING THE DEMANDS

Since God is the ultimate authority and communicates to us primarily through the Bible, our actions should reflect the commands and guidelines He gives in Scripture.

Recognizing God’s authority in our lives is the first step in developing our understanding of Biblical ethics. We need to always be aware of how we are responding to His authority. Until we enter God’s presence, either through death or Christ’s return, we will struggle with correctly responding to His authority. However, as we mature in our faith, we will recognize and honor His authority more and more.

APPLY THE TRUTH

1. What do the passages, ideas, and reflections of this lesson reveal to you about your perspective toward God’s being the ultimate authority?
2. Based on this lesson’s Bible passages and thoughts regarding God’s authority, what behaviors or attitudes do you need to change?
3. Based on this lesson’s Bible passages and thoughts regarding God’s authority, what

behaviors or attitudes should you continue so they become more consistent?

4. What specific actions will you take to improve your attempts to respond rightly to God's authority? Think through specifics, such as detailed descriptions of what you will do, when you will do each one, how you will measure success, and whose help you need to achieve your goal.