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Spiritual Authority for Every Believer

*A call to minister in
Jesus's name*



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Note From The Author

As we explore the topic of spiritual authority, you should know I pastored a church for many years believing the authority Jesus gave to his original followers *was not* imparted to modern-day believers. Not only was my theological paradigm void of supernatural ministry such as healing or casting out demons, but I was also antagonistic toward anyone who claimed such outrageous beliefs. Over time, I entered an extended spiritual wilderness where I felt lost and dissatisfied in all areas of life. My usual desires for worship, prayer, and Bible reading had vanished. Joy and peace seemed out of reach. From this position, I decided I could no longer continue my role as a pastor.

But God, as he often does with people in the wilderness, met me with grace and kept me in my ministerial role. Not only did God bring healing to my soul, he began to break the rules of my theological paradigm. He began speaking to me when I believed he didn't speak. These "illegal" activities caused me to break down my theological paradigm and rebuild one with openness and expectation. I began to wonder if spiritual authority was something that applied to me as a modern-day follower of Jesus. Chasing this curiosity, I met with a group of trustworthy friends to study the Bible and experiment with spiritual authority.

Our breakthrough came when we prayed for a woman who had breast cancer. We challenged the domain of darkness and declared healing over her with the same vocabulary we found in the Bible. Unusual faith seemed to fill the room that evening. About two weeks later, scans showed no evidence of cancer in her body. To this day, she remains healed.

This healing moment is a marker in my life. Since then, many more people have been healed and set free. To be sure, I have many stories of failure as well! But I believe the pathway for understanding Kingdom ministry and operating with success begins with the topic of spiritual authority. What follows is the summary of my journey on the topic of spiritual authority from a biblical and practical perspective.

Spiritual Authority for Every Believer

A call to minister in Jesus's name

They Never Saw It Coming

The gospels provide us with a first-hand account of the life and purpose of Jesus. These first four books of the New Testament are foundational for the church—the followers of Jesus—and for the life and purpose of each person who chooses to take up his Great Commission. The very first of these books speaks to this great commission in chapter 28: *“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you.”* But the commission of Jesus to his followers actually began in Matthew 10, an assignment that cannot be severed from the Great Commission. Here, Jesus gives his disciples authority over evil in the spiritual realm, with a commission to exercise it. We are here to discuss the first part of the commission from Matthew 10, knowing that the first disciples would continue to exercise their authority as part of their great commission from Matthew 28.

Matthew, an original follower of Jesus, shapes his gospel narrative in chapter nine as an invitation to the reader to observe and celebrate the miracles the Messiah performed. But he writes as though he wants to set us up—to draw his audience toward the authority Jesus demonstrated. And then, in chapter 10, he hits them with an unexpected plot twist. This setup can feel like a punch in the gut, overwhelming the readers who want to follow Jesus. At least that’s what I experienced as I read the first gospel.

Notice the build up in chapter nine: Jesus tells a paralyzed man to stand up and walk. A desperate woman, who had bled for 12 years, simply touched the robe of Jesus and was instantly made well. A young girl had died, and even death was not a problem for Jesus; he raised her up. News of these miracles began to spread to growing crowds. A blind man called out to Jesus and was instantly given sight. A man made mute by a demon came to Jesus in front of the onlooking crowds. Jesus drove away the demon and the man spoke. The crowds proclaimed, “Never was anything like this seen in Israel!” Indeed, God had never come in the flesh before. Certainly this was the work of a person who was God, or at least a powerful prophet! In some respects, the onlookers might have thought Jesus was putting on a show for all to observe. Perhaps at last, God’s people could watch as the Messiah brought deliverance from the Roman empire and the restoration of Israel.

But then Matthew changes the course of the story in chapter ten. There were so many people in need, so many sheep without a shepherd, that Jesus called for more laborers to serve in miracles, signs, and wonders as he was doing. He said there was a harvest of Kingdom ministry ready right now. What could Jesus mean by

calling for more laborers? Who else could do the work of miracles? How could a mere human perform the works of God?

In a surprise move that nobody could have seen coming, Jesus gathered his 12 disciples and imparted to them his authority over unclean spirits, calling upon them to heal every disease and every affliction.

My imagination tries to picture this moment. How did the disciples respond to Jesus? How would this impartation even work? Ordinary people couldn't give commands to evil spirits. Were the disciples excited? Fearful? Perplexed? Perhaps they had expected Jesus to grant them governmental authority, to lord over the people, to lead the expulsion of the Roman occupation of Israel. But now we know that Jesus had something entirely different in mind. He came to demonstrate authority over an unexpected opponent: all the power of the enemy—the devil. And he intended to share this authority with ordinary people.

With a simple statement, "I give you authority," Jesus commissioned his disciples to travel around Israel with instructions to announce the Kingdom of heaven had come near, to heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, and drive out demons. In other words, all the miracles they saw Jesus do, they would now do.¹ Jesus pulled his followers off the sideline and into action.

In my experience, the Holy Spirit used the structure of Matthew's narrative to create deep conviction in my heart. He forced me to set my Bible down and deal with the question shouting into my mind, and perhaps into yours as well: *Did Jesus give all believers this authority? Do I carry this same authority? The answer could seriously change the way I live my life.* I let these thoughts marinate in the back of my mind for some time.

My search for an answer deepened when I arrived at Matthew 28:18-19, a very familiar scripture to me. Jesus gives another commission to the same group of twelve disciples, a "Great Commission," sending them out to make disciples of all nations. I had already applied this commission to my life and accepted it with an attitude of obedience. So why hadn't I accepted the commission of *authority* given to the same followers of Jesus? How could I choose which commissions of Jesus applied to me and which commissions remained with his original followers? How could I separate one commission from the other? Perhaps you have wondered the same.

When we follow Jesus, we will inevitably face these pivotal moments where we have to cope with the words of Jesus that feel uncomfortable. In this case, I believe we are burdened with the task of an honest investigation of the scriptures to see if Jesus has indeed given the entire body of Christ his authority.

If believers remain unaware of the spiritual authority Jesus has imparted to them, the consequences are substantial. At best, we live with the wisdom and intent to expand the Kingdom of Jesus, but without knowledge of our true identity and access to supernatural power, we work entirely through human strength. Let's examine the scriptures about the topic of spiritual authority and see what we can discover together.

¹ Matthew 10:7-8.

Jesus, the Highest Authority

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Matthew 28:18

What Is Spiritual Authority?

The general nature of authority, applied to a person, group, or institution, carries a structure with three aspects:

- 1) a defined *realm* for which the authority applies,
- 2) the *right to give orders* within the realm, and
- 3) the *power to enforce* the orders.

For example, a government has authority over its citizens in the realm of its territory. Managers have authority over their employees in the realm of their business. Parents have authority over their children in the realm of their household. In each case, the power of enforcement gives meaning to the right to give orders. A government only has the right of authority because it has the power to place unlawful citizens in prison. A manager only has the right of authority because they have the power to terminate employment. A parent only has the right of authority because they have the power to give their child a time out. When someone loses the power to enforce their orders, they no longer operate in a position of authority.

When God created the heavens and the earth, he instituted structures of authority² within the physical, or earthly, realm, and within the spiritual, or heavenly, realm.³ Jesus was given ultimate authority over all realms of creation. In Matthew 28:18, Jesus claimed exactly that:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

In Colossians 3:15-18, Paul describes Jesus as the “*firstborn over all creation*,” and “*before all things*,” signifying the preeminent authority of Jesus over the earthly and heavenly realms, meaning over everything created, both visible and invisible.

While the Jewish culture had expectations for the coming Messiah to exercise *physical* authority over the earthly realm—pushing out the Roman occupation of Israel—Jesus was more interested in exercising *spiritual* authority over the heavenly realm, which indeed would impact the earthly realm.

² Writers in the New Testament use the Greek word *exousia* (ex-oo-see`-ah) to describe this authority.

³ For the purposes of this writing, the heavenly or celestial realm refers to the spiritual realm, and the physical or terrestrial realm refers to the earthly realm.

Examples of Jesus Exercising Spiritual Authority

Jesus exercised his authority in the spiritual realm in a variety of applications, including:

- Teaching: Matthew 7:28-29
And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.
- Forgiving sin: Matthew 9:6
“But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins” – he then said to the paralytic – “Rise, pick up your bed and go home.”
- Commanding evil spirits: Mark 1:27
And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, “What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.”
- Healing, related to evil spirits: Luke 13:11-12
And there was a woman who had a disabling spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not fully straighten herself. When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said to her, “Woman you are freed from your disability.”
- Death and resurrection: John 10:18
“No one takes [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.”
- Nature: Luke 8:24-25
Then [Jesus] got up and rebuked the wind and the raging waves. So they ceased, and there was a calm. He said to them, “Where is your faith?” They were fearful and amazed, asking one another, “Who can this be? He commands even the winds and the waves, and they obey him!”

In each example, because Jesus carried authority in the spiritual realm, the earthly realm was also uniquely impacted. Even when Jesus taught, his spiritual authority caused his listeners to be amazed in a way they never were with the scribes, who carried only earthly authority.⁴

The demonstration of spiritual authority almost always causes onlookers to be enthralled because spiritual authority accesses a realm not bound by the laws of the earthly realm. Jesus’s onlookers carried a healthy understanding of the spiritual

⁴ See Matthew 7:28-29.

realm, but they had never before seen someone operate with supernatural authority and power like Jesus.

Spiritual Authority Can Be Imparted

Within any authority structure, certain levels of authority can be delegated to representatives and applied within their realm of authority. Kings may grant authority to an ambassador, or parents may grant authority to a babysitter. School principals grant authority to teachers for classroom supervision, or a business owner may grant authority to a salesperson to offer a discount. In these cases, the delegate's right to authority is granted by the one in power. As a result, when the representative exercises authority, it is as if the leader is also exercising the authority because the same power enforces both agents.

In Matthew 10:1, Jesus gathered his 12 disciples and imparted spiritual authority to them, empowering them within the heavenly realm. The disciples would be able to give orders in the spiritual realm as representatives of Jesus, the one with "all authority in heaven and on earth." The same power that enforces the authority of Jesus also enforces the authority of his disciples serving under his authority.

By choosing his 12 disciples as recipients of his authority, Jesus made it clear that education, skill, economic background, and even religious position are not prerequisites for such a calling. And, as we see in Luke 10, Jesus gave his authority to 72 more people—with the same commission as the 12 disciples—demonstrating that spiritual authority was not reserved only for the original 12 apostles.

How would these new recipients of spiritual authority exercise their gift for the first time? They simply believed what Jesus told them and had the obedience and courage to exercise it.

Spiritual Authority and the Defined Enemy

Authority works only when the one giving it provides the resources to enforce the commands. Jesus made an unmistakable connection when he imparted authority to his followers (Luke 10:19):

Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you.

By identifying "serpents and scorpions," Jesus set the target to indicate where the authority should and should not be exercised. Biblical prophetic literature uses serpents and scorpions as metaphors for evil spiritual beings⁵, and this is the enemy that Jesus has defined. In other settings, Jesus told his followers to love their enemies.⁶ This edict pertains to the earthly realm, where our "enemies" are human

⁵ See Isaiah 27; Revelation 9, 12, 20.

⁶ See Matthew 5:44; Luke 6:27-36.

beings, created and loved by God. Luke 10 speaks of the devil as the enemy of the spiritual realm, and Jesus was equipping his followers for battle.

This battle is ongoing, and the authority exercised over the spiritual realm has resulted in people healed and set free from demons.

The heart of Jesus for imparted spiritual authority is to spread the Kingdom of God by confronting the work of the devil in the spiritual realm—sickness, bondage, fear, and death—and to give back to God's people what has been stolen. Jesus instructed his followers to announce to these miracle recipients: *"The Kingdom of God has come near to you."*

God's Created Structure of Authority

I saw Satan fall from heaven like lightning.

Luke 10:18

To have an appreciation for spiritual *authority*, which applies to the spiritual realm, we need to appreciate the history and structure of the spiritual realm itself.

When the 72 commissioned followers of Jesus returned from exercising their newly-granted authority, they exclaimed with joy, *"Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!"*⁷ We can hear their delight and even surprise because nobody had ever before seen a demon be subject to a human.

In response, Jesus gives a brief explanation as to why the authority worked, revealing to the 72 in Luke 10:18, *"I saw Satan fall from heaven like lightning."* He then continues to define the target of our spiritual authority in verse 19, as seen in the previous section. But by identifying the fall of Satan in the midst of the exercise, Jesus identifies the reason for the success of applied spiritual authority. He reveals to us a prophetic picture of the authority structure, with Satan falling from the heavens.

As we begin to understand where we stand on the hierarchy of spiritual authority, we need to further unpack the importance of Satan's fall from heaven and how Satan stood so high in the first place. And in order to understand how this fall affects us, we need to go back to the very beginning.

The First Delegation of Authority: God to Humans

Genesis 1:1:

In the beginning, God created the heavens and earth.

Within his creation, God created two realms: a celestial realm connected with the heavens, and a terrestrial realm connected with the earth. God created multiple beings to inhabit each realm. Humans and animals were created for the earthly realm. Many different spiritual beings were created for the heavenly realm, including angels, cherubim, seraphim, hosts, and a heavenly counsel.

The humans were placed in Eden, a massive garden paradise where it was commonplace for the heavenly realm to overlap with the earth. According to Genesis 3:8, God actually walked and talked with the humans in Eden.⁸

After creation, God gave two designations to the humans in the earthly realm that differentiated them from the spiritual beings in the heavenly realm (Genesis 1:26)⁹:

⁷ See Luke 10:17.

⁸ After the entrance of sin into the creation, the scriptures show only glimpses of the heavenly realm accessible to the earthly realm. Among others, Isaiah, John, and Stephen were shown revelations of this heavenly realm.

⁹ These designations to the humans possibly triggered a rebellion among many of the spiritual beings.

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the seas and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

Humans would carry, first, the image of God and, second, the authority and dominion over creation, including all the creatures who creep along the earth.

Genesis 1:26 is the first account of a delegation of authority from God, and it was given to humans rather than to the spiritual beings. After creation, God began to reveal his special and sometimes counterintuitive purposes for a relational intimacy with humans that is not accounted for with the heavenly beings. The scriptures describe the grandeur and majesty of the heavenly beings, symbolized in Hebrew poetry by the sun, moon, and stars, while the earthly beings are made from dirt and described as lowly. Yet, God gave the lowly ones—us—dominion over all creation.

King David wrote a poem about this very idea in Psalm 8:3-6:

*When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
The moon and the stars, which you have set in place
What is man that you are mindful of him
Or the son of man that you care for him?
Yet you have made him a little lower
than the heavenly beings
And crowned him with glory and honor.
You have given him dominion
over the works of your hands;
You have put all things under his feet.*

Whereas modern western culture focuses on the physical nature of the sun, moon, and stars as giant spheres of gas and matter, the Old Testament writers understood these celestial objects as a way to understand the creation of spiritual beings in the heavenly realms.¹⁰

When David writes about the moon and stars being set in place, he is ultimately not meditating on spheres of gas and matter but on the reality of what the moon and stars represent: the spiritual beings in all of their glory. David is in awe of God because, even though God made humans lower in grandeur than the spiritual beings, he placed the crown of honor—the crown as the symbol of authority—on the heads of humanity.

With this crown of authority bestowed upon humans, spiritual beings would not carry any authority over humanity. This is why the spiritual beings could only

¹⁰ Tim Mackie of The Bible Project provides excellent insight of the Hebrew understanding of the heavenly realm. See www.bibleproject.com for videos on this topic including the series on spiritual beings.

tempt the humans instead of giving them orders from a position of authority. They ranked equal to or even lower than humans on the hierarchy of spiritual authority.

Failure in the Garden: Humans Surrender Their Authority

In Eden, God did not permit the humans to eat from the tree called "the knowledge of good and evil." In time, a spiritual being in the form of a serpent¹¹ rebelled against God in order to disrupt the structure of authority. This serpent approached the humans and tempted them to disobey God and eat from the tree.¹² At this point in time, the humans were in the position of authority over this rebellious spiritual being. When the serpent deceived the humans to eat from the tree, the humans positioned themselves in agreement with a lie coming from a lesser authority. Instead of recognizing the authority and dominion they possessed over this being, they submitted themselves to the plan of rebellion, and surrendered their place of authority.

This human agreement with the rebellious spirit set a new authority structure in motion, giving the spiritual beings a place of authority in the earthly realm that they were never meant to possess.

As a result of humans abdicating their God-given authority, the spiritual beings worked their evil through humans to inflict multiple cycles of rebellion and carnage throughout the earth. Genesis 6 describes the "sons of God,"¹³ a group of rebellious spiritual beings, procreating with human women, resulting in the Nephilim, who were giant, demigod humans who brought destruction to the earth.¹⁴ Evil was so rampant at this time that God brought a flood to the earth and restarted humanity with the family of Noah.

The flood of judgment from God was only a temporary solution. The rebellion of both humans and spiritual beings continued with Noah's descendants.

The List of Seventy Nations and the Seventy Spiritual Beings

Genesis 10 records the descendants of Noah as a list of 70 nations. This list includes deep levels of evil, showing that the flood did not eradicate the rebellion of humans, nor their granting of authority to evil spiritual beings.

Recorded in Deuteronomy 32:8-9, Moses wrote a song of blessing at the end of his life that referenced what God was doing with the 70 nations from Genesis 10:

¹¹ The Hebrew word *seraphim* (referenced in Isaiah 6:2 from Isaiah's encounter with the spiritual realm) refers to a serpent-like spiritual being.

¹² We might be challenged to comprehend the idea of a serpent speaking to humans in Eden but we should also remember the overlap between the heavenly and earthly realms at this time.

¹³ See Genesis 6:2-4; Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7; Deuteronomy 32:8. The term "sons of God," referring to spiritual beings is in contrast to the term "sons of man," referring to humans.

¹⁴ See 2 Peter 2:4-5 and Jude 6 for possible references to this event.

When the Most High gave the nations their inheritance, when he divided mankind, he fixed the borders of the peoples according to the number of the sons of God. But the Lord's portion is his people, Jacob his allotted heritage.

Moses refers to the "sons of God," the same evil spiritual beings we saw in Genesis 6, and teaches that God organized the number and boundary of nations according to the number of sons of God. This means that God divided the people into 70 nations because there were 70 rebellious spiritual beings. Through this act, God turned the people over to their wicked desires by granting authority to the 70 spiritual beings to rule through the nations' leaders. However, God himself would rule the nation of Israel and oversee the people as his own.

Throughout the Old Testament we see references to these spiritual beings and their authority over their nations. For example, an angel of the Lord came to Daniel to reveal what was happening in the heavenly realm during the previous weeks (Daniel 10:13):

The prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days, but Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I was left there with the kings of Persia.

We catch a glimpse of the vocabulary, calling the spiritual being a "prince," connecting it to a specific nation.

So far we can conclude from the scriptures:

1. God created humans to have a special relational connection with himself, and as a result he granted humans authority beneath himself and above the spiritual beings.
2. In an act of rebellion, a spiritual being lesser in authority, convinced the humans to disobey God, thereby stealing authority away from the humans and changing place with the humans in the authority structure.
3. Throughout the period of the Old Testament, these evil spiritual beings spread havoc on the earthly realm, working their devastations through humans over whom they now had authority.

A Hopeful Prophecy: The Coming Offspring of the Woman

Back in Genesis 3:15, we see this important, mysterious promise of God toward the serpent, just after the humans gave into the temptation:

*I will put enmity between you and the woman,
And between your offspring and her offspring;
He shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel.*

This is the first prophetic promise of the coming Messiah. God says one day an offspring from the woman will step on the head of the serpent, a symbolic picture of

a mysterious person in the future who will defeat the serpent and restore God's intended authority structure. The Messiah fits this promise perfectly, but when would he come and fulfill the prophecy?

How Jesus Restored Our Authority

Phase 1: Testing of Jesus

Following the baptism of Jesus where he received the Holy Spirit, he was sent by the Spirit into the wilderness in order to be tested.¹⁵ Consider the temptations from the devil in light of God's authority structure. Remember that the humans gave up their full authority in the first place by agreeing with a temptation from a lesser authority to rebel against God.

Now, Jesus finds himself tempted by the same spiritual being¹⁶ as Adam and Eve. Even though the devil successfully stole authority from the humans, he still remains a lesser authority than Jesus. In the second of three temptations, the devil showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. The language suggests that the heavenly realm opened up to Jesus in the earthly realm, revealing all the kingdoms supernaturally. During this visionary moment, the devil told Jesus (4:6-7):

"To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours."

The authority structure of all creation is at stake in this temptation. Indeed, the devil did possess authority over all these kingdoms—the humans gave it to him. Would Jesus, in human form, make the same mistake as the humans did in Eden? It may seem laughable that Jesus, a higher authority, would submit to the plan of the devil, a lesser authority, but that is just what the humans did to start off this problem. However, Jesus understood that the God of creation was the only one worthy of worship. Jesus passed this test, maintained his position of authority over the spiritual beings, and was thereby qualified to go about his mission of taking back ground stolen by the devil.

Phase 2: Ministry of Jesus

The doctrine we believe about Jesus is very important to the system of spiritual authority. For example, we believe Jesus has always existed, as affirmed in Colossians 2:15-17:

¹⁵ See Luke 4:1-13.

¹⁶ See Revelation 12:9. The identity of the ancient serpent is the devil.

[Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

The incarnated Jesus is the physical image of a spiritual God. He is God in flesh and blood, and is called the firstborn of all creation. The use of the word “firstborn” does not describe that he was born, but rather describes the top position of authority. Jesus has authority over the entire creation account, which includes the humans and the spiritual beings. According to this passage, Jesus himself was the creator. Notice the relevant language by the apostle Paul to the story of authority we are placing together. He contrasts the heavens and earth along with the visible and invisible. These pairs of words are synonymous: Jesus created—and therefore has authority over—the earthly realm with its beings and the heavenly realm with its beings. Then Paul lists thrones, dominions, rulers, and authorities; the authority structure of the rebellious spiritual beings. Jesus has authority over it all.

Imagine the significance when this pre-existing, all-authoritative God leaves the heavenly realm and takes on a human body in the earthly realm where all the spiritual beings have been exercising their authority. Suddenly, a higher authority arrives with the priority of taking back what had been stolen. Jesus was on a mission. John described the mission succinctly in 1 John 3:8:

For the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.

In fact, Jesus described the physical manifestation of the Kingdom of God as destroying the devil's works. Luke 11:20:

“But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.”

Jesus had much to do when he came to earth, but his priority was to take action against the spiritual beings who had ruined the earth for thousands of years.

Phase 3: Death and Resurrection of Jesus

The earthly ministry of Jesus was only part of the authority restoration process. Through his death and by the shedding of blood, Jesus would gain the authority for even greater works. Jesus would not only destroy the works and strongholds of the rebellious spiritual beings, but by going to the cross and overcoming death, Jesus would also lay the groundwork to destroy the spiritual beings themselves.

A remarkable and pivotal event happened in the last week of Jesus's life, recorded in John 12. While troubled in his spirit, Jesus briefly considered avoiding

his impending suffering. Yet, Jesus understood and embraced his purpose of coming to earth to die. He called for his Father's name to be glorified. In response, the audible voice of the Father broke out of the heavenly realm and into the earthly realm for all to hear: *"I have glorified it and will glorify it again."* In response, Jesus told the crowd (John 12:31-32):

"Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself."

Jesus announces to the public that through his death, the ruler of this world, the devil, would be immediately cast out. A significant change occurred to the devil through the death of Jesus. Since the Bible teaches us that the devil is still present, actively seeking someone to devour,¹⁷ the metaphor of casting out refers to demotion rather than expulsion. The devil would be cast away from the authoritative hold he had through his ruling in the earthly realm.

The devil's demotion of authority, along with the demotion of all of the rebellious spiritual beings, resulted in Jesus now drawing *all* the people of the earth to himself—all the nations beyond the people of Israel. Through this authority change, the power of the 70 spiritual beings ruling the 70 nations from Genesis 10 had been broken. Soon, Jesus would commission his followers to go make disciples of these nations. Thus, this authority change was the means by which God could fulfill his covenant with Abraham, promising that all nations would be blessed through him.¹⁸

In the first two chapters of Hebrews, the writer teaches in depth about God's connection to humanity in contrast to the spiritual beings. The whole segment puts the spiritual beings in their designated place in the authority structure: under Jesus and under humans. After all, as it says in 1:14:

Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?

Who is serving whom reveals that spiritual beings carry a lesser spiritual authority.

In Hebrews 2, the writer quotes Psalm 8, where David emphasizes the authoritative crown of glory God gave to humans. Jesus provides a perfect example of how to wear this crown. While he took on a human body, which is less glorious than the angels, he never relinquished his authority over all realms. The force of these chapters comes in Hebrews 2:14-15:

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, [Jesus] himself partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

¹⁷ See 1 Peter 5:8.

¹⁸ See Genesis 12:3 and Paul's explanation in Galatians 3:8.

Jesus came to the earthly realm not only to destroy the works of the devil but also—by his death and resurrection—to destroy the devil himself.¹⁹

Take note of how the restoration of authority by Jesus mirrors the original theft of authority by the devil. Just as the devil revealed himself on earth in a physical form to steal humans' authority, Jesus revealed himself on earth in a physical form to restore authority to humans.

The Successful Demonstration of Authority

Let's return to the setting of Luke 10, where the 72 followers have returned with stories of successfully exercising authority over the spiritual beings. Jesus explained their success by telling them he saw Satan fall from heaven like lightning.

Jesus employs metaphorical language used often by the prophets to describe a king or spiritual being who has lost favor or influence and is removed from a position of authority. For example, we can see a similar metaphor in this poem from Isaiah 14:12 about the king of Babylon correlating with the appointed spiritual being operating with him:

*How you are fallen from heaven,
O Day Star, son of Dawn!
How you are cut down to the ground,
You who laid the nations low.*

Both the king and the spiritual being with him are compared to stars, a picture of glory and rule. This poem taunts the king and celebrates the falling of the star, a picture of his removal from authority within the heavenly realm.²⁰

Jesus uses similar language about Satan in Luke 10:18. Most likely, Jesus is not referencing Satan's original rebellion back in the Genesis era, rather this image of falling from heaven is a picture of what happened to Satan when Jesus arrived on Earth and restored the intended authority back to humans. In the heavenly realm, Satan was downgraded. And this is why mere humans can confront demons and have the demons obey.

As a result, Jesus told the 72 they had authority to tread on serpents and scorpions and over all the power of the enemy. Jewish cultures would understand serpents and scorpions as ancient symbols of the devil and the act of treading on them without harm as a picture of the successful exercising of authority. As Jesus was the fulfillment of the Genesis 3:15 prophecy, "he shall bruise the serpent's head," so will the followers of Jesus continue on in the same work.

¹⁹ John gives us a visionary picture of the destruction of the devil in Revelation 20:10.

²⁰ The context of the word "heaven" should be understood as the heavenly realm, rather than the modern Christian understanding of heaven as a place we go after we die.

At this point in our examination of the history of authority, we should ask ourselves if it was in the heart of Jesus to grant authority only to the select groups of the 12 and the 72, or to extend the authority to all of his followers in all times, due to his restoration of the entire authority structure?

Our Permanent Right of Spiritual Authority

He gave the right to become children of God

John 1:12

Jesus arrived on earth and restructured the chain of authority by reinstating humans and demoting Satan. As a result, we live in an era where Jesus accomplished the permanent restoration of authority.

The followers of Jesus who wrote letters that comprised the New Testament speak from the context of this accomplished authority. John opens his letter by comparing the aspects of the heavenly and earthly realms that Jesus and his followers participate in. John prefaces his letter with the same exhortation from Colossians, that Jesus existed in the beginning with God and was involved in the creation of everything. But then Jesus left his heavenly place and became a human, with flesh and blood. Many did not receive Jesus as God, but according to John 1:12-13:

But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave them the right to become children of God, who were born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

Everyone who believes in Jesus receives the right to become children of God. The Greek word for “right” is *exousia*—spiritual authority. Stated another way, everyone who believes in Jesus receives the spiritual authority that comes with being in the family of God.

The possession of spiritual authority, along with the anointing of the Holy Spirit, is what makes these astounding words of Jesus in John 14:12 possible:

“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father.”

New Identity Leads to Authority: Heirs

As new covenant believers living after the death and resurrection of Jesus, we are in a completely different relational identity than the old covenant saints.

In Galatians 4:4-7, Paul expands upon this relationship change²¹:

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba, Father.” So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

²¹ See also Romans 8:14-18.

Receiving authority from Jesus is fruit from a larger work that Jesus accomplished when he came to earth. Before Jesus came, people lived under the law, giving them the metaphorical identity of slaves. The very purpose of the slave-master metaphor is to demonstrate the nature of authority in the relationship. One party has all, and the other has none.

But Jesus came to redeem, or purchase the ownership rights, of those under the law in order to set them free from slavery. Instead, we become adopted as children into the family of God! In the new covenant we relate to God as a family member, and if this is true, we are heirs.

Ultimately, Paul's purpose of convincing people they are an heir is to convince them they have the authority that comes from that position. Jesus accomplished the work to transform the relationship to grant us authority.

New Identity Leads to Authority: Priests

Fundamental to understanding the believer's authority is embracing our identity as Kingdom priests and pursuing the work of the priestly calling. We see this taught in 1 Peter 2:4-5, 9:

As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ...you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

God created the priesthood as a people set apart to minister to himself and others on his behalf. The Old Testament shows us different contexts of the priestly calling.

God set apart Aaron and the tribe of Levi for the priestly ministry, on behalf of the nation of Israel. Exodus 29 describes the consecrating ritual for these priests which gave them the authority to minister to God. This was a holy ministry which required authorization from God to perform the necessary rituals.

In another context of priestly ministry, God told Moses in Exodus 19:5-6, that even though all the people of the earth belong to God, he had set apart Israel as a Kingdom of priests. Like the Levitical priesthood, one part represents the whole.

David wrote Psalm 110 about a third priestly context. He makes a Messianic prophecy saying, "You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizadek." This priestly order preceded the Levitical order and refers to Melchizadek, who was both a king and a priest to God, who ministered on behalf of Abraham in Genesis 14:18.

Jesus fulfilled the prophecy of the dual priest and king. Peter then confirms that indeed, the people of Jesus make up the royal priesthood in service to Jesus. All contexts of priesthood necessitate the conferring of authority to the priests in order for the priests to accomplish the required work. Furthermore, a royal priesthood

communicates that the royal priests are representatives of the royal king, carrying the king's authority.

To be a priest of Jesus means to carry the authority of Jesus. Priestly identity is one fruit of the identity changes that Jesus put into place for all people under the New Covenant.

No Identity Means No Authority

Acts 19:11-20 tells us the story of another priestly family who became famous for losing a fight against demons. When Paul arrived at Ephesus, God began doing unusual and extraordinary miracles through Paul's hands. Articles of clothing, that were touched by Paul, were sent out to people for healing and deliverance of evil spirits. The setting of Ephesus describes a time when the heavenly realm was closely overlapped with the physical realm. Acts 19:13-17 continues:

Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists undertook to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, "I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims." Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva were doing this. But the evil spirit answered them, "Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?" And the man in whom was the evil spirit leaped on them, mastered all of them, so that they fled out of the house naked and wounded. And this became known to all the residents of Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks. And fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was extolled.

Even before Jesus arrived to minister in Israel, Jewish exorcists tried their best to deal with demons.²² They saw little success because they did not carry the authority to overcome. Many Jewish exorcists, including the priestly family of Sceva, traveled throughout the Roman empire to try to bring relief to demonized people.

The language in this passage suggests the sons of Sceva were not believers in Jesus as Messiah. They were invoking the name of Jesus, a name they only knew because they heard Paul proclaim it. They themselves were not proclaimers of the name of Jesus. Likely because of the heightened spiritual activity happening in Ephesus at the time and after seeing that Paul had such fruitfulness in casting out evil spirits through the name of Jesus, the sons of Sceva simply tried using the name of Jesus as a pragmatic option.

Without following Jesus as Lord, these priestly sons did not carry the priestly identity of Jesus, and therefore carried no actual authority to apply over these evil spirits. Even the evil spirits taunted the men, claiming they had no idea who they were. As a result, the demonized man, overcome with dark, supernatural power, beat up the seven brothers and stripped them naked. This illustrates the importance of carrying the true priestly identity from Jesus in order to carry true authority in the heavenly realm. Kingdom ministry requires Kingdom authority and power!

²² Refer to Luke 11:19.

How to Exercise Your Spiritual Authority

In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!

Acts 3:6

In Jesus's Name

When Jesus gives authority to his followers, the premise is that instead of Jesus physically going from place to place to minister, he sends his followers to go instead. We represent Jesus and do what he would do. In this way, Jesus has deputized us, his followers, by giving us a badge and appropriate weapons to expand his Kingdom by confronting our spiritual enemy. We serve as representatives, going in Jesus's name. So instead of limiting the phrase "in Jesus's name" as a way to close out a prayer, we should understand that to exercise authority is to represent Jesus by ministering in his name.

When we examine New Testament examples of believers exercising authority, we see them using vocabulary of declaring or commanding rather than asking. In fact, every example of healing in the New Testament, whether it be by Jesus or his followers, has them declaring the healing to take place rather than praying to ask God to do the healing. For example, Peter in Acts 3:6:

"In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!"

How could Peter utilize such a command? Why didn't he go into prayer and ask God to heal the lame man? Because Jesus imparted his authority to Peter to represent Jesus in the presence of the lame man. This is what it means for Jesus to deputize people to do the same work as the sheriff.

When we look through the lens of representing Jesus in ministry, Jesus gives us his debit card to access his bank account of unlimited resources. However, it is common for believers to instead feel like they have been given a gift card with an unknown amount. In this case, even though they know they have received a gift, they go to the check out unsure if they have enough on the card to make the purchase. This thinking causes us to minister with insecurity and limitations. This is a sign that we are placing the burden of ministry success on our own resources, or lack thereof, rather than what Jesus has given us: full use of Kingdom funds. You cannot overdraft Jesus's account.

Notice the simplicity of Peter's vocabulary in Acts 3:6: *"Rise up and walk."* In reality, Peter is telling the man how to respond to something the Kingdom of God has already done for him. Our role in exercising authority is to simply carry out the desires and decisions that Jesus has already made. Our focus, then, is to be aligned with the agenda of Jesus, be courageously obedient, and leave the results to God.

Ministering in Partnership With the Holy Spirit

Jesus gave authority, but he never meant for us to walk alone. As He would leave the earthly realm behind, the Father would send the Holy Spirit to help. Jesus promised his followers in John 14:26:

“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.”

The promise was fulfilled in two parts. First, in John 20:22, on resurrection evening, Jesus breathed on his disciples and said, *“Receive the Holy Spirit.”* Then, according to Acts 1:4-8, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem until they were endued with power. Jesus promised them:

“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

In Acts 2, the Holy Spirit came in power and supercharged the ministry of the authority carriers. But the gift of the Holy Spirit is much more than power. He comforts, counsels, and he helps us in exercising the authority we carry.

Even though we carry a debit card to Jesus’s bank account, we still are to only use the card according to the desires of the one we represent. Unlimited resources means that in every circumstance where Jesus sends us, we will have more than enough. However, as we move out, there will be circumstances where the Holy Spirit will not permit us to go. In Acts 16:6-7, Paul and his missionary team tried to enter certain regions of Asia Minor but the Holy Spirit did not permit them, despite Jesus giving a commission to go to all nations. Therefore, as we move around and minister according to what Jesus has *said*, we also listen to what the Holy Spirit is *saying* as we go. Jesus himself described his ongoing ministry dependence in this fashion (John 5:19):

“Truly, truly I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise.”

Even though Jesus possessed all authority in heaven and on earth, he did not exercise authority as a blank check. Rather, he kept his eye on what the Father was doing and ministered accordingly. We watch for what the Holy Spirit is starting and then come along and finish the work in Jesus’s name.

Ministering in Connection With Faith

As we partner with the Holy Spirit to minister with authority, the most important aspect to our success could be faith. In order for us to actually take ground from the enemy, we must trust that Jesus gave us authority, we must trust that

Jesus will enforce our actions done in his name, and we must trust in the identity Jesus gave us. In this case, the opposite of trust is fear and doubt.

The dynamic of faith with fear and doubt is illustrated well in the account of Peter walking on water with Jesus. The disciples were out on a boat and caught in a storm in the middle of the night. To their shock, the disciples saw what they thought was a ghost walking on the waves of the stormy water. Jesus shouted to them, confirming it was actually him in the flesh! The story continues in Matthew 14:28-31:

Peter answered [Jesus], "Lord if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, "Lord, save me." Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?"

Peter actually walked on water! How did he do this? We may like to picture Jesus, hand extended to release power, holding Peter on the water. But Peter stood firm on the water because of his strong faith and the courage to exercise it. But how fast things can change! In one moment Peter is standing with courageous faith and in the next he is sinking in fear of the wind.

All ministry exercised with Kingdom authority can present similar moments. You are on the scene, ready to represent Jesus and overcome the power of the enemy, but challenging circumstances will tempt us to believe we are not enough or that we will be defeated. Just as fast as we jump on to the water, fear and doubt can send us back to the safety of the boat.

Many years ago I was praying and walking in a busy section of my town. I came across a homeless man who had parts of his shoes duct taped to his feet. After introducing myself to him, I offered to give him my shoes. He responded with overwhelming gratitude and thanksgiving. I took off my shoes, and just as I extended my arm to give him the shoes, an evil spirit took over the man. He screamed at me and shouted profanities and threatened to kill me.

In these moments, there isn't really time to process your identity in Christ. Our core beliefs will simply come to the surface. On that day, I turned around and walked away in fear, unable to give the man my shoes. In hindsight, I wish I would have confronted the evil spirit that didn't want that man to receive a free gift. On the other hand, maybe it was best for me to walk away. Either way, I spent time reflecting on that encounter and now I am more deeply grounded in my identity. Since then I have had many similar experiences with better results.

Don't worry! Jesus will not send everyone to try to set free highly demonized people. But before you get into any ministry setting, ground yourself in your identity and delegated authority, and the components of faith and courageous obedience so that when you are in the moment, you will more likely succeed.

Ministering With Connection to Angels

Not only does God give the Holy Spirit to help us, he also assigns angels as an integral part of our supernatural team. Most of the spiritual beings did not join the rebellion back in Eden and these holy angels still exist to execute the purposes of God in the restoration of the earthly realm. Some angels are assigned for ministry to us while other angels are assigned for ministry alongside us, while others will be assigned to instruct us.²³

Even though most of us may not see angelic helpers with our eyes, it is essential that we value their role in the Kingdom. Part of our prayer life should be directed to asking God to release angels to help us in our Kingdom assignments.

Potential Missteps With Authority

In Luke's gospel, Jesus grants authority to the 12 in 9:1, and authority to the 72 in 10:1. Sandwiched in between is a rapid fire listing of multiple ways the 12 disciples misunderstood and misused their gift of authority. Let's use Luke's writing as a tool to grow in our stewardship of spiritual authority.

1. When we limit our authority: Luke 9:10-17

The 12 disciples had just returned from the first journey carrying their new authority. I picture them going out on their journey with trepidation but returning home with brimming overconfidence. Jesus listened to their stories of success. Eventually crowds of thousands discovered their location, so Jesus welcomed them as he used his own authority through teaching and healing. As the day drew to an end, the disciples realized they had a food shortage so they recommended to Jesus to send the people away for food. But Jesus responded with a curious statement (Luke 9:13):

"You give them something to eat."

What was Jesus telling them to do? Certainly Jesus also understood the food shortage. I believe Jesus was inviting the confident disciples to again use their authority to provide a supernatural solution to a natural problem.

The disciples' responded by reiterating the food shortage, demonstrating they only had eyes for the natural problem at hand. Jesus went on to miraculously multiply the food, but I wonder if the disciples missed an opportunity to use their authority.

How easy it is for carriers of spiritual authority to be intimidated by what faces them in the earthly realm. But the presence of authority brings the needed solution. Thus, as simple as it may sound, the most important step in exercising

²³ See Luke 22:43; Acts 5:19; 8:26; 10:3; 12:7; 27:23.

authority is to remember that you have it in every assignment that God sets up for you.

2. When we try exercising authority and fail: Luke 9:37-43²⁴

While Jesus was on the mountain with Peter, James, and John for the transfiguration, a man had brought his son to the other disciples for healing and deliverance. According to the father, a spirit had been seizing the boy and convulsing him, causing him to foam at the mouth. He brought the boy to the disciples to cast out the demon, but the disciples were unable. Jesus arrived from the mountain and successfully freed the boy.

The possession of authority does not guarantee successful results. These disciples had already cast out many demons, but not at this moment. When the disciples asked Jesus to explain why they were unable to cast out the demon, Jesus spoke to them about faith, prayer, and fasting.

As previously mentioned, exercising authority requires a measure of faith to be applied appropriately. We trust what Jesus says. When we become taunted by the work of the enemy in front of us, then our authority is laid down in surrender to a lesser authority. In this case we are not trusting Jesus that we are the one with greater authority with access to the enforcement. We are like a parent who pleads with their child to clean his room. The parent clearly has the position of authority, but in this case they exercise it as though the child carries something greater.

In these cases, our vocabulary can often reveal how much our faith is connected to the identity Jesus gave us. When we confront the kingdom of darkness in fear, pleading for change, the enemy won't respond because there is no function of authority. However, when we stand firm, trusting that Jesus actually gave us authority, we are like a parent who tells their child to clean his room with a simple word or even a look, and the child obeys.

3. When authority causes superiority: Luke 9:46-48

The possession of authority is something very powerful, which can quickly lead to arrogance and abuse. Human nature will lead us to compare ourselves to one another and cast judgments. Whether overtly or covertly, these actions and heart postures are problematic. We will be tempted to overestimate ourselves into attitudes of superiority and jostle for earthly positions of honor. We will also be tempted to underestimate ourselves and walk in a spirit of false humility.

Not long after receiving their authority, the disciples began to argue with one another over who was the greatest, completely misunderstanding the humble character Jesus required to accompany the gift of authority. The disciples brought their cultural ranking assumptions into the Kingdom of Jesus.

²⁴ Mark 9:14-29 gives another account of this story in greater detail.

In correction to the argument, Jesus brought a child to his side. As the disciples looked at the child, Jesus told them:

"Whoever receives this child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. For he who is least among you all is the one who is great."

Jesus does not elevate someone into a superior position by giving them authority. He expects those with authority to carry the humble character of a child.

4. When we feel threatened by authority: Luke 9:49-50

John approached Jesus with a problem:

"Master, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he does not follow with us." But Jesus said to him, "Do not stop him, for the one who is not against you is for you."

The disciples seemed to quickly assume that they themselves were the only ones who could confront the power of the enemy. While there is mystery in this passage about the other person casting out demons, let's highlight the common temptation to place a barrier between you and others in the Kingdom. At times we may feel competitively superior over another or feel threatened by another's success. Jesus quickly corrected the attitude. The people you are opposing are actually playing for the same team.

5. When we misapply authority: Luke 9:51-56

While Jesus and the 12 disciples were traveling through Samaria, residents of a village were unwelcoming to the group. Feeling this rejection, James and John asked Jesus:

"Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?"

On the positive side, James and John are speaking as though they possess authority. They offer to call on the fire as though that is within their rights. But Jesus rebuked James and John for this offer.

Jesus wants the authority he gives to apply to the enemy within the spiritual realm. The humans in Samaria who rejected the traveling group behaved like enemies, but according to the teaching of Jesus, these humans are to be loved. Humans are never the enemy. The enemy is clearly defined as the rebellious spiritual beings working evil in the world, often through humans.

Consider Paul's teaching from Ephesians 6:12 in the context of James and John's offer of fire:

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

Paul highlights the reality of a spiritual battle, but he also wants readers to turn their energy away from a battle against opposing humans, and toward the opposing spiritual beings. Paul also gives insight into the authority structure of the rebellious spiritual beings, similar to what he wrote in Colossians 3. To be clear, the enemy is real, and is located in the heavenly realm. Jesus gave the authority to confront the enemy of this realm.

The Armor of God

In teaching settings where we are unaware of our spiritual authority, the armor of God²⁵ becomes limited to a defensive metal suit meant to help Christians survive until Jesus returns to deal with the devil. With this in mind, I picture the church, safely inside the walls of a castle, without ever daring to go outside, wearing heavy armor clanging against one another, waiting for an attack.

But as we've seen, Jesus has already dealt with the devil and restored authority in our favor. When we serve Jesus, standing in our delegated authority, the armor becomes necessary protection because *we* are on the attack. We are not surviving in a bunker, we are taking ground from the enemy and advancing the Kingdom until Jesus returns.

Therefore, listen to Paul exhort the body of Christ, who carries spiritual authority to advance the Kingdom:

Therefore take up the whole armor of God that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication.

²⁵ See Ephesians 6:13-18.

The Purpose of Imparted Authority: Mission

The Kingdom of God has come near to you.

Luke 10:9

Binding and Plunder

Jesus restored the authority structure in order to take back from the devil what had been destroyed. When Jesus imparted his spiritual authority to his followers, he immediately commissioned them to move out and exercise it. Jesus actually imparted two of his possessions: spiritual authority and the mission to exercise it. These two go hand-in-hand and therefore can never be separated. Jesus only gave authority to his followers because he had a mission for his followers. We cannot receive authority without utilizing it to advance the Kingdom, and we must not try to advance the Kingdom without exercising our delegated authority.

Jesus illustrated this point in Matthew 12:29:

"How can someone enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? Then indeed he may plunder his house."

The strong man is the devil and the house is where the devil stores everything he has stolen. Jesus stormed that house, bound its resident, and began taking back the plunder. Then Jesus commissioned his followers for the same task. Jesus bound the devil for *our* successful entry. We must perpetually connect Jesus's work of binding the strong man to the purpose of entering the strong man's house for plundering.

The overwhelming majority of plunder is found outside the walls of our church services. We are called to administer spiritual authority to fellow believers, but to stop there falls short of the heart of Jesus. Remember the broader picture of the authority restructure. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus, the rebellious spiritual beings can no longer prevent the nations from coming to Jesus. The shedding of blood for the new covenant results in the fulfillment of the covenant with Abraham: *"In you all nations will be blessed."*

There was a time when our neighborhoods, cities, regions, and nations were these "houses" full of plunder yet inaccessible because a ruling rebellious spiritual being stood guard. Jesus gave us the keys necessary to access these places.²⁶ What a tragic missed opportunity to not take advantage of the binding work Jesus made available to us.

The Kingdom "Now" and the Kingdom "Not Yet"

Even though Jesus did the work of restoring his followers to a higher authority than the rebellious spiritual beings, we will have a battle against an active

²⁶ Compare Matthew 16:19.

evil enemy as we go out to plunder. To be sure, the work of Jesus did not remove the devil from moving around on the earth, seeking someone to devour.²⁷ At least, not yet. There will be a day when we live in the ultimate expression of the Kingdom of God, where no effects of sin will be present—no sickness, death, or devil—these will be permanently eradicated. Sometimes Jesus refers to this expression of the Kingdom as “the age to come” or “in the resurrection.” This is the expression of the Kingdom that is “not yet.”

When Jesus arrived on earth to exercise authority over the devil, he said:²⁸

“If it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.”

The ongoing application of the authority of Jesus on earth is demonstrated through the inauguration of his Kingdom. This is the expression of the Kingdom that is “now.” We live in the Kingdom “now” with our hope set on the Kingdom “not yet.” We live in a foretaste of what the Kingdom will one day fully be; therefore, we must embrace the tension, where Jesus has bound the devil, yet the devil remains to fight—a mystery where we are commissioned to heal the sick, yet sickness remains as a reality on earth.

The believer’s commission to exercise authority exists within this tension of the Kingdom “now” and the Kingdom “not yet.” Sometimes human nature resists the presence of tension. This can lead to fatalistic understandings of the Kingdom, such as ignoring our partnership role by assuming that if God wants people healed, he will heal them. Or, we try to exercise authority but it does not work so we conclude we must not have authority, or we are applying it wrong.

In Matthew 10:8 Jesus actually told his followers to raise the dead! If Jesus says to raise the dead, we should reasonably conclude there are dead people he wants raised. Shall we conclude that every single dead person will be raised? No. This is the tension of the Kingdom “now” and the Kingdom “not yet.” The disciples were sent out to minister within this tension and so are we. Simple obedience should influence our decision to accept the mission of Jesus rather than the potential of “results.”

As we go out to our neighborhoods, cities, regions, and nations carrying the spiritual authority to plunder the house of the devil, we will experience stories of joy as well as sorrow and frustration. We can expect to tell Jesus, “I can’t believe it worked!” And we can expect to ask Jesus, “Why didn’t it work?” This is life on mission, in the Kingdom “now” tension, and this is good. In both instances when we see success or failure, we can be drawn closer to Jesus.

²⁷ See 1 Peter 5:8.

²⁸ See Luke 11:20

Two by Two

Jesus likely sent out his followers in twos for more than traveling convenience. Although you can be successful in ministering alone in the Kingdom, we should consider these spiritual principles for ministering with teammates as we operate within the heavenly realm.

The principle of two witnesses is important to the heart of God throughout scripture as it applies to both the earthly and heavenly realms. Two witnesses provide the validation of truth. In the old covenant law, God required two witnesses to establish any wrongdoing rather than one.²⁹ John describes the prophetic work of two witnesses in his vision.³⁰

In Matthew 18:15-20, Jesus describes a relationship between two witnesses and authority, applied in both the earthly and heavenly realms, in the context of human reconciliation. If a person confronts another who has sinned against him, but gains no reconciliation, he should take along one or two witnesses to confront the person again. Jesus explains:

“Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again, I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”

Jesus describes the workings of spiritual authority, connected with having witnesses. Binding and loosing are the actions of a person with spiritual authority. When two or three take part of this action together on earth, the action goes official in the heavenly realm. In this way Jesus explains how agreement impacts both realms.

Solo ministry is often unavoidable, but should be the exception and not the rule. Look for partners to join you in exercising spiritual authority.

Person of Peace

According to Luke 10:5-7, when Jesus commissioned the 72 to go into the towns for ministry, he gave specific instructions for them to find a person of peace before they began the work of ministry. The person of peace was someone God had prepared for them to show hospitality, provide for their physical needs, and be a person of influence, giving the minister credibility within that town. Without the person of peace, the ministry in that town would not be as successful. In fact, Jesus instructed the 72 that if they did not find a person of peace, they were to move on to another town. In a way, the presence of the person of peace in a town was a sign that God had opened the doors for ministry.

²⁹ See Deuteronomy 19:15.

³⁰ See Revelation 11:3.

The person of peace concept is a vital element in understanding the missional strategy of Jesus as he commissions his followers with authority. The person of peace could then serve as a gateway for favor and relational connections within the town.

The person of peace principle can often get lost in the intricacies of our modern cultures. But as we prepare to go out on mission, we should prioritize praying for and seeking out the people of peace that God has provided for us in our missional spaces.

Two Arenas to Exercise Spiritual Authority

Once we embrace the spiritual authority Jesus has imparted, we will move out into various settings where we can safely experiment. We can begin by identifying the arenas where God has already given us a position of earthly realm authority. Then on occasion in our ongoing intimacy with Christ, we will be led and gain favor to exercise spiritual authority where we do not carry positional authority.

Arenas Within Our Positional Authority

Identify spaces and settings where God has already given you authority through your status or position in the earthly realm. For example, God has placed parents in a status of authority over their children. Because this earthly realm authority is granted by God, spiritual authority can be easily exercised. Parents should boldly bless their children and confront any perceived darkness surrounding the lives of their children.

Another context of positional authority exists in your home. God's provision, along with legal documents granting your right to dwell in your home, makes this setting a perfect place to exercise spiritual authority. As a legal resident, you should boldly pronounce blessings and expel all darkness from your home.

Many contexts of positional authority exist in the earthly realm and can be used for better or for worse, for blessing or for cursing.

Arenas Beyond Our Positional Authority

Through our ongoing abiding and intimacy with Jesus, we will sometimes gain favor to exercise authority in arenas where we don't have positional authority. These special assignments can be revealed to us through prayer or as we pay attention to what the Spirit is doing in the ongoing moments of life. When granted, this authority can override our lack of positional authority in these arenas. Jesus taught the abiding principle in John 15:7:

"If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you."

When you receive these spiritual assignments revealed through intimate connection with God, you will often feel a burden or drawing toward a person, place,

or circumstance that you previously did not carry. In many cases, you may receive a surge of faith and boldness to act. These are signs that God has given you favor to minister in a specific situation where you previously did not have authority.

The dynamic of gaining spiritual authority in arenas without positional authority is illustrated in Acts 27 where Paul was a prisoner on a ship bound for Rome. In this setting, Paul clearly had no positional authority. As the ship set sail, Paul perceived coming danger and loss of life during the trip and communicated his concerns to the centurion charged with guarding the prisoners. As we would expect, the centurion paid no attention to Paul's concerns because as a prisoner, Paul carried no positional authority or overriding favor with his guards. And so the ship set sail despite Paul's warning.

Soon after, a violent storm battered the ship just as Paul had predicted. In the night, an angel came to Paul and said, *"Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar. And behold, God has granted you all those who sail with you."*³¹ In this heavenly realm encounter Paul received courage and a promise that all on the ship would survive the storm. He also received favor with those in charge. The next day Paul stood before all the people of the ship, declared with authority they would be safe, and gave instructions for how they would all survive. After ignoring Paul's earlier warnings, the centurion guard in positional authority now followed the directives of Paul the prisoner.

At the beginning of the journey Paul spoke with little influence because even though he carried spiritual authority, he lacked positional authority. But after an encounter with an angel sent by God from the heavenly realm, Paul received supernatural favor to speak with unusual influence and spiritual authority to an entire ship where he was a prisoner. To be clear, Paul had endowed spiritual authority even when his advice was not followed by those with positional authority. The punchline of the narrative is that spiritual authority can trump positional authority when activated by God for his purposes.

When we begin to exercise our authority, we can safely operate within the positional authority that God has already assigned us. As we press into our abiding relationship with Jesus, at times we will gain favor for special Kingdom assignments. Because these are often outside of our ongoing positional authority settings, a measure of courageous obedience is necessary to complete the assignment.

Practical Examples of Exercising Spiritual Authority on Mission

The practical goal of our mission is to find any space, whether a location or person, where we see fruit of the devil, and declare the Kingdom fruit of Jesus instead. Jesus describes these declarations as "binding" and "loosing."³² We bind, or forbid, the work of the enemy, and we loose, or release, the work of Jesus.

³¹ See Acts 27:23-24.

³² For example, Matthew 16:19; 18:18.

Try an experiment of how that might sound:

Ask the Spirit to bring to your mind a person or place in your context that needs to experience the binding and loosing work of Jesus. Next, in Jesus's name, declare what needs to be bound and what needs to be imparted with regard to this person or place. This posture of prayer is called "declarative prayer" and is the most common form of prayer in the gospels. A nice opportunity to practice this is in the context of a prayer walk. Ask the Spirit to direct you in this approach to exercising your authority as you come across people, homes, neighborhoods, parks, businesses, etc.

How does it feel to let these words pass your lips? The more comfortable you get with your identity as one who possesses authority, the more bold you will get with declarative statements. Boldness can be important because it often reveals our fear and faith levels, which matter in applying spiritual authority.

What follows are some additional ideas for specific applications of authority in specific spaces. These ideas are intended to stimulate countless other ideas.

1. **Blessing**

Blessing involves declaring God's desires over a person, place, or circumstance, especially in areas where curses have been previously spoken. Some blessings may be predictive while others may be positional.

- **Homes with spiritual darkness**

Some describe their homes as dark and creepy, while at times even seeing evil sights. Children will often "see things" in their rooms causing fear. Walk through the home and tell the evil to go away and bless the home with the fruits of the Holy Spirit. This ministry is easy to measure as the people can recognize very quickly if anything changes.

- **Your children**

Speak blessings that are aligned with the heart of Jesus over your kids. In some cases, people with earthly authority can say things to kids that are not aligned with Jesus, such as, "You'll never amount to anything." When kids begin to agree with these words, curses can get established. As parents, we can easily break these curses and establish proper statements about our kids' identities and destinies.

- **Marriages**

In a culture where many marriages fail, newlywed couples will hear statements

such as, “Half of all marriages fail.” We should bless marriages with declarative statements of permanence, fruitfulness, and romance.

2. Prayer-Walking

When we walk and pray around a neighborhood or building, we are carrying our authority to a specific location to release the Kingdom.

- **For a person of peace**

As you intentionally go to a location to walk and pray, God will often reveal a person of peace who may provide a relational and Kingdom breakthrough for that location. Although praying from a distance can be effective, physically walking and praying through an area gives you the potential to meet a person of peace.

- **To confront the spiritual background for the presence of crime**

Many local law enforcement agencies have websites with maps of crime hot spots. With a group of people, locate an area with an unusually high crime rate and walk the area while declaring the arrival of the Kingdom of Jesus. In the following weeks and months check the website for decrease of crime.

3. Praying for the Sick

Physical healing is the most common example in the New Testament of using declarative statements based upon spiritual authority.

- **For believers**

When you have the opportunity, offer to experiment with declarations over someone who needs healing. Try using short statements like you find in the Bible. After waiting for a short period of time, follow up and ask them if anything has changed. This is a great space to test and see if you feel any fear or doubt as you minister with God’s authority.

- **For unbelievers**

You might be surprised at how effective healing authority is with those far from God. Courage is necessary but the payoff is great. In these settings, make sure you refrain from religious vocabulary often learned in our church cultures. Healing prayer can also lead to finding a person of peace.

4. Inner Healing

Inner healing seeks out the underlying spiritual conditions that cause trauma in a person. The discovery of these roots can lead to healing in the body, mind, soul and spirit.

- Common spiritual roots within wounded people that cause trauma are lack of forgiveness, resentment, and anger.

- True identity development is often the pathway for inner healing.
- Once the roots are identified, spiritual authority is used to bind, loose, bless, heal, and restore.

5. Deliverance

Deliverance is the pathway for people to get free from demonic bondage. People can be bound up in severe or often subtle ways. Sometimes this ministry can be quick, while other times deliverance can take more time and even require multiple sessions. And in most every case, the ministry of inner healing and deliverance go hand in hand. Addressing demonic bondage is often necessary for success in physical and inner healing ministry. The principles of binding and loosing are the pathway to deliverance.

Closing Commission

The study of spiritual authority in the Bible is of great consequence. The movement of the Kingdom of heaven is at stake. Embracing these concepts requires us to embrace the realities of the heavenly realm where our authority exists. In general, our primary attention is directed toward the realm that carries the greatest weight of familiarity. Because the earthly realm is visible, our focus can easily be glued to our problems here.

But the One we follow came from the heavenly realm in order to give us authority in this often unfamiliar realm. Jesus calls us to recognize the realities of the heavenly realm and their connections into the physical realm. We can only accept his commission to work in the harvest if we have an appropriate value on the heavenly realm and our authority within.

Let's embrace our spiritual authority over all the power of the enemy and take back ground in the name of our victorious King Jesus Christ!

As we close our examination of imparted spiritual authority, I leave you with some declarations of your God-given identity and authority in Christ. I suggest speaking these over yourself several times:

- I am a child of God and therefore a recipient of his inheritance.
- I am a priest of the most high God.
- I have received spiritual authority from Jesus Christ.
- I am commissioned to exercise spiritual authority and minister in Jesus's name.
- I am commissioned to do the same works Jesus did.
- I have a crown of glory upon my head.
- I am equipped to overcome the power of the enemy.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Darren Rusco and his wife Jennifer were born and raised on the central coast of California. They have a son and daughter-in-law, Jason and Ally, and two daughters, Cameron and Hayden. After a career as a teacher and coach, Darren transitioned to pastoral ministry in Paso Robles, CA. In 2011 the Ruscos joined Novo Mission to minister in Glasgow, Scotland. Currently Darren resides in Paso Robles, leading a team called Open Spaces Project, part of Novo's Gospel Movement Teams Division. Darren's heart is to equip people for mission, five fold gifting, and spiritual level ministries.