

Understanding Our Authority in Christ

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July 1991

I have long been aware that Scripture tells us we have great authority in Christ to accomplish His work, defeat demons and call on the heavenly hosts to aid us in time of need. Yet, how seldom we Christians move into that realm of authority. How sad that Christ has given us this authority and it goes so unused in the body of Christ.

In this teaching we will explore the concept of authority, both in the natural and supernatural or spiritual realms, and how we can exercise it.

Authority in the Natural Realm

During the time I served in the U. S. Marine Corps I learned the meaning of authority. Every Marine wore his or her rank insignia on his uniform. Everyone knew the rank structure and knew who had authority over whom. Among Marines there are never any long debates about who outranks whom. Everyone, from the lowest private to the highest general, knows how authority flows through the rank structure.

This U. S. Marine order of authority is an example of authority as it applies in the natural realm. There are countless orders of natural authority in the world in which we live. Civil governments have ranks of authority. Educational systems have ranks of authority. Denominational churches have ranks of authority. In fact natural institutions would be and are chaotic when the lines of authority are blurred or destroyed.

Keeping this U. S. Marine Corps ranking of authority in mind, let's look to Christ's authority and the ranking in the spiritual realm.

Jesus - Head Over All Authority

Jesus is Lord over all authority. He is the supreme commander in both the natural and spiritual. No authority on earth exists that is not subordinate to Him, for the Scripture says:

Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. (Rom 13:1 NIV emphasis added).

The Apostle Paul writes regarding Jesus:

He is the image of the invisible God, the first born over all creation. For by him all things were created: Things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by and for him. (Col 1:15-16).

In order to help understand the authority of Jesus I have diagrammed authority as it flows from Him. From the chart we see that Jesus' authority is over both the natural realm and the spiritual realm. The natural realm contains the natural authorities mentioned earlier. The spiritual realm contains three distinct sub-realms, the church, the angelic hosts, and the satanic kingdom. Note that I have placed the blocks identifying the different entities at various heights to indicate a "rank." Obviously mankind is presently at the bottom of the structure while Jesus is at the top. I have put mankind at the bottom because we are presently subject to both natural authority and satanic au-

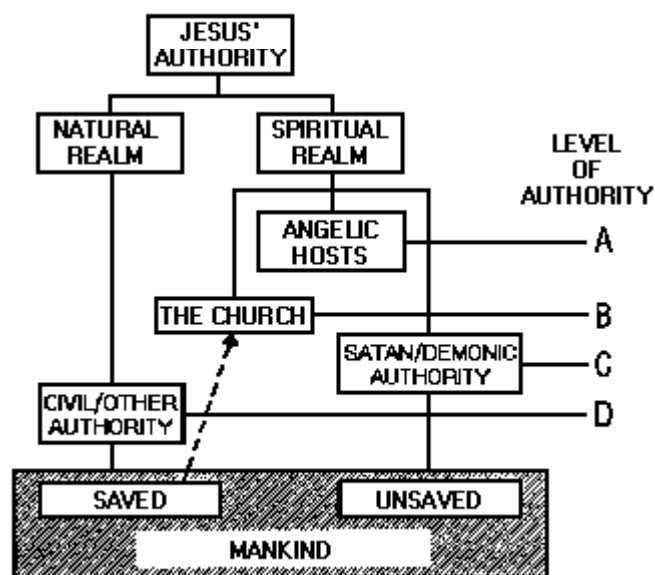


Chart of Authority

thority. As we will see later in this lesson, this subjugation is particularly true of the unsaved.

Church Leaders Must Recognize Authority

It is very important for the church, and particularly those in leadership, to come to a full understanding of the church's authority. Vast power is available to the church and to those who understand and will move in power and victory.

Let us examine an example of this authority found in Matthew, chapter 8. One day Jesus encountered a man who understood the principles of authority. A Roman centurion came to Jesus asking Him to heal his suffering servant. Jesus said to him:

"I will go and heal him." The centurion replied, "Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word and my servant will be healed. For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'go,' and he goes; and to that one, 'come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'do this,' and he does it." When Jesus heard this he was astonished and said to those following him, "I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith.... Then Jesus said to the centurion, "Go! It will be done just as you believed it would." And his servant was healed at that very hour. (Matt 8:7-13 NIV).

As a military man, the centurion fully understood how natural authority worked. He probably reasoned (correctly) that there was a parallel of authority in the spiritual realm and recognized Jesus' mastery over it. He then likely reasoned that physical distance wasn't a factor in the spiritual realm and accurately concluded that all Jesus had to do was give the command and his servant would be healed!

"In the Name of Jesus"

Now that we understand this authority, and its power as exhibited by Jesus Himself, the question becomes, how can we tap into it? How can we move in that same authority? Let us look at another Scripture for the answer. One day Jesus appointed seventy-two disciples and sent them out telling them to heal the sick and to announce that the kingdom of God is near.

The seventy-two returned with joy and said, "Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name." He replied, "...do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven." (Lk 10:17-20 NIV).

Here the seventy-two said, "...even the demons submit to us in your name" indicating that the power of Christian authority lies in the "name of Jesus."

But does that name always work? Being totally honest, most of us have used the "name of Jesus" many times without accomplishing anything, haven't we? Yes, we all have. Then what's wrong? What are we not doing right? Our problem seems to deepen when we consider another Scripture:

I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask **in my name**, so that the son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything **in my name**, and I will do it. (Jn 14:12-14 NIV - emphasis added).

Those are powerful statements, aren't they? Yet haven't we all asked for things in His name only to see things worsen and our prayers not answered? The results are far from what we asked, or anticipated, or prayed for.

Why Didn't I Get My Request Answered?

Over the years, I have pondered this set of verses as I have repeatedly seen prayers go unanswered. I believe that a close examination of Jesus' words in the above Scripture and His instructions to the seventy-two provide the answer. I find four distinct preconditions that must be met before that awesome authority in Jesus' name is released to us. The four preconditions are:

1. The seventy-two had been instructed by Jesus and they were walking in obedience to the Lord's instructions. Thus, once we receive instruction from Jesus, we must act on it in obedience to His word.
2. Verse 12 above gives us the second precondition, "...anyone who has faith in me...." Not only must we be born-again, but we must also have faith that He can do all things, that He is able to move any obstacle, and that He can heal any disease or do whatever it is that needs to be done...even raise the dead.
3. We must be mature Christians. This statement is based on that verse which contains the reason Jesus promised to grant any request we ask of Him, "...so that the Son may bring glory to the Father." (Jn 14:13 NIV).

One may ask, "What has Christian maturity to do with bringing glory to the Father?" Simply this: we see from the Scripture (I John 2:12-14) that there are three stages of Christian growth - children, young men and fathers. It is the nature of a child to "take." Little children always have their hands out to receive. Their whole world is centered around "self." Their con-

versation is dominated with, "I," "me," "my," and "mine." That's precisely the way we are as spiritual little children. Our hand is always extended to Father, asking Him to supply our wants and needs.

Young men begin to work, earn money and supply their own needs. But "self" is still very much at the center stage of the young man's life. So also the spiritual young man has "self" problems in his spiritual growth.

But spiritual fathers are very much like natural fathers, their hands are always extended to others--supplying the needs of others. Spiritual fathers gather goods, money, etc. for an entirely different motive than the child or young man. The spiritual father gathers to give to the needs of others. He has discovered that it is indeed more blessed to give than receive! Thus, when spiritual fathers or mothers ask in the name of Jesus, the request inevitably reflects their reaching out to others so the work of the kingdom can be accomplished. These requests always bring glory to the Father. It is only the spiritually mature who consistently pray Father's will. Thus, the granting of these prayers will inevitably bring glory to the Father.

4. We must be under God-appointed natural authority. The Roman centurion in the Scripture passage quoted above recognized that all the authority he had rested in the fact that he himself was under authority. In effect when he told a soldier, "go!" the Roman government issued the command! Thus, if he were not under authority, he would have no authority.

It is obvious that we, if we are to have authority, must be under authority. Even as I travel and minister around the world I have a ministry governing board of godly men and women to whom I submit as my God-ordained authority. Additionally I have a pastor to whom I submit. If we are to have spiritual authority, it is absolutely necessary to be under God-ordained authority.

Exercising Our Authority - The Signet Ring

In Jesus' day a common practice among wealthy and influential people was the granting of a signet ring to mature sons and occasionally to trusted servants who had proven their allegiance to the family patriarch through years of faithful service to him. Once the son or servant received the signet ring, it became a great boost to his status in the community. The possession of the patriarch's signet ring said to everyone, "the possessor of this ring has great authority." In fact the signet ring gave it's owner equal authority with the patriarch! The holder could buy, sell and trade with the same authority as the patriarch! In sum, the signet ring gave it's owner authority to speak and act in the name of the patriarch.

Obviously, such rings were given only to the fully mature--to those whose interests were the same as those of the patriarch. Never was the ring given to one who was ambitious or acted in self-interest. Neither was a signet ring ever given to a child or a young man who was not yet proven.

Can't you visualize young children of that day as they imagined the possession of a coveted signet ring? In my mind's eye I can see a child walking up to a merchant in the market place asking goods for himself, showing the merchant his

imaginary signet ring and saying, "In the name of my father, I'll take some of this candy." The merchant smiles, pats the child gently and says, "Yes, son! I see your 'ring,'" as he places the candy back on the shelf. "In the name of my father" didn't work for the child. Why? Because the child didn't have a genuine signet ring!

How often have we, as Christians, walked up to God's candy counter, sought something for "self" and said, "Here are my requests, Father, 'in the name of Jesus'"? James addressed this very issue when he said, "You want something but don't get it... When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures." (Jas 4:2-3 NIV). Is it any wonder that many of our prayers go unanswered?

Thus, it is clear in light of the above that those who want full authority-authority to speak in the "name of Jesus" and see things happen-must fulfill the criteria demanded of a full-grown son or daughter who has a proven, unquestioning allegiance to the Father. We must demonstrate, as a life-style, that "...I no longer live, but Christ lives in me...." (Gal 2:20 NIV).

Authority Over the Satanic Kingdom

Now let's examine our authority over the satanic kingdom. More specifically, do we have to be mature Christians and meet all the preconditions discussed above before we can move in authority over demonic powers? Happily, the answer to this question is no! We do not have to struggle for years in our Christian walk before we reach the stature required to defeat Satan. Let's go back to the Scripture quoted earlier from Luke:

The seventy-two returned with joy and said, "Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name." He replied, "...do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven." (Lk 10:17-20 NIV).

Looking again at the Chart of Authority note that when we are saved, at that point in time, in spirit, we are moved from "mankind" into the church, the bride of Christ. Our names are recorded in the Book of Life! They are written in Heaven!

Using our military analogy again, at the point when Jesus wrote our names in heaven, we were immediately promoted from privates to generals! In effect, Jesus said, "I have made you all generals! Rejoice in your promotion! Don't rejoice that the spirits (privates!) submit to you. Rejoice in the reason they submit! Your names are written in heaven!"

The moment we are born again, we have power over the satanic kingdom. We need only learn how to use that authority properly. But the power over other areas of our lives comes only with growth and maturity. We must journey through the process of sanctification to achieve the status worthy of the signet ring in all other aspects of our lives with Christ. The noteworthy exception is our victory over Satan and his hordes.

You see, demons, principalities and powers, and Satan himself, all recognize this authority as from Jesus and they all submit to it when it is properly administrated. So this type of authority does not need to be "earned" as it were. It is inherent in every born-again Christian from the point of surrender to Christ. It is this authority that conquers Satan. He is not submitting to us

as individuals--only to our power as believers.

Note too, in the Chart of Authority that the church outranks Satan! The church's authority lies at "B" above Satan. So the church collectively also carries the power and authority to defeat our enemy.

Thus, the church, and each of us at any time, may exercise authority over all of Satan's power, as long as we are walking in obedience, for we are generals! We possess full authority to command Satan and his demonic hosts to loose their hands from ourselves, our family, our church, our brothers and sisters in Christ, our health, our finances, etc. and he must obey.

Now we must ask the question, is there anything that can cause us to lose that authority? Unhappily, the answer to this question is "yes." Since our promotion to general in the spiritual realm is an analogy drawn from the military world, let's draw another military analogy to see how we can lose our authority. In the military, if a person commits a serious offence he may be "busted" to a much lower rank and may even be put in a military jail to serve a sentence! So also, if we become involved in deep-rooted sin, we may not only be busted to private, we may even be imprisoned in the spiritual realm.

Spiritual Imprisonment

Let us examine more fully what happens when a Christian becomes deeply involved in sin as when it becomes a life-style. In Matthew, chapter five, Jesus said, "Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. I tell you the truth, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny." (Matt 5:25-26, NIV).

Remember, this Scripture is taken from the Sermon on the Mount. In that sermon, Jesus related truths from the unseen, spiritual world to the natural, visible world. In other words, He was telling the people about things as they actually are in the spiritual realm by paralleling them to the way we see them in the natural realm. Thus, in Matthew 5:25-27, Jesus was saying, "When you violate spiritual laws, you go to spiritual jail, unless you take appropriate action and confess your guilt."

In order to more fully understand what Jesus was saying in our quoted text, we need to identify the characters about whom He was speaking. As always our adversary is Satan. The judge is God the Father, the officer is satanic authority (i.e., a demon) and prison is spiritual bondage (being bound by demonic power).

Revelation 12:10 tells us that Satan is the accuser of the brethren. Here is how the verses relate. A Christian is drawn gradually deeper and deeper into sin. Satan, his adversary, takes him before the Judge (God) and accuses him or her of his gross sin. God then has no recourse but to act in accordance with His righteousness against the sin. He hands the guilty offender over to Satan's "officer" who promptly imprisons him or her. Remember, this Christian refused to acknowledge his or her sin by agreeing with his accuser, Satan, prior to the court scene. You see, agreement (confession and repentance) of his sin beforehand would have prevented God from handing him over

to the officer. But the Christian's silent, persistent sin sealed the guilty verdict. For a Christian, spiritual imprisonment is being placed under demonic control in the area of that sin, be it sexual sin, sin of the heart, the sin of indulgence, or any other sin.

Notice that in such cases, that portion of a Christian's life is handed over to demonic power by God Himself. It is at this point of spiritual bondage that the Christian be-comes powerless to defeat his enemy. He is reduced back to the rank of private and has lost his authority to command the demons to flee. Note, he is still a private in God's army. In other words, he is still saved. He has just handed over his power by his own unrepentant long-term sin. Note also that in these cases no amount of rebuking by whom-ever is going to dislodge the demon until there is real repentance and turning from sin.

A Retrial Is Granted

Spiritual imprisonment need not be the end. Once a Christian learns that he has been imprisoned in the manner described above, he may pray for a new trial. Certainly God takes no pleasure in such circumstances and will gladly give a new trial to anyone who seeks it. In Job this issue is addressed when the Lord spoke through Elihu:

But if men are bound in chains, held fast by cords of affliction, he tells them what they have done - that they have sinned arrogantly. He makes them listen to correction and commands them to repent of their evil. If they obey and serve him, they will spend the rest of their days in prosperity and their years in contentment. But if they do not listen, they will perish by the sword and die without knowledge. (Job 36:8-12 NIV).

God has made a way out! He wants us to confess our sin that we may be restored and free from demon oppression. Once the retrial is granted the prisoner comes before the Lord and confesses, "Guilty as charged! I have sinned. Lord, please forgive me!"

The Lord responds, "Case dismissed! You're free to go! And, here are your general's stars again!" Hallelujah! Once again our Christian moves back to the rank of general so that he can again defeat Satan's onslaughts by the power and authority of the name of Jesus.

Conclusion

Thus we see how God our Father, through His son, Christ Jesus, established his authority over all in heaven and on earth, and how His plan encompasses our exercising that authority to accomplish our Father's work here on earth. We see how, as we become more and more mature, asking things in the name of Jesus so that the Father may be glorified, we move into the fullness of that authority.

We also see that we are generals in God's army and fully capable of defeating our enemy. The only way we lose our generalship is by long-term, willful sin. Yet even then, God has made a way of restoration. So no matter what happens, we can always prevail.

Isn't it about time that we as God's people start realizing what power and authority we have in Jesus. And isn't it past time God's people, you and I, move into that power and authority? It is there waiting for us. Hallelujah!

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