

The Authority of the Believer

Key Scripture:

"I have all authority in heaven and in earth. Go ye, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations." Matt. 28:18

Portion for the Journey:

In this passage, we see Jesus meeting with His disciples after His resurrection in Galilee. Jesus knew the transmission of that authority, that power, was essential for His disciples because He knew they would be engaged in ongoing spiritual warfare. John Beckett, writing in 1985, stated that he felt a foreboding for the Church in the future. He said, "I believe God wants to say to us that we must take care how we walk in the days ahead. The foreboding is ... the plunge toward total secularization in our nation and the relative impotence of the Church to stop it. Abortion, sexual immorality, pornography and the rest are ravaging the land, challenging the Church to raise up standards of righteousness, and contend with the satanic forces at work. To do this, believers must understand their authority in Jesus Christ. Satan can do all he can to obscure that authority, and he's been quite successful. Our potential to combat evil in spiritual warfare is much greater than most of us realize." ¹

Paul Billheimer wrote, "Spiritual warfare places the believer in direct opposition to a vast, well-organized host of wicked spirits under the control of their master prince, who is attempting a constant and fiendish disruption of the human social order." The early church understood this, and it is likely the greatest single reason for our ineffectiveness today is a lack of understanding of the authority we have in Jesus Christ. Hosea 4:6; John 8:32

Man was made for authority: In the Garden of Eden, man was created for authority. Man was given rule over the earth, and everything in the earth. This rule was a gift from God that came with no strings attached. Gen. 1:26; Ps. 8

Among those that crept upon the earth was one creature more beautiful, more beguiling and crafty than the others. Tragically, in the fall, man gave away the dominion God had entrusted to him. The serpent became the actual and legal ruler of the world. He is referred to as "the god of this world." Mankind came under satanic control. The earth and all life became subject to decay and death. Man, as a result of Adam, was dead through sin and condemned. Luke 4:6; 2 Cor. 4:4; Rom. 5:8-15

Requirements to regain authority: Two basic issues had to be resolved. 1) Membership had to be won back by a trustee group that God originally established to have dominion. This is a legal matter. God abides by the laws He initially established. We view this as transfer of a title. 2) None of the descendants of Adam were qualified to regain the title because they carried the stain of his sin in their blood. The sons of Adam were incapable of leading a blameless life. Whoever would take back the title had to be perfect so Satan could have no legal claim upon him. The only one who met the requirements of our Just God was his Son—perfectly human, perfectly divine. He was the last of the Adamic race. The

¹ The first section of this lesson is a summary of message written by John Beckett in 1985. His message on the authority of the believer appeared in "Intercessors for America" newsletter Feb. 1, 1985. He credits much of the material to the writings of Paul Billheimer, a great saint and prayer warrior who passed away before this newsletter was published.

virgin birth was essential, because from that birth came someone unique, perfect God and perfect man. This is why Jesus divinity must be beyond question. Jesus is the Son of God. 1 Cor. 15:22,45

From Eden to Calvary: When Jesus went to the cross to regain man's dominion, He provoked the greatest battle that has ever been waged. The outcome would determine the future of the human race. The contestants were the rightful heir to the throne of God vs. the false pretender, the usurper, Satan. Satan's strategy during the earthly years of Jesus' ministry was to find and exploit even a hint of sin or disobedience to the Master—anything that could separate Him from the Father. He blatantly attempted this in the wilderness when he tempted Jesus to bow down to him. He taunted Jesus through the demon possessed, he sought to make Him deny His divinity and he challenged him through the religious rulers of the day. But through this all, Jesus stood firm in His allegiance to the Father. Luke 4:1-13

Jesus set His face toward Jerusalem. It is said that during this time there was incredible peace in the whole social order because the full vengeance of the enemy was being concentrated on one man. When Jesus went to Gethsemane the battle reached its zenith. Our Savior sweat blood from His forehead. He cried out to the Father. Luke 22:42-45 Jesus knew that the cross was essential for all that had been bequeathed to the first Adam might be regained for the Kingdom of God and God's created mankind. At the cross, Satan thought he would bring the final stroke upon the only one who challenged his authority. So, Jesus went to the cross, accepting the shame, separation from the Father, taking the full brunt for our sins and the full brunt of all that Satan had perpetrated upon the human race when he beguiled Adam and Eve. "This archfiend of darkness pushed Jesus clear up to death ...without having one thought that was out of harmony with His heavenly Father. Satan's real purpose in all of his cruel attacks and pressure upon Jesus was to compel Him to fail just once in His submission to God."²

The Totality of Satan's defeat: Satan's defeat was final. His defeat was sealed by Jesus Christ (see Heb. 2:14). His critical flaw was in shedding the blood of an innocent man. See Genesis 6:9 forbids the shedding of innocent blood and in the death of Jesus Satan sealed his fate. When Satan slew the innocent Son of God, he destroyed himself. Satan is now destroyed. The legal claims he secured through Adam's fall were completely cancelled. Since the cross, he has no legal rights at all. All the power he now exercises is now solely by deception and bluff. Col. 2:15, 1 Cor. 2:8 (see entire chapter); 2 Cor. 2:14; Phil. 2:5-11; Heb. 2:14-18; 1 John 3:7-8; Rom. 8:37

There is a paradox in that we see Jesus has legally regained dominion over the earth, but we are not walking out that dominion and victory that God has intended. What happened? The answer is that Jesus' dominion is a legal matter. The authority has legally been won but there is little or no enforcement. The enforcement has been placed in the hands of the Church, Christ's corporate body here on earth. Num. 33:53; Deut. 4:1; Josh. 1:11; Josh. 18:3

The body of Christ is the exclusive means that God has chosen to enforce the victory that Jesus has won on Calvary. Satan's defeat is complete and it is final. He is not, as some think, almost as powerful as God and engage in a heavenly wrestling match. He has brainwashed and deceived us into thinking this to hide his true condition. He actually has no power at all. He has no legal standing. He has no rights.

² Destined to Overcome by Paul Billheimer, p. 28 Bethany House Publishers, 1982

He has no authority. The authority is ours through Jesus Christ to enforce the victory, to make it effective in our lives, our families, our homes and in our nation.

Our primary method of enforcement is through prayer and proclaiming our legal rights through His Word. Prayer is His design for us to enforce His authority. He tied His doing to our praying. He is preparing us to reign and rule with Him and that requires that we become overcomers in prayer. It is not a matter of our worthiness or our eloquence in prayer. It is a matter of taking up the scepter of authority and coming with courage and boldness and faith to the throne of grace.

Jesus Himself commissioned His disciples and said, “watch and pray.” He said “...pray and do not faint.” Paul emphasized prayer throughout his ministry and in his letters, setting the priority of prayer, especially for those who are in authority so we may lead peaceful and quiet lives (1 Tim. 2:1-4). He said in Romans “be devoted to prayer,” in 1 Thes, “to pray without ceasing” and in 1 Cor. “to devote yourselves to prayer,” and in Ephesians to “put on the full armor of God and to take up the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, with all prayer and petition, to pray at all times in the Spirit.”

Digging Deeper in the Word

Authority: The Greek word for ‘authority’ is ‘exousia’ (G 1849). The word comes from the impersonal verb ‘exesti’ which means, ‘it is lawful.’ Exousia means to have full leave or permission or liberty to do as one pleases, the ability or strength to do as one pleases or with which one is endowed. The power of authority. The right to exercise power. It refers to the power of rule in government and the power of one whose will and commands must be obeyed.”

1. Authority of the Son of God: During Jesus Christ's life on this earth He made manifest the authority He received from the Father. As the Son, He spoke and taught as One with great authority. Many of His actions appeared to be for the purpose of demonstrating that His authority came from the Father. When challenged by the chief priests and elders, the established religious authorities, to state by what authority He taught, He replied with a parable. All the prophets and teachers that had come from God before Him were servants, but He is the Son. Matt. 21:23-27, 37; Mark 11:28-33; 12:6; Luke 20:2, 8, 13; John 5:19-27; Phil. 2:5-11.

a. His teaching is with authority. His hearers contrast it with that of the scribes, who, with all the prestige of tradition and establishment, in comparison with Him, entirely lacked authority. Matt. 7:29; Mark 1:22; Luke 4:32; John 7:46

b. His Works: His authority as a teacher is closely associated with His works, especially as these revealed His authority over that world of evil spirits whose influence was felt in the mental disorders that afflicted. Mark 1:27; Luke 4:36

c. Forgiving and Judging. When Jesus claimed to be able to forgive sins, He proved it by demonstrating His power to heal. This was something only God could do. (Matthew 9:6, 8; Mark 2:10; Luke 5:24). It implied a power to dispense with the recognized laws of retribution and to remove guilt, which could only come from God. All these powers are asserted in another form in the statement that He is the final judge. John 5:27

d. Life and Salvation. He therefore possesses authority over life and salvation. The Father gave authority over all flesh, "that whatsoever thou hast given him, to them he should give eternal life" (John 17:2 the American Revised Version, margin). This authority begins in His power over His own life to give it in sacrifice for men (John 10:18). By faith in Him and obedience to Him, men obtain salvation (Matthew 10:32; 11:28-30). Their relation to Him determines their relation to God and to the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 10:40; Luke 12:8).

2. Authority of the Son of Man: Through His victory on the cross, Jesus has been given all rule and all authority and all dominion that Adam lost to Satan. The blood of the Lamb sustains the eternal covenant of the authority we are given in Jesus Christ. This covenant is permanent. It cannot be broken by our sin because His blood continues to cleanse. Heb. 1:8; Ps. 45:6; Eph. 1:20-23; Col. 2:10; 1 Peter 3:22; 1 Cor. 15:24; Rev. 12:10-11

All authority is now upon Jesus Christ our Lord and He has delegated it back to His Church. Jesus is Head over all things in the Church. The authority of sonship, and of participation in the tree of life belongs to all believers (John 1:12; Rev. 22:14). He said in Luke 10:1, "I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy and nothing shall injure you." In all this we are to see the authority of faith, of character, of men who are messengers of Christ because they are in living union with Him. It pertains to no office or institution, and exists only where Christ reigns in men, and therefore, through them. 1 Cor. 3:21-23; Luke 10:19; 19:11-27; Matt. 16:19; 18:18; Mark 3:15; 6:7-13; Matt. 16:18,19; Rev. 2:26; 12:10; Ps. 115:16

And in virtue of their faith His people have authority over the nations Christ makes them to be kings, a kingdom and priests a royal priesthood. 1 Pet. 2:9; Rev. 1:6; 2:26; 20:4

The authority and power is in His Name. It is only through Jesus that we have access to approach God's Throne to pray to the Father using the authority of Jesus' name in prayer. His name is not a formula. Our authority to use His name is based on our relationship with Him as believers. All prayer must be in accord with His Word, His character and must be presented in the same spirit of dependence and submission to the will of the Father that marked Jesus' life. Our authority depends on our right standing with the Father achieved by Jesus and not our feeling of personal worthiness. John 14:6,13-14; 15:16; 16:23-29; Acts 19:13-17; 1 Cor. 1:30

Our authority is released as we speak His Word. Gen. 1; Ps. 33:6-9; Heb. 11:3; Rev. 12:11; Luke 7:6,8; John 15:7; Prov. 15:4; Prov. 10:11; Mark 11:23; Matt. 8:8, 26; 17:20; 21:21; Luke 7:7 Jesus spoke directly to Satan and demons when using His authority. Matt. 16:23; Matt. 4:10

Examples of Authority: Moses: Ex. 4:3; Ex. 17:8-16 and Esther: Esther 5:1-3

- Authority to Pray in His name: John 14:13,14; 15:16; 16:23-24,26
- Authority over demons; to cast out unclean spirits Matt. 10:1; Mark 3:15; Mark 6:7; Luke 9:1-; Luke 10:19; Mark 16:17-18; James 4:7; 1 Pet. 5:8-9; Eph. 6:10-20
- Authority to forgive, to baptize and to teach all nations. Matt. 28:18-20; Luke 24:48-49
- Authority to perform miracles and heal sick. Acts 3:6; 9:32-35; 9: 36-42

What God is speaking to my heart:

My response to God: