

# SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY

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# SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY

## Introduction

Authority is one of those things that everyone seems to want—both in the natural and in the spiritual. However, our understanding of spiritual authority is based on the World's concept and application of authority rather than God's.

It is not an accident that the scriptures tell us that we should have the mind of Christ and that our minds need to be renewed. This is because spiritual things cannot be understood with the natural mind.

But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. (1 Corinthians 2:14 NASB)

Because of this we have not understood spiritual authority but instead have applied natural thinking and natural authority to our understanding and application of spiritual authority. This has created major problems in the Church.

## The Authority of Adam

When God made Adam, He had a purpose in mind for him that included a co-operative endeavor for fulfillment.

God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth." (Genesis 1:28 NASB)

God told Adam that they were to do two things: 1) be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth; and 2) subdue the earth and rule over the living things.

God built into Adam the desire and ability to rule. However, He didn't intend for Adam to rule without Him but would rule as His delegate in the earth. Adam's rule over the living things on the earth would flow from his fellowship with God and understanding of His purposes.

When Adam fell, the *desire* to rule was still inherent in him, however, he lost the *ability* to rule in a godly manner. This is what he passed to the generations that followed.

There was also another aspect of Adam's rulership. Because he ruled before the fall as a delegate of God, there is also inherent in Adam's descendants the need to be ruled as God ruled Adam.

## Natural Authority

From Adam we receive *natural authority*, which is the authority given to Adam that is now without God. One could even say that this is *positional authority* since man was given the position of rulership by God.

God allows us to exercise natural authority so some semblance of orderly society can be maintained.

Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. (Romans 13:1 NASB)

Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. (Romans 13:2 NASB)

For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; (Romans 13:3 NASB)

for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil. (Romans 13:4 NASB)

Natural authority is used by God to govern the people of the earth. God uses the rulers of the earth for a measure of blessing and for judgment against evil.

Because of the fall of Adam, natural authority is *taken* rather than *given*. Because it is exercised without the fellowship of God it is of the same nature as the authority exercised by Satan.

Before he became Satan, Lucifer, at some point, decided that he would *take* authority over all, even God.

"How you have fallen from heaven, O star of the morning, son of the dawn! You have been cut down to the earth, You who have weakened the nations! (Isaiah 14:12 NASB)

"But you said in your heart, 'I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God, And I will sit on the mount of assembly In the recesses of the north. (Isaiah 14:13 NASB)

'I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.' (Isaiah 14:14 NASB)

The taking of authority is a principle of Satan and is directly opposed to the principle of authority exemplified by the Lord Jesus. It is possible in our work to stand with Christ in terms of doctrine and, yet, stand with Satan in terms of authority.

Pride caused Lucifer to desire to usurp God's authority--to ascend to His Throne. The result was that Lucifer became Satan and now desires to overthrow all submission to God's authority. This is Satan's Primary Principle--stand against God's authority (resist).

It is pride within us that causes us to harbor within our hearts this same principle of Satan. Yet, the scriptures say that "God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble" (1 Peter 5:5). You see, if we "stand against God's authority", God "stands against us". However, Jesus showed us how to "stand under God's authority" (submit).

It has always been God's intention to govern His people through spiritual authority and not natural authority. Our example is the children of Israel. God governed through the priests and the prophets but the people weren't satisfied with the arrangement. It didn't give the same appearance as the Gentile nations who were governed by kings. So, they told the prophet, Samuel, that they wanted a king like all the nations around them.

Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah; (1 Samuel 8:4 NASB)

and they said to him, "Behold, you have grown old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint a king for us to judge us like all the nations." (1 Samuel 8:5 NASB)

When Samuel prayed to the Lord about this, the Lord made it clear that, by this request, the people were rejecting Him as their King.

The LORD said to Samuel, "Listen to the voice of the people in regard to all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being king over them." (1 Samuel 8:7 NASB)

Then, the Lord told Samuel to warn the people about the consequences of having a natural king.

"Now then, listen to their voice; however, you shall solemnly warn them and tell them of the procedure of the king who will reign over them." (1 Samuel 8:9 NASB)

When we choose natural authority over spiritual authority we need to pay close attention to the consequences. The nature of the natural is different from the nature of the spiritual.

He said, "This will be the procedure of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and place *them* for himself in his chariots and among his horsemen and they will run before his chariots. (1 Samuel 8:11 NASB)

"He will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and of fifties, and *some* to do his plowing and to reap his harvest and to make his weapons of war and equipment for his chariots. (1 Samuel 8:12 NASB)

"He will also take your daughters for perfumers and cooks and bakers. (1 Samuel 8:13 NASB)

"He will take the best of your fields and your vineyards and your olive groves and give *them* to his servants. (1 Samuel 8:14 NASB)

"He will take a tenth of your seed and of your vineyards and give to his officers and to his servants. (1 Samuel 8:15 NASB)

"He will also take your male servants and your female servants and your best young

men and your donkeys and use *them* for his work. (1 Samuel 8:16 NASB)

"He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves will become his servants. (1 Samuel 8:17 NASB)

The nature of natural authority is that the one who exercises it "will take". As in the above scriptures the king will take of the peoples provisions, finances, heirs, and inheritance. He will take until you become a slave to the one who rules over you.

Nevertheless, the people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel, and they said, "No, but there shall be a king over us, (1 Samuel 8:19 NASB)

that we also may be like all the nations, that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles." (1 Samuel 8:20 NASB)

They wanted a king because they were tired of their own responsibilities. They wanted the king to fight the battles. They wanted the king to be displayed to the world full of pomp and circumstance. They wanted to be like all of the other nations.

This is the nature of natural, worldly authority: it is full of power, prestige, judgment, and fighting.

## Spiritual Authority

All spiritual authority has its basis in God and is received from God. It cannot be taken but only received as God gives it to us. Jesus did not take authority but received it from the Father.

And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. (Matthew 28:18 NASB)

When the Father made Jesus both Lord and King, He became the ruler of the Kingdom of God and it is from His position as King that He exercises authority.

then *comes* the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. (1 Corinthians 15:24 NASB)

Since Jesus has all authority, what authority is He abolishing in His Kingdom? He is abolishing all natural, positional, secular authority that has been taken under the principle of Satan without regard to God.

Jesus clearly warned us of the difference between the authority of the world and His authority.

But Jesus called them to Himself and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and *their* great men exercise authority over them. (Matthew 20:25 NASB)

"It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, (Matthew 20:26 NASB)

and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; (Matthew 20:27 NASB)  
just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a  
ransom for many." (Matthew 20:28 NASB)

Jesus clearly contrasts the way the world handles authority and the way that we should as His followers. Spiritual authority has nothing to do with being great or exercising authority over people but instead is service to others. Natural or worldly authority seeks to be served and exercise authority over as many people as possible, whereas spiritual authority seeks to serve others and never seeks to exercise authority over people.

## The Source of Spiritual Authority

As we saw in Matthew 28:18, all authority has been given to Jesus. He recognizes no other authority than that which is in Himself. The authority resides in who He is not from the His government. He is the only source of authority.

What about the Church? Does the Church have any authority? Yes and no. There is no *inherent* authority in the Church. There is only authority delegated by Jesus. As Jesus rules His Kingdom there is authority within the Kingdom to govern according to the plans and purposes of the King. His authority is only *loaned* to us as we walk under His government because only then is it recognized in the spiritual realm.

In Matthew 8 we have the story of the Roman Centurion that came to Jesus for healing for his servant. When Jesus said that He would come, the Centurion said that it wasn't necessary for Jesus to come in person but He could speak the word and his servant would be healed. Jesus said this was greater faith than anyone in Israel exercised. Why? Because the Centurion understood *governmental authority*.

And when Jesus entered Capernaum, a centurion came to Him, imploring Him,  
(Matthew 8:5 NASB)

and saying, "Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, fearfully tormented."  
(Matthew 8:6 NASB)

Jesus \*said to him, "I will come and heal him." (Matthew 8:7 NASB)

But the centurion said, "Lord, I am not worthy for You to come under my roof, but just say the word, and my servant will be healed. (Matthew 8:8 NASB)

"For I also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to this one, 'Go!' and he goes, and to another, 'Come!' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this!' and he does *it*." (Matthew 8:9 NASB)

Now when Jesus heard *this*, He marveled and said to those who were following,  
"Truly I say to you, I have not found such great faith with anyone in Israel. (Matthew 8:10 NASB)

The Centurion recognized that Jesus walked in spiritual authority. That was why Jesus had only to speak the word and He would be obeyed. The Centurion understood this because, he too, walked in governmental authority and could, by a word, direct those for whom he was responsible.

I have seen these scriptures twisted and used to justify a worldly authority of “lording it over” (which Jesus condemned). The “shepherding movement” used these verses to emphasize that the Centurion was “a man under authority” and used this to say that we all must be under authority to a “shepherd” and give obedience to him even if he was wrong (just as Sarah obeyed Abraham when he said she was his sister when they went to Egypt) trusting God to protect us from the shepherd's mistakes. They said that to “have authority” one must be “under authority”, which, in the broadest sense is true; however, their application meant that one had to be “under” another person's (shepherd's) authority.

When the Centurion said that he was “a man under authority”, he meant that he derived his authority from the government that he served. He didn't have authority because he was under an army commander. He had authority because he was part of the government's army. Had he left the army, none of those of whom he spoke would obey him anymore because he no longer had any governmental authority.

It is the same in the Kingdom of God. We exercise *governmental authority*, which is loaned to us as long as we live and work under His government. To exercise authority one must have the *right* to do so. To attempt to exercise authority without having the right to do it makes it *illegitimate* authority and puts it in the category of the world and the principle of Satan.

There are criteria that must be met in order to walk under His government. The most basic is the same that is required to function as a son of God.

For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. ([Romans 8:14 NASB](#))

Even a son who is to be the heir does not have *carte blanche* authority.

Now I say, as long as the heir is a child, he does not differ at all from a slave although he is owner of everything, ([Galatians 4:1 NASB](#))

but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by the father. ([Galatians 4:2 NASB](#))

While I am sure that there are some accommodations made for the heir, in practice, he doesn't exercise authority but instead is taught, directed, trained and otherwise managed until the appropriate time set by the the father. Why would the father not allow the heir (son) to direct the servants until he came of age? Because he would fulfill his every selfish desire, indulging himself with comfort and laziness! Is it not the same with us?

## Authority Over What?

In the Church today, many speak of having authority over some number of people or some number of churches or some number of ministries. But, is this what Jesus had in mind?

Jesus gave very specific authority to the disciples:

Jesus summoned His twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every kind of disease and every kind of sickness. (Matthew 10:1 NASB)

This is clear. The disciples were given authority over unclean spirits and every kind of disease and sickness.

When Jesus sent them out in pairs, He, again, gave very specific authority to them.

And He called the twelve together, and gave them power and authority over all the demons and to heal diseases. (Luke 9:1 NASB)

And He sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and *to perform* healing. (Luke 9:2 NASB)

Again, it is clear: authority over all demons and to heal disease. And, the purpose for which the authority was given is also very clear: to proclaim the Kingdom of God and to perform healing.

They were given authority by Jesus to proclaim and to perform the purposes of the King.

When Jesus sent out the seventy, they were only directed according to the plan of the Lord. They weren't sent to just anyplace but only to the places where He was coming.

Now after this the Lord appointed seventy others, and sent them in pairs ahead of Him to every city and place where He Himself was going to come. (Luke 10:1 NASB)

When they returned and were excited about the fact that the demons were subject to them, Jesus told them why:

**"Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing will injure you. (Luke 10:19 NASB)**

Notice that in all of these cases, Jesus gave authority over spiritual things such as demons and sicknesses but never gave any of them authority over people. Likewise, Jesus has given us authority over all of the power of the enemy so that we might overcome but the scriptures say specifically that we don't wrestle with flesh and blood, that is, people. It would seem to me that so many in the Church have it backwards. They want to exercise authority over people but have very little authority in spiritual matters.

Only One has been given authority over people and that One is Jesus.

Jesus spoke these things; and lifting up His eyes to heaven, He said, "**Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You, (John 17:1 NASB)**  
**even as You gave Him authority over all flesh, that to all whom You have given Him, He may give eternal life. (John 17:2 NASB)**

We function as the “under guardians and managers” of the “heirs of salvation” until they come of age and function as sons. Paul speaks of this when he speaks of the authority given to him.

For even if I boast somewhat further about our authority, which the Lord gave for building you up and not for destroying you, I will not be put to shame, (2 Corinthians 10:8 NASB)

For this reason I am writing these things while absent, so that when present I *need* not use severity, in accordance with the authority which the Lord gave me for building up and not for tearing down. (2 Corinthians 13:10 NASB)

So, we see that when it comes to people, even Paul's authority was limited to the specific purposes of the Lord for building up. This had to do with the apostolic work of the Kingdom and Paul's function as a “master builder”. We are given spiritual authority to fulfill the function of our calling and to accomplish the work that the Lord has assigned.

## Application of Spiritual Authority

The crucial aspect of spiritual authority is how it is applied to the Church. The problem that has occurred previously is that our application of authority has been based on our understanding of authority as being over people (authority applied according to the World's principles). Let's look at the scriptures with the understanding of authority as service; that it relates to function; and that leadership is by example.

Jesus repeatedly expressed authority in terms of example, responsibility, and function by using the picture of shepherds and sheep. Shepherds lead sheep by going in front, never by driving them from behind.

We think of “being in charge” as having the authority to order people around. This is not the way Jesus thought of “being in charge”.

And the Lord said, "**Who then is the faithful and sensible steward, whom his master will put in charge of his servants, to give them their rations at the proper time? (Luke 12:42 NASB)**

In this scripture being “in charge” dealt with function and the responsibility of providing food, not with the authority to order people around. We also see this concept applied by Paul.

But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among

you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction. (1 Thessalonians 5:12 NASB)

In this scripture having “charge over you” relates to function and their responsibility is to give instruction (food). Again, this has nothing to do with ordering people around.

Of course, the scripture that is quoted by those who think of authority as a position with the right to demand obedience is I Timothy 5:17:

The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. (1 Timothy 5:17 NASB)

They emphasize the word “rule” as in “I’m top dog and it’s my way or the highway”. However, the word translated as rule means “to go in front”, “lead” (sounds like a shepherd’s job, doesn’t it?). This word is also translated as “manage”.

The one who goes in front is to be our example as we look at their conduct and faith.

Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith. (Hebrews 13:7 NASB)

This is why we can offer obedience and submission. We are being obedient and submissive to the Lord in them and to the job function that the Lord has given them. They must give an account to the Lord concerning their conduct toward their job responsibilities.

Obey your leaders and submit *to them*, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you. (Hebrews 13:17 NASB)

They keep watch over our souls just like a shepherd keeps watch over the flock and are responsible to God for this function.

It is interesting that the New American Standard Bible translates “rule” as manage when speaking of the requirements for Overseers and Deacons.

*He must be* one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity (1 Timothy 3:4 NASB)

(but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?), (1 Timothy 3:5 NASB)

Deacons must be husbands of *only* one wife, and good managers of *their* children and their own households. (1 Timothy 3:12 NASB)

The idea of managing is probably closer to the intended meaning of the use of the word “rule”. We understand that we manage that for which we are responsible. A department manager in a business only has authority over the business functions and how people relate to the necessities of operations. The manager has no authority over the employees for non-job related conduct except as it affects job performance.

The Overseers or elders of the Church go before the people to lead by example and conduct in order to provide instruction and manage the flock. They are held accountable by the Lord for how they perform these functions. We are to submit to the Lord in them and obey His instructions through them as they walk in governmental authority.

The Church, like the Children of Israel when they told Samuel that they wanted a king, has rejected the government of the Kingdom for the government of the World System. Worldly authority only takes and keeps on taking until all are in servitude to it; whereas, spiritual authority serves like a father serves his family, building them up and desiring for them fulfill their purpose.

There are no “offices” in the Church. Only servant-leaders called of God to function according to His plan and purpose for the completion of the work fore-ordained for them that many sons might be brought to glory that God may be all in all.

The Word tells us that we are not of this world. Then, let's act like it!