

In-Depth Bible Study: Spiritual Authority

Understanding, Receiving, Walking In, and Remaining Under God-Given Authority

Key Scriptures: Matthew 28:18–20; Luke 9:1–2; Luke 10:19; Romans 13:1–2; Ephesians 1:18–23; Ephesians 2:6; James 4:7; 1 Peter 5:5–6

Central Truth

Spiritual authority is **delegated authority from God that enables believers to represent His will, advance His Kingdom, resist the enemy, serve His people, and fulfill their God-given assignments.**

Spiritual authority is not primarily about having power **over people**. It is about being properly positioned **under God** so that His authority can operate **through us**.

Matthew 28:18 (KJV): “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.”

Everything begins here: **Jesus possesses ultimate authority**. Whatever spiritual authority we exercise is delegated by Him.

A simple principle to remember is:

Authority flows from relationship → submission → obedience → assignment → stewardship.

I. What Is Spiritual Authority?

The New Testament helps us distinguish between **power** and **authority**.

The Greek word **exousia** refers to authority, right, jurisdiction, or delegated permission.

The Greek word **dunamis** refers more to power, might, strength, or ability.

Luke 9:1 says Jesus gave His disciples both:

“Then he called his twelve disciples together, and gave them **power and authority** over all devils, and to cure diseases.”

Think of the difference this way:

Power is the ability to act. Authority is the right to act.

A police officer standing in an intersection may not possess the physical strength to stop a moving truck, but the officer possesses legal authority that requires the driver to stop.

Likewise, spiritual authority does not originate in how loud we pray, how emotional we become, what title we possess, or how long we have been saved.

Our authority rests in **the One who authorized us.**

II. God Is the Source of All Legitimate Spiritual Authority

Romans 13:1

“For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.”

God’s Kingdom operates according to divine order.

Jesus Himself demonstrated this principle.

John 5:19

Jesus said:

“The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do...”

Jesus possessed unlimited divine authority, yet His earthly ministry demonstrated submission to the Father.

John 6:38

“For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me.”

This reveals an important Kingdom principle:

Authority is safest and strongest when it operates in submission.

Jesus was not independent of the Father. He represented the Father.

Therefore, spiritual authority is not:

“I can do whatever I want because I have authority.”

It is:

“I have been authorized to accomplish what God desires.”

III. Jesus Is the Supreme Authority

Ephesians 1:20–22

God raised Christ from the dead and seated Him:

“Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion...”

Then Scripture says God:

“put all things under his feet.”

Jesus is above:

- Satan
- demons
- principalities
- powers
- rulers of darkness
- spiritual wickedness
- earthly kingdoms
- sickness
- death
- every spiritual opposition

There is no spiritual authority equal to Christ.

Philippians 2:9–11

God highly exalted Jesus and gave Him a name above every name.

Therefore, Christian authority is **Christ-centered authority**.

We do not confront darkness based upon our reputation.

We stand in the authority of Jesus Christ.

IV. The Believer’s Position in Christ

One of the greatest keys to understanding spiritual authority is understanding **spiritual position**.

Ephesians 2:4–6

God has:

“raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”

Notice the language.

Christ is seated above principalities and powers.

Then Scripture says believers are spiritually seated **with Him**.

This means our authority does not originate from the earth upward.

It flows from **Christ downward**.

You are not trying to become victorious over an enemy who possesses equal authority to Jesus.

Christ has already defeated the enemy.

Colossians 2:15

Jesus:

“spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.”

The Cross was not Christ barely surviving Satan.

It was Christ defeating the powers of darkness.

Therefore, believers enforce a victory that **Christ has already won**.

V. Spiritual Authority Comes Through Delegation

Luke 10:19

Jesus declared:

“Behold, I give unto you power...over all the power of the enemy.”

The disciples did not manufacture this authority.

Jesus **gave** it.

This teaches us that spiritual authority is always **delegated authority**.

Consider the biblical pattern:

God → Christ → Believer → Assignment

Jesus said in John 20:21:

“As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.”

Authority therefore accompanies **sending**.

Where God sends you, He provides authority for the assignment.

This is important because we should not assume authority over everything simply because we are Christians.

There are **spheres of authority**.

VI. Authority Has Jurisdiction

Paul understood that God had given him a specific sphere of responsibility.

2 Corinthians 10:13

Paul spoke about:

“the measure of the rule which God hath distributed to us.”

God gives different people different assignments.

For example, there is authority connected to:

Personal stewardship — your thoughts, choices, body, conduct, spiritual life.

Family responsibility — responsibilities God has assigned within the household.

Ministry leadership — authority to serve, teach, equip, correct, and protect within a ministry assignment.

Spiritual warfare — authority to resist Satan and oppose demonic activity.

Kingdom assignment — authority connected to what God specifically sends you to accomplish.

A dangerous mistake is attempting to exercise authority in an area where God has not given us jurisdiction.

Authority does not mean ownership of everything.

Authority must remain connected to **assignment**.

VII. Submission and Authority Are Connected

This is one of the most important lessons concerning spiritual authority.

James 4:7

“Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”

Notice the order:

1. Submit to God. 2. Resist the devil. 3. The devil flees.

Many people want verse 7 to say:

“Resist the devil and he will flee.”

But Scripture first says:

Submit yourselves therefore to God.

Resistance carries spiritual weight when the believer is standing under God's authority.

Submission is not weakness.

Submission is alignment.

VIII. The Centurion Understood Authority

One of Scripture's clearest revelations of authority appears in Matthew 8:5–13.

The centurion told Jesus:

Matthew 8:9

“For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me...”

His statement is profound.

He did not merely say:

“I am a man **with authority.**”

He said:

“**I am a man UNDER authority.**”

Because he understood submission, he understood command.

He recognized that Jesus did not have to physically enter his house to heal his servant.

He said:

“Speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed.”

The centurion understood that legitimate authority does not depend upon proximity.

Jesus could simply issue the command.

Spiritual Principle

People who understand being under authority are better prepared to exercise authority.

IX. Authority Without Submission Is Dangerous

Scripture gives a dramatic example in Acts 19.

Acts 19:13–16 — The Sons of Sceva

Certain men attempted to cast out demons saying:

“We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth.”

The evil spirit responded:

“Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye?”

They knew the language.

They knew Jesus’ name.

They observed Paul's ministry.

But they did not possess Paul's relationship, assignment, or spiritual standing.

This teaches us:

Spiritual authority cannot merely be imitated.

You cannot borrow someone else's spiritual authority.

You cannot live through:

- your pastor's relationship with God,
- your apostle's prayer life,
- your mother's faith,
- your mentor's anointing,
- or another person's revelation.

Authority flows from **your relationship and submission to Christ.**

X. Spiritual Authority Is Not the Same as a Title

Jesus gave strong warnings about leadership that becomes obsessed with position.

Matthew 20:25–28

Jesus explained that Gentile rulers exercised dominion over people, but told His disciples:

“It shall not be so among you.”

Kingdom leadership looks different.

Jesus said:

“Whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant.”

Therefore:

Biblical authority serves. Fleshly authority controls.

Spiritual authority should never become:

- manipulation,
- intimidation,

- domination,
- coercion,
- fear-based leadership,
- unquestionable personal control,
- spiritual abuse.

A title may identify an assignment, but **a title does not manufacture authority.**

Authority comes from God.

XI. Authority Must Be Exercised in Love

2 Corinthians 10:8

Paul described authority the Lord had given:

“for edification, and not for your destruction.”

This is extremely important for leaders.

God gives authority to **build people**, not crush them.

Even correction should have restoration as its objective.

Galatians 6:1

If someone is overtaken in a fault, those who are spiritual should restore that person:

“in the spirit of meekness.”

True spiritual authority does not need to constantly prove itself.

It does not require humiliation.

It does not fear questions.

It does not manipulate people into loyalty.

Godly authority protects, equips, corrects, develops, and releases people into God’s purpose.

XII. Spiritual Authority Over the Enemy

Believers have been given authority to resist Satan.

Luke 10:19

Jesus gives authority:

“over all the power of the enemy.”

Mark 16:17

“In my name shall they cast out devils...”

James 4:7

“Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”

1 Peter 5:8–9

Regarding Satan:

“Whom resist stedfast in the faith...”

Notice that Scripture consistently emphasizes **resistance**, not fascination.

Our focus should not become demons.

Our focus remains Christ.

Spiritual warfare should be conducted from the confidence of Christ’s victory rather than fear of Satan’s activity.

XIII. The Authority of the Name of Jesus

Jesus’ name represents His identity and authority.

Philippians 2:10

“That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow...”

Acts 3:6

Peter told the lame man:

“In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.”

“In the name of Jesus” is not merely a phrase placed at the end of a prayer.

To act **in someone’s name** means to act as their authorized representative.

Therefore, using Jesus’ name means:

I am acting according to His character, His will, His Word, and His authority.

This is why relationship and obedience matter.

XIV. The Authority of God’s Word

Jesus demonstrated this during His temptation.

Matthew 4 records Satan repeatedly tempting Jesus.

Jesus answered:

“It is written.”

Jesus confronted deception with Scripture.

Likewise, believers must know God’s Word.

Hebrews 4:12

“For the word of God is quick, and powerful...”

Ephesians 6:17

The Word of God is called:

“the sword of the Spirit.”

Spiritual authority becomes dangerous when separated from biblical truth.

The Word establishes the boundaries within which spiritual authority operates.

If what we claim God told us contradicts Scripture, the problem is not Scripture.

Our interpretation must be examined.

XV. The Authority of Prayer

Prayer is not merely asking God for things.

Prayer is also partnership with God's will.

Jesus taught:

Matthew 6:10

"Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven."

Prayer invites heaven's purposes into earthly circumstances.

This does not mean prayer gives us permission to command God.

Instead, prayer aligns us with what **God desires to accomplish**.

1 John 5:14

"If we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us."

Authority in prayer is strongest when prayer agrees with:

God's Word + God's will + God's character + God's timing.

XVI. Authority and Obedience

Jesus demonstrated perfect obedience.

Philippians 2:8

"He humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."

Obedience protects spiritual authority.

Saul illustrates the opposite.

In 1 Samuel 15, Saul partially obeyed God's instructions and attempted to justify his actions.

Samuel responded:

1 Samuel 15:22

"To obey is better than sacrifice."

You cannot consistently reject God's instructions while expecting to effectively represent God's authority.

Authority without obedience eventually becomes presumption.

XVII. Authority and Humility

1 Peter 5:5–6

“God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.”

Then:

“Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God...”

Humility protects authority from becoming corrupted.

When God increases someone’s influence, gifting, platform, revelation, or leadership responsibility, humility becomes increasingly necessary.

Mature authority says:

“This belongs to God. I am a steward.”

Immature authority says:

“Look at what I can do.”

XVIII. Authority vs. Anointing vs. Power

These terms overlap but should not always be treated as identical.

Concept	Meaning
Authority	God-given right or jurisdiction to act
Power	Spiritual ability or capacity

Anointing	Divine enablement/consecration for God's purpose
Calling	God's invitation or purpose
Assignment	Specific responsibility connected to the calling
Submission	Willing alignment under legitimate authority
Obedience	Acting according to God's instruction

A person may be gifted and still lack maturity.

A person may have a calling and still need preparation.

A person may possess authority in one sphere without possessing authority in another.

This is why **character must develop alongside gifting**.

XIX. Authority Does Not Eliminate Spiritual Warfare

Having authority does not mean there will be no opposition.

Ephesians 6:10–12

Paul tells believers to:

“be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.”

Then he commands them to put on the whole armor of God.

Why would believers need armor if spiritual authority meant there would never be a battle?

Authority does not eliminate warfare.

Authority determines how we stand during warfare.

Paul says in Ephesians 6:13:

“having done all, to stand.”

XX. Seven Areas Where Believers Must Exercise Spiritual Authority

1. Authority Over Your Thought Life

2 Corinthians 10:5

Bring:

“into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.”

You do not have to entertain every thought that enters your mind.

Ask:

Does this thought agree with God’s truth?

2. Authority Over Your Flesh

1 Corinthians 9:27

Paul said:

“I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection.”

Spiritual authority begins with governing yourself.

If we want authority over demons but refuse authority over our own appetites, emotions, words, attitudes, and impulses, something is out of order.

3. Authority Over Fear

2 Timothy 1:7

“For God hath not given us the spirit of fear...”

Fear may knock at the door, but it does not have to become the ruler of your decisions.

4. Authority Against Temptation

1 Corinthians 10:13

God provides:

“a way to escape.”

Authority includes the ability to say **no**.

5. Authority to Resist Satan

James 4:7

Submit to God and resist the devil.

6. Authority to Advance God’s Kingdom

Jesus authorized His disciples to preach the Kingdom, make disciples, minister to people, and teach His commandments.

Matthew 28:18–20

Authority is not merely defensive.

It is **missional**.

7. Authority to Fulfill Your Assignment

When God assigns something, He provides grace to accomplish it.

Paul said:

1 Corinthians 15:10

“By the grace of God I am what I am.”

Your responsibility is not to imitate someone else’s assignment.

It is to faithfully steward yours.

XXI. How Spiritual Authority Is Weakened

Authority itself comes from Christ, but our effectiveness in walking in it can be compromised by poor alignment.

Common problems include:

Pride — 1 Peter 5:5

Rebellion — 1 Samuel 15:23

Unforgiveness — Mark 11:25

Unrepentant sin — Psalm 66:18

Ignorance of Scripture — Hosea 4:6

Fear — 2 Timothy 1:7

Double-mindedness — James 1:6–8

Self-promotion — Proverbs 27:2

Operating outside assignment — 2 Corinthians 10:13

Lack of prayer — Matthew 26:41

The answer is not pretending to possess more authority.

The answer is returning to **alignment with God**.

XXII. A Pattern for Walking in Spiritual Authority

Here is a practical biblical progression:

1. KNOW CHRIST

Authority begins with relationship.

John 15:5

“Without me ye can do nothing.”

2. KNOW YOUR IDENTITY

Understand who you are in Christ.

Study:

Romans 8:14–17

2 Corinthians 5:17

Ephesians 1:3–6

Colossians 3:1–4

3. SUBMIT TO GOD

James 4:7.

Before asking, “What can I command?” ask:

“Where must I surrender?”

4. KNOW GOD’S WORD

You cannot confidently exercise biblical authority while remaining biblically ignorant.

5. DISCERN YOUR ASSIGNMENT

Ask:

What has God actually called me to do?

6. WALK IN OBEDIENCE

Do what God says even when obedience is inconvenient.

7. MAINTAIN HUMILITY

Remember the authority belongs to Christ.

8. SPEAK ACCORDING TO GOD’S WORD

Do not merely speak from emotion.

Speak from biblical conviction.

9. RESIST THE ENEMY

Do not negotiate with what God told you to resist.

10. REMAIN ACCOUNTABLE

Healthy spiritual authority operates within biblical community and accountability.

XXIII. Four Levels of Spiritual Authority to Understand

A helpful way to examine authority is through four areas.

Authority Over Yourself

Before attempting to lead others, learn spiritual self-government.

Proverbs 25:28

A person without self-control is compared to:

“a city that is broken down, and without walls.”

Authority Against the Enemy

Resist temptation, deception, accusation, and spiritual opposition through Christ.

Authority Within Your Assignment

Exercise leadership where God has actually placed responsibility in your hands.

Authority to Influence Others

This should always operate through service, truth, example, love, correction, encouragement, and discipleship—not domination.

XXIV. The Greatest Test of Spiritual Authority

The greatest evidence of spiritual authority may not be how many demons someone claims to cast out.

It may be whether that person can **submit to God when God says no**.

Jesus demonstrated this in Gethsemane.

Luke 22:42

“Nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.”

Jesus possessed authority to command legions of angels.

Yet He submitted Himself to the Father's redemptive plan.

That is mature authority:

Power under control. Strength under submission. Authority under God's will.

XXV. A Spiritual Authority Self-Examination

Consider these questions prayerfully:

1. **Am I under God's authority or merely asking God to endorse my decisions?**
 2. **Do I know the difference between my desires and God's instructions?**
 3. **Am I exercising authority in an area God actually assigned to me?**
 4. **Do I submit as readily as I expect others to submit?**
 5. **Does my leadership build people or control people?**
 6. **Is my authority rooted in Scripture or personality?**
 7. **Can I receive correction?**
 8. **Am I trying to imitate someone else's anointing or assignment?**
 9. **Is my private life consistent with my public authority?**
 10. **Does my exercise of authority look like Jesus?**
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XXVI. A Powerful Kingdom Principle

There is a progression throughout Scripture:

SUBMISSION → ALIGNMENT → AUTHORITY → OBEDIENCE → FRUIT

The goal is not simply to become "powerful."

The goal is to become **trustworthy with God's authority**.

Jesus said:

Luke 16:10

"He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much."

God is concerned not only with whether we can exercise authority.

He is concerned with whether He can **trust us with authority**.

Group Discussion Questions

1. What is the difference between spiritual power and spiritual authority?
2. Why must authority begin with submission?
3. What does the centurion teach us about authority?
4. What do the sons of Sceva teach us about borrowed authority?
5. How can leaders distinguish biblical authority from control?
6. What areas of our lives must come under God's authority before we attempt to lead others?
7. What happens when gifting develops faster than character?
8. How do we determine the boundaries of our spiritual jurisdiction?
9. What does it practically mean to resist the devil?
10. How did Jesus model both authority and submission?

Closing Challenge:

“Under Authority Before Walking in Authority”

For the next seven days, pray:

Day 1 — Examine: “Lord, reveal where I am out of alignment.”

Day 2 — Submit: “Lord, I surrender my will to Yours.”

Day 3 — Repent: “Lord, reveal anything I need to turn away from.”

Day 4 — Identify: “Lord, show me the authority and responsibilities You have entrusted to me.”

Day 5 — Establish: Study scriptures concerning your identity in Christ.

Day 6 — Resist: Identify areas where fear, temptation, deception, or spiritual opposition have been influencing you and deliberately bring them under God's truth.

Day 7 — Commission: “Lord, teach me to use everything You have entrusted to me for Your glory and the good of others.”

Final Principle

You cannot properly exercise God's authority while rejecting God's authority.

The goal of spiritual maturity is not simply to become someone who can **command**. It is to become someone whom God can **command**.

When we are surrendered to Christ, grounded in His Word, filled with His Spirit, humble in character, clear about our assignment, and obedient to His direction, spiritual authority becomes less about **proving who we are** and more about **revealing who Jesus is**.