

# The Authority of the Believer

by Josh McDowell

## *Introduction*

I would like to talk about the authority of the believer over Satan. I believe this is one of the five most important messages a person can hear. I think the rest of your life one of the five most important messages you'll ever consider is what you'll consider in this message.

As you study the Old Testament, you see that the men and women of God were in a constant struggle with Satan. Study the life of Christ, of Paul, the other apostles, and you'll see a constant spiritual struggle.

If I were to ask you, "How many of you in the last year have felt a real spiritual struggle in your witness on the campus?" I would estimate that 80 to 90 percent of you would raise your hand.

The authority of the believer is a possession of every true child of God. We have authority over Satan, and Satan tries to blind believers to that fact.

## *The Devil in a Dodge*

I first learned of the authority of the believer during Easter week at Balboa Beach. About 50,000 college students would come (much like Daytona Beach). We had a big ballroom, and we packed that out several nights in a row. In fact, we would have two, three meetings a night packed-out. We also packed-out a supper club and a coffee shop. André Kōle would put on his performance each evening. We had so many people coming to our meetings that many of the bars were empty. It really irritated some people, and one night, one of the men from a place called Socrates' Den decided to come and try to break up our meeting.

So, they came over driving a new souped-up Dodge. As André was performing (whatever went on outside, you could hear inside because the walls were so thin) this guy pulled up with his Dodge, stopped out in front and revved the engine--"Vroom, Vroom, Vroom." Then he popped the clutch, and "roooooooooom" down the street.

Well, everyone inside turned around and looked out. André got them settled back down and the guy went back around the block. He came back, stopped out in front and

revved it up again. Vroooooommm, vroommm, vroooooommmmm, and he took off down the street.

By this time everybody was whispering and wondering what was going on. Some of them were standing up trying to look out the window. Well, the guy went back around the block again. And I knew at that time that if he did it once more, it would literally break up the meeting. So, I turned to one of our staff members, and said, "I think Satan is trying to break up this meeting. Let's step out in the doorway and exercise the authority of the believer."

So, we stepped out in the doorway, and we prayed a very simple prayer that I'm going to teach you how to pray. The guy came, stopped out in front and started to rev it up, vroooooommm, vroommmmm. And he popped the clutch and Eeeerrrrrrrr Brrrrmmmmmm, and he blew the rear end of his car all over the street. Well, we just thanked the Lord, and we went over and pushed him off the street, and I shared the Four Laws with him. It reminded me of what Jesus said. "All authority is given to me in heaven and earth."

### *Misconceptions about Authority*

Now, what is the authority of the believer? First, let's ask what the authority of the believer is not. One misconception is that the authority of the believer is the fullness of the Holy Spirit. Now, I believe God desires every person to be filled with the Holy Spirit, but the filling of the Holy Spirit and the authority of the believer are different.

Then there are others who say the authority of the believer is a spiritual gift conferred only on a few that endows them with power over Satan. Now, of course, God gives spiritual gifts. But spiritual gifts and the authority of the believer are different.

Then there are those that believe that the authority of the believer is to be equated with prevailing prayer. That's when you go to your knees and you pray something through until you have God's confidence that it's been answered. So, God leads people to prevailing prayer. But prevailing prayer and the authority of the believer are different. Now, what is the authority of the believer?

### *What is Authority?*

First we need to answer, "What is Authority?" Now, to point out what authority is, I need to show you the difference between two Greek words which are often rendered the same in our English translation.

For example, in Luke 10:19, the King James version would read: "Behold, I have given you power to turn upon the serpents and scorpions and over all the power of the enemy and nothing shall injure you." There are two separate Greek words used for power here but one English translation. The first word should be translated *authority*, not *power*.

The Christian does not have *power* over Satan. We have *authority* over Satan. What's the difference? Let me give you an illustration.

### *Authority Illustrated*

I used to live in Buenos Aires, Argentina. It's the second largest city in the western hemisphere. It has one of the longest streets in the world--almost 60 miles long. It also has one of the widest streets in the world--a street called Corrientas. In English, it means *current*, and it's a solid current of traffic. Sometimes, it's one of the longest parking lots in the world. As you approach an intersection, about the only way you can really make it across is to confess any unknown sin, make sure you are filled with the Holy Spirit, commit your life into the hands of a living God and dash across the street.

But one day as we approached it, an amazing thing took place. It was very unusual and yet very usual. Out in the center of the intersection there was a platform. On the platform there was a uniformed policeman. He looked over at us. There were about 20 of us at that time congregating on the corner waiting to cross. He looked at all those cars and all of a sudden he blew his whistle and put up his hand. The moment he put up his hand, all of those cars came to a screeching halt. Then he motioned us to cross the street.

Now, what is the explanation for that? With all of his personal power, he couldn't have stopped one of those cars. But he had something far better than personal power. He was invested with the authority of the police department. And, the moving cars and the pedestrians recognized that authority. Authority is delegated power. Its value depends on the power behind its user.

In Mexico, they have these little platforms for traffic police about a foot and a half off of the ground out in the center of the large intersections. One day I saw a mother walking along with a little boy. He was quite infatuated with the traffic police. The traffic policeman stepped off of the little platform, and walked to the other side of the intersection. This little kid broke away from his mother, ran out in the intersection, jumped up on the platform and put out his hand like he had seen the policeman do and all those cars stopped. You see, they recognized the authority of that platform.

The authority of the believer is delegated power. The believer must be aware of the

divine power behind him or her, and of his or her own authority to face the enemy without fear or hesitation. Why? Because the authority possessed by the believer is backed by a greater force or power than our enemy Satan. Much greater. And Satan knows that.

### *The Source of Authority*

Ephesians 1:19-23 reads, "And what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of his might. Which he brought about in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and every name that is named."

I'm so glad I knew that before I went to Latin America. Jesus' name is far above every name that is named; not only in this age, but also in the one to come. And, "He put all things in subjection under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church which is his body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all."

Now, when Jesus Christ was raised from the dead, it was the greatest manifestation of God's power recorded in the Scriptures. The Apostle Paul used four Greek words for *power* to describe what God did. First, he says the "greatness of his power." The word power here is *dynamis*. We get our word *dynamite* from this word. It means personal power.

Then Paul goes on to say these are "in accordance with the working." The word *working*, is *energeo*. We get our word *energy* from this word. It means a manifestation or an activity.

Paul then says that it is the working of the "strength." In other words, it is God's exercise of strength. The word *strength* here in the Greek is *kratos*. Like a man working out or exercising, God exercises His strength. The word for might is from the Greek *ischuo*. It means a great summation of power or power afforded by strength; great inherited strength.

The combination of these four words signify that behind the events described in Ephesians 1:19-23, we have the greatest working of God manifested in the Scriptures. Even greater than creation. When most people talk about the might of God, they refer to the Resurrection. That's only half the story. If it was only a resurrection, it wouldn't have taken all that might of God.

Look at verse 20 and see what it incorporates. Paul says that this power raised him

from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places far above all rule and authority and power and dominion. The last thing Satan wanted was not for Jesus Christ to be raised from the dead. Of course, he didn't want this. But the last thing Satan wanted was Jesus Christ to ascend through the powers of the air to take His place at the right hand of the Father. Satan was not defeated at the resurrection alone. It was the resurrection, ascension and the seating of Christ that defeated him.

And so, in this great unleashing of God's might, "he disarmed the rulers and authorities, he made a public display of them having triumphed over them through Him" (Colossians 2:12-15).

### *The Operation of His Power and Authority*

The source of the authority is the resurrection, ascension and the seating of Jesus Christ. By those, Satan was defeated and disarmed. But, when did this power become operative in our lives as believers? In discussing the text of Ephesians 1:19, I skipped over four words that are extremely important to this point: "toward us who believe," or "toward the believing ones."

In other words, all of this unleashing of God's might in the resurrection, the ascension and the seating of Jesus Christ was for you and me. All of this might of God was towards you and me, towards the believing ones, that we might take victory over Satan.

Observe the identification of Christ's people with him and the crisis of the resurrection and ascension and the seating. Look at Ephesians 2:1. "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins." Paul's flow of thought in 1:20 is continued in 2:1. It would read like this. "And seated him at his right hand in the heavenly place." And then 2:1, "And you also who are dead in your trespasses." In other words, there was such an identification of the believer with Jesus Christ in his crucifixion, burial, resurrection, ascension and seating and victory over Satan that the apostle Paul used the same verbs that described the resurrection and ascension of Jesus to describe our resurrection and our ascension, ( the verbs *raised* and *seated*).

How can Paul say this? Because at the moment of salvation, you were placed into the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:3). Paul says, "By one Spirit we've all been baptized." The word *baptized* here means *identified*, we are identified with one body, the body of Christ. At the moment of salvation, the Holy Spirit took and baptized you and totally identified you with the Body of Christ. This happened the moment you believed in Jesus Christ. And at that moment, you are identified in the eyes of God and Satan with Christ's crucifixion, burial, resurrection, ascension and seating at the right hand of the Father.

That's why the Apostle Paul used the same verbs to describe our resurrection and ascension.

There are two persons who know that: God and Satan. The biggest problem is that the believer usually doesn't know it. So, many Christians sincerely believe that they never get to the right hand of the father until they die. They don't realize that at the moment of salvation we were co-resurrected, co-ascended, and co-seated with Jesus Christ positionally; far above all rule and power and authority and dominion and every name that is named. You might say, in our co-crucifixion with Christ, we died to the penalty of sin. In our co-resurrection, we died to the power of sin. In our co-ascension, we gained authority over the source of sin, the evil one.

### *The Location of Our Authority*

Let's review for a moment. First, we looked at some misconceptions. Then we learned that authority is delegated power. The believer has no power over Satan. It's delegated power. Third, we saw that the source of the authority is the resurrection, ascension and the seating of Jesus Christ. And then we learned that this authority became operative in the life of the believer at the moment of salvation.

Now, let's look at the location of spiritual authority. In Ephesians 2:4-6, Paul writes, "But because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us in the heavenly realms with Christ Jesus."

Made us alive together with who? With Christ. And raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. We are co-resurrected, co-ascended, co-seated. We have been made to sit in the heavenlies. We are co-occupants of the right hand of the throne of God with Jesus Christ. It is not some special gift conferred upon a certain group of believers. It is the birthright of every true believer in Jesus Christ.

The right hand of the throne of God is the center, or the location of power. And we have been elevated to that right hand position so that we may exercise to the extent of our spiritual apprehension authority over the powers of the air. But this is only to the extent of our spiritual apprehension. Because, you see, authority is delegated power and until the believer comes to realize the power behind him, he will never exercise the authority of the believer. The more you apprehend the power behind you, the more you will exercise the authority of the believer.

That's why I have to take all this time to give you the background for a 30 second

prayer. Because you will never pray a prayer to exercise the authority of the believer unless you realize the power behind it; that you've been co-resurrected, co-ascended, co-seated far above all rule, power, authority and dominion and every name that is named.

*"Oh No They Won't Be"*

Hebrews 12:2 reads, "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him, endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." Where's Jesus? At the right hand of the Father. Where are you? If you believe in Jesus Christ, if you have been co-resurrected, co-ascended and co-seated with Jesus, at least two people know about it, God and Satan.

Now, let me show you how my understanding that I have been co-resurrected, co-ascended and co-seated with Jesus Christ allows me to be bold in my witness. I don't know about your personality, but mine is the type of personality that when I'm in an adverse situation (a free speech situation or debate), and it seems like everyone turns on me, if I set my mind to circumstances around me, I start to withdraw. I almost become an introvert and back away from the situation.

But once I learned that I'm above the situation and I am seated at the right hand of the Father and I fix my eyes on Jesus, I see the things above, not the circumstances around me. I become bold.

Let me illustrate. I was at the University of Colorado. We had a two night series on prophecy. The second night was packed out. There were five guys at the back of the room and as soon as I closed the meeting, they literally ran to the front. The leader had blood shot eyes. And he just ran forward screaming. I mean he was damning God, damning the Holy Spirit, damning Jesus and damning me. (I kind of appreciated the progression.) And he was just screaming.

I looked at him and said, "Who in the world do you think you are?" He said, "I was born to be a disciple of Satan and by free choice, I have become one." And he lit into me. Well, let me tell you, if I had set my mind to circumstances around me, I would have withdrawn. But I set my mind at the right hand of the Father and knew that I had been co-resurrected, co-ascended and co-seated with Jesus Christ far above all rule and power and authority and dominion and every name that is named. I looked straight back at him and every time he opened his mouth I quoted Scripture. He'd say something else, and I quoted Scripture. And he'd say something else, and I quoted Scripture. It went on and on.

Well, something happened. I guess he didn't have his mind set at the left hand of

the pit, because he turned around and walked away. He walked about nine feet and turned back around. I'll never forget it. He screamed at me and said "Christian, we're going to meet again. And the next time we meet the tables are going to be turned."

Well, let me tell you, if I would have set my mind on the circumstances around me, I would have withdrawn and said "Well, maybe that's right. Let's hope we don't meet again." But, I set my mind at the right hand of the Father, and I knew that I had been co-resurrected, co-ascended and co-seated with Jesus Christ far above all rule and power and authority and dominion and every name that is named. And I looked back at him and I said, "Oh no they won't be."

His face just dropped and he said, "How can you say that?" I said, "That's easy. You see, I've been co-resurrected, co-ascended and co-seated with Jesus Christ far above all rule, power, authority, and dominion and every name that is named, and there is nothing that you can do to hinder the gospel going out when I am speaking. Come on back tomorrow night."

Jesus said "all authority is given to me in heaven and earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:18,19). Now, how can we go into all the world and make disciples? Because Jesus said "all authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Now you go." And the only way we can go is when we realize the authority we have. The more you learn of your position in Christ at the right hand of the Father, the bolder your witness will become.

### *Qualifications for Exercising Authority*

Let's discuss the qualifications for authority. Please remember, it is not a special gift. It is the birthright of every true believer in Jesus. At the moment of salvation, you were elevated to the right hand of the Father. You don't climb some ladder of faith to get there.

Here are some of the qualifications. First of all, there must be a knowledge. A knowledge of your position in Christ and Satan's defeat. You see, if you don't understand who you are and that you are co-resurrected, co-ascended and co-seated and that Satan was defeated, you will never exercise spiritual authority.

Second, is belief. It's not mere mental assent I'm thinking of. The will is involved. Belief must lead to action. Or, you can put it this way; that which the mind accepts, the will must obey or otherwise you're not truly believing.

Do you truly believe that you have been co-resurrected, co-ascended and co-seated



with Jesus Christ? I mean, men and women, if you truly believe that, then your actions would be different. You'd wake up each morning and say, "Lord Jesus, I accept my position. I acknowledge it at the right hand of the Father. And today, cause it through the Holy Spirit to be a reality in my experience."

The third qualification is humility. While belief introduces you to your rightful place at the throne of power--the right hand of the Father--only humility will ensure you of keeping it. Humility is knowing who you are, who made you, and giving God the glory for it. Maybe I'm not all I should be, but I am more than I used to be and I'm who God made me to be.

Men and women, once you realize that the source of your strength and authority is the power behind you, you are going to go out of here and pray the way I show you how to pray. And God is going to do things in and through your life that you've never seen done before. Pretty soon, you're going to start saying "Well, God sure is lucky to have me on his team." And you know what happens next? A nose dive. Because if you go out of here and you set your mind at the right hand of the father and you start exercising the authority of the believer, you'll see things happen that have never happened before. And you start thinking you're really someone. And the next thing is a nose dive. Spiritual authority must be exercised in a spirit of humility!

The fourth qualification is boldness. With humility comes the greatest boldness. True boldness to me is faith in its full manifestation. When God has spoken, to hold back is sin. What we need are men and women filled with the Holy Spirit with their mind set at the right hand of the Father that fear no one but God. And true boldness comes from realizing your position in Jesus Christ and being filled with the Holy Spirit.

The fifth and final qualification is awareness. Awareness that the place of every believer at the right hand of the Father is also the place of the most intense conflict. The moment your eyes are opened to the right hand of the Father, and the knowledge that you have been co-resurrected, co-ascended, and co-seated, Satan will do everything possible to wipe you out, to discourage you, to cause you to tube it. Because the last thing Satan wants is a believer exercising spiritual authority. The last thing Satan wants is a Spirit-filled believer that knows his throne rights. And so, you become a marked individual. And I'll warn you ahead of time, Satan will start working in your life to discourage you from further study of this topic. He'll try to get you not to look at your position in Christ. I'll warn you ahead of time.

*The Authority of the Believer in Practice*

Now here's the way I exercise the authority of the believer. I had to go through all of this just to show you a 30 second prayer. Why? Because, remember, authority is delegated power. First, I always pray in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and claim victory on behalf of His shed blood on the cross. Speak right out and remind Satan that he's already defeated. I'll say, "Satan, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ who shed His blood on the cross, I command you to stop your activities in this area." Or, "Satan, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ who has shed blood on the cross, I acknowledge the victory that is in Jesus Christ." Or "Satan, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ who has shed blood on the cross, I acknowledge that the victory is in Jesus and all honor and glory in this situation should go to him."

I speak to him various ways, but I always use "In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ who has shed blood on the cross" because it reminds Satan that he is already defeated.

And then, I realize that there is nothing I can do. I have no power over Satan. I only have authority. The more I learn of the power behind me, the greater boldness I have in exercising the authority of the believer.

*Make Sure It's Satan*

Now, you need to make sure it's Satan working. Satan gets blamed for a lot of things that are simply a lack of organization on the part of man. I've spoken at meetings where the organization was horrible. Some student will stand up and say, "Wow, we really need to pray and exercise the authority of the believer here." And I'll say, "Forget exercising the authority of the believer. Next time just start preparing." Total disorganization, and they blame it on Satan.

How do you know it's Satan working? Paul says in 2 Corinthians 2:11, not to be ignorant of the wiles or schemes of the devil. As we study the Scripture, we'll learn more about how Satan works.

Second, is the witness of the Spirit (1 John 4:1-4). Many times you may feel the presence of a spiritual struggle in a situation. Note the Scriptures, and weigh the circumstances and judge if there is that witness, that struggle. If I think there is, then I exercise the authority of the believer.

### *Honor to His Name--Not Ours*

Now, once you exercise the authority of the believer, be patient. I find that God always acts when it brings the most honor and glory to His name--not to our name. I'm very impatient. And a lot of time, I think God ought to work according to my schedule. I exercise the authority of the believer, and I think God ought to act when I think He ought to act and in the way that I think He ought to act.

Well, God doesn't always do it that way. So, I've learned to be patient. Sometimes I exercise the authority of the believer and just the exact opposite takes place of what I expected. Now I've learned to wait six months and even a year to look back on a situation to see how God got all the honor and glory. I can honestly say that I have never exercised the authority of the believer where I did not see Satan defeated. Never. Sometimes I had to wait six months. Sometimes it seemed like Satan was getting the victory, but in the long run, God worked out His plan and it was just beautiful.

### *God's Perfect Timing*

Let me close with an illustration. I was speaking in a University in South America, and it was a very tense situation. I was the first American in four years to speak at the University because of its Marxist leanings. They had photographs of me all over campus, and the communists students, to keep students from coming to where I was speaking, painted CIA agent in red letters over the photos. I thought it meant Christians in Action. But of course they meant "Central Intelligence Agency." It backfired on them. Most of the students had never personally heard or seen a CIA agent. So they all came to the meeting to see what one looked like, and we packed out the room.

Whenever you speak in South America you always have a lot of professional agitators. There were some professional Marxist agitators there that night. When I go to another country, I like to speak as best I can the language of that country. And so, I pointed out to them that I was learning their language and that night I would be lecturing in it. Well, I started in and it was horrible. These guys, would jump up and say "you filthy pig, etc., etc." One after another, they were jumping up and throwing out accusations, and I couldn't answer them. I didn't even know what they were saying. I felt so sorry for the Christians because they had so looked forward to my coming to see new brothers and sisters and a lot of evangelistic contacts.

And you know, that first night everything was going wrong. I wanted to crawl underneath the seat. I felt like crying. It finally got to the point where I was about to quit. Every time I mentioned Jesus, they just laughed. The entire audience. But I had exercised the authority of the believer, and I thought "God, why aren't you doing something?" Why?

Satan's defeated, yes. But I wasn't walking by faith. You see, God works when it brings the greatest honor and glory to His name, not to ours.

Well, this went on for 45 minutes and finally God started to work. The secretary of the *Mobiento Revolutionario*, the revolutionary student movement stood up. She was quite an outspoken woman, and everyone went silent so I figured she was someone. She said, "Professor McDowell, if I accept Christ tonight will he give me the love for people that you have for us?" Well, men and women, I don't have to tell you it broke just about every person's heart. We had 58 decisions for Christ that night.

God works when it brings the greatest honor and glory to His Name, not to ours. I've learned to exercise the authority of the believer and then to walk by faith. God will take care of it from there. Jesus said "all authority has been given to me in heaven and earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations."

**This article has been prepared from a transcript of Josh's tape, "The Authority of the Believer."  
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