

2. The Believer's Position in Christ

Spiritual Warfare: Overcoming Evil

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Positional Authority in Christ

In the year 1900, Patillo Higgins, a one-armed mechanic and self-taught geologist, believed that many industries would eventually shift from coal to oil. But where would all that oil come from? He suspected it lay beneath his feet at Spindletop, near Houston in Texas. Higgins was convinced that drilling a well on top of the salt dome located on his land (and others like it) would yield a substantial amount of oil. To turn his dream into reality, he approached a salt miner from Louisiana, Captain Anthony F Lucas, who had also trained as an engineer. Despite Higgins's strong belief, no one in the area thought that a salt dome structure could produce oil. Lucas selected the location, and drilling commenced on October 27, 1900. After two months of drilling, they reached a depth of 880 feet. Discouraged by the lack of findings, they paused operations for Christmas.

After the Christmas break, they continued drilling. After some perseverance and adjustments, they finally noticed mud starting to bubble up in the hole. Seconds later, the drill pipe burst out of the ground with great force, and for a moment, nothing happened! This outcome was quite confusing, leading them to wonder what had occurred. After several minutes, they began to clean up the mess when, suddenly, a loud noise like a cannon shot came from the hole. Mud shot up from the ground like a rocket, followed by oil that soared to a height of 150 feet in the air. Lucas had hoped that his well would produce five barrels a day, but it produced 100,000 barrels daily, more than all the combined oil wells in the entire United States. At today's prices, this oil find is estimated to be worth \$11 billion US dollars. Great riches had been lying beneath the feet of all those in the area, and they did not know it.¹

Last week, we discussed the dark spiritual forces that inhabit an unseen dimension beyond our senses. These dark, unseen forces do not want you to grasp the truths that we are talking about in this series, the truth about spiritual warfare—especially the truth that you possess great authority, granted to you as one who has come under the New Covenant in Christ. Great spiritual treasure and riches in Christ lie untapped when we do not grasp our position of authority in Christ. To fight a spiritual battle, you need to understand the truth of who you are in Christ and who He is shaping you to be. The more you appreciate and understand the significance of what happened at the crucifixion of Christ, the greater your ability to resist the enemy and compel him to flee from you (James 4:7). To explore the topic of our position in Christ Jesus, let's examine a Scripture followed by a question:

¹¹God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, ¹²so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and **the evil spirits left them**. ¹³Some Jews who went around driving out evil spirits **tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus** over those who were demon-possessed. They would say, "In the name of the Jesus whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out." ¹⁴Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. ¹⁵One day the evil spirit answered them,

¹ <https://www.priweb.org/ed/pgws/history/spindletop/spindletop.html>

“Jesus I know, and Paul I know about, but who are you?” ¹⁶Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on them and overpowered them all. He gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding (Acts 19:11-16).

The sons of Sceva observed demons being cast out effortlessly (v.12) and believed they could do the same. Why do you think they were unable to succeed while Paul did?

The sons of Sceva believed that speaking the name of Jesus and invoking the authority of Christ was sufficient. However, they did not recognize that the demons within the man could see their lack of authority, as these men had no relationship with Christ. They had not yet been born again and regenerated by the Spirit of God. Unseen demonic spirits that have gained access to a person's life can perceive both the invisible spiritual realm and the physical realm. We see multiple accounts in the Gospels that when demons who were oppressing individuals saw Jesus approaching, they would fall to the ground, shriek, shake the person, foam at the mouth, cry out, or exhibit other behavioral manifestations. They immediately recognized the authority in Christ and could not stay in His presence.

Authority in the spiritual realm hinges on one's relationship with Jesus. It's not about what you know; it's about Who you know! Positional authority is bestowed upon a person when he or she is born again of the Spirit, and the Spirit of Christ dwells within. To exercise authority and enhance the anointing of the Spirit, believers must act in faith based on what has been secured for them at the cross of Christ. My objective with this series is to delve beneath the surface of matters to uncover true spiritual riches. We will explore our true state in the past, who the believer is in the present, and who the believer is becoming in the future.

What We Were in the Past

In his letter to the church in Ephesus, the apostle Paul conveyed his passion for the people of God (i.e., the Church) to grasp their positional authority in Christ. He began by discussing their lives before they came to Jesus:

¹As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ²in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. ⁴But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved (Ephesians 2:1-5).

The Scriptures reveal that there are three parts to our nature: “May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1Thessalonians 5:23). Our soul is invisible and consists of our mind, will, emotions, and conscience, while our spirit is the part of our nature that connects with God. Remember the warning that God gave to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, “From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; ¹⁷but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die” (Genesis 2:16-17). Did Adam fall dead when he and Eve ate the forbidden fruit? No, so

what happened to them? Their spiritual connection to God was broken in the Garden, disconnecting them from the author of life; they became spiritually dead. As a result, Adam and Eve were cut off from God due to their obedience in the garden to the serpent, Satan, the prince of darkness (Revelation 12:9). Adam's entire race has inherited a default to sin and, with it, separation from God. "But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear" (Isaiah 59:2).

The apostle Paul noted that, due to our spirit being dead toward God through our sin, we became servants of Satan and lived in slavery to sin. If a person is living outside of a relationship with Christ, whether they understand it or not, the Scripture tells us that Satan is their master, and he continually works to dominate the individual through habitual sin. Paul wrote: "...when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient" (Ephesians 2:2). God needed a champion, someone who could conquer the one who held the power of death over humanity. But how could that be possible when just one sin would disqualify a person?

The Chosen One had to be free of the sin passed down from Adam to the entire human race. The answer to humanity's problem was what God had planned in eternity past—to step into humanity Himself and become a man. He had to be born of a virgin and not of man's seed. The Holy Spirit descended upon Mary, and the eternal God Himself, in the person of Jesus, entered the human race to bear the accumulated guilt of sin and the judgment that humanity deserved. Wonder of wonders! He confronted the forces of darkness manifesting through people—His battle was not against flesh and blood (Ephesians 6:12) but against spiritual forces in the unseen realm that held us captive by invisible spiritual bonds:

¹⁴Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, ¹⁵and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives (Hebrews 2:14-15).

In what ways does a person's life change when he is freed from the fear of losing it? How does being enslaved by fear create bondage?

Who We Are in Christ

When Jesus went to the cross, He was the representative Man, our Substitute, and the Righteous One for the unrighteous (2 Corinthians 5:21). In some mysterious way, which we will fully understand only in eternity, you and I, as believers in Christ, hung there on the cross with Jesus. When Christ died, we died with Him. Your release from servitude to Satan occurred on the cross when Jesus died for you and as you. Paul, the apostle, explained this by saying, "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless, I live, yet not I but Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2:20). In another place, he writes, "For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection" (Romans 6:5). These two Scriptures were written about a truth that transpired at the cross. If you are a believer, you have been placed in Christ Jesus, and His death represents your own death. You are delivered from Satan's power through the death of Christ. This positional authority is not something we must strive to attain; it

is a completed fact that must be believed. There exists an organic spiritual union between the believer and Christ, with Jesus stating, **"I am the Vine; you are the branches"** (John 15:5). In the thirteen letters of Paul in the New Testament, the apostle uses the phrase "In Christ" 165 times. I believe he's trying to convey an important message. John Piper, the theologian, explains this truth from Romans 6:5-6:

Now let's confirm this with a few other verses. Verse 6: **"Knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him."** This is another way of saying that we died (verse 2) or that **"we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death"** (verse 5). Notice that while verse 6 says the "old self" (=old man) was crucified, verses 2 and 5 say "we died" and "we were united to him in the likeness of his death." I take this to mean that my "old self" is me – but different than I have become. The "old self" is the me that was rebellious against God, and insubordinate to God's law, and blind to God's glory, and unbelieving toward his promises. Verse 6 says the "old me" was crucified with Christ. (See Galatians 2:20.) When Christ died, God counted the old sinful me as dying with him.²

Other riches are opened to us when we drill down deeper into the Scriptures:

⁶And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, ⁷in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. ⁸For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— ⁹not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do (Ephesians 2:6-10; emphasis added).

You may notice that we are told that when Christ was raised, due to our union with Him, the Church- the called-out believers from the world- are raised as well, and we are seated with Him in the heavenly realms. It is in these unseen realms, which Scripture refers to as the heavenly realms, that the riches below the surface have surfaced for us. In the first chapter of his letter to the church in Ephesus, Paul writes that God **"has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ"** (Ephesians 1:3). The enemy of your soul does not want you to understand these truths, but they are not idle fabrications. They are spiritual truths that need to seep into your soul and be manifested in your life. You no longer have to live according to the ruler of the kingdom of the air; instead, you are to be guided by obedience to the Spirit of Christ. If you are a believer, the gates of hell should tremble when the enemy sees you approaching. Indeed, the sons of Sceva should regard you with envy for the authority that dwells in and upon you. It has always been God's plan to astonish the angels, both dark and light, as well as every evil ruler and authority in the spiritual realm throughout time and eternity:

⁹and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. ¹⁰His intent was that now, through the church, **the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms,** ¹¹according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord (Ephesians 3:9-11; emphasis added).

² <http://www.desiringgod.org/sermons/united-with-christ-in-death-and-life-part-1>

God is using willing believers in Christ to showcase His power and grace to dismantle the enemy's power structures. The rulers and authorities likely represent demonic powers situated in the unseen realms. While we may feel weak, we are strong through God, able to pull down strongholds and dismantle the false beliefs and power centers established by demonic spirits throughout the world. In another place, Paul wrote: **“For the weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds”** (2 Corinthians 10:4).

God has a purpose and plan, and even when the enemy seeks to sabotage and disrupt, God still has the last word. The end of the story has already been determined and written in advance to encourage us. God is the author of all things, the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. There is nothing that can happen that God does not anticipate. Nothing takes Him by surprise, and He already knows how to work all things together in your life for good. The Lord sees you already in your completed state. The limitation of time does not bind Him as it does us. It is God who has initiated the work in you, and He is also the One who will finish it. Because of the finished work that Christ accomplished on the cross, you are ALREADY seated with Christ. Our reconciliation is complete.

Why is it essential to understand your identity as a believer? It benefits you not only by helping you navigate daily life but also by enhancing your prayer life. Recognizing the spiritual riches given to you in Christ will profoundly impact the effectiveness of your prayers. If you know you are praying in accordance with God's will and that the Father will not deny the Son, why would you assume that God would withhold anything from you? (Romans 8:32). Our faith, or lack thereof, is directly related to our understanding of our identity in Christ. Some may think that praying with authority requires a loud voice or a specific tone. While the Holy Spirit might inspire certain ways of praying, actual authority stems from the legal reality of what occurred at the cross and our comprehension of it. It is through understanding what Christ has accomplished and proclaiming it that we learn to be victorious in prayer. Our faith and prayer life are intimately linked to how we perceive ourselves in the Father's eyes. When we truly understand this, we do not hesitate to come boldly before the throne of grace and declare God's will with authority.

What prevents you from approaching God's throne of grace with confidence? Do you sometimes experience a struggle in your mind while praying? What kinds of thoughts obstruct your faith?

Believers in Christ will Triumph Over the Enemy

Jesus has been granted all authority in the unseen heavenly realm and on earth, and through our organic union with Him, He has commissioned us to go and make disciples- not just converts- of all nations (Matthew 28:18-19). He is our High Priest, representing us before the Father:

But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God (Hebrews 10:12).

He sat down because He completed the work. It is a finished work, so He took His place at the right hand of the Father, and because of our organic union with Him, we are also seated in heavenly places with Him: “And God raised us up with Christ and seated us in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus” (Colossians 2:12).

If we could have seen beyond the veil of flesh in the Garden of Gethsemane, what might we have discovered, I wonder? Think of the delight the enemy forces must have felt when the rulers and elites cried out for Barabbas instead of Christ. Can you imagine their satisfaction and squeals of excitement at every blow that fell on our Champion’s back? Jesus endured the shame and spitting by looking forward and seeing us seated with Him in heavenly places. To most people in this world, what happened at the cross of Christ seemed to be a defeat for the Kingdom of God. The enemy, I’m sure, was self-deceived into thinking he was winning; however, he was merely signing his death certificate.

If you are like me, you may have wondered at some point, “Why didn’t God just take Satan captive and kill him?” The issue lies in the fact that Satan had a legal claim to this world, stemming from the Fall of Man, when humanity chose the knowledge of good and evil over a relationship with God. In the Garden of Eden, mankind abdicated the authority that was initially granted to them at the beginning (Genesis 1:26, 28). The Fall of Man impacted their rulership and authority, which rightfully belonged to Adam and Eve and their descendants from the beginning. God will not act against mankind’s will and reclaim authority over this earth by force; He has committed Himself to His divine order. When we observe this world, we do not see order; we see chaos. This exists because Satan is not yet bound.

Satan’s ultimate end has not yet been realized, but his time is gradually coming to an end as the Kingdom of God grows all over the world. The Gospel is going forth to all nations, and lives are being made new in Christ. What the Father accomplished by sending His Son was to pay the penalty for sin legally. When Jesus bowed His head and declared, “It is finished,” Satan was defeated. He had been a murderer from the beginning, dating back to the Garden of Eden, but now he had taken an innocent life- a life that he did not legally possess since no fault was found in Jesus. Before Judas left the table at the Last Supper, Satan entered him. The Lord knew what was going to happen and said to Judas, “What you do, do quickly” (John 13:27). Although Satan intended to destroy Jesus, Jesus’ death nullified all of Satan’s claims on those who respond to what God has achieved in Christ.

Although the war continues, the outcome is already determined. One day, we will witness the final judgment of Satan; his end is already decided, though not yet fully realized. When Jesus took His rightful place on the throne at the Father’s right hand, He undeniably proved that He had overcome Satan, and we are seated with Him in the heavenly realms. Not only has Jesus defeated Satan, but in Him and through His power and life, we are also called to overcome and triumph over all the works of the evil one.

They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death (Revelation 12:11).

There are two parts mentioned in the passage above that refer to overcoming or triumphing over this world and demonic forces. The first is the Blood of the Lamb, the substitutionary death of Christ. Jesus is the spotless Lamb of God, the sacrifice for our sins. The second part is that they (believers) overcame him by the word of their testimony. We believe in our hearts that Jesus is Lord and that He died for our sins, but we must also confess with our mouths the truth of God's Word. We are crucified with Christ, buried with Him (as symbolized in baptism), raised with Him, and enthroned with Him. **"It is a faithful saying: For if we are dead with him, we shall also live with him"** (2 Timothy 2:11).

Writer Paul E. Billheimer, in his book *Destined for the Throne*, explores the truth of being crucified with Christ. He states:

We are not surprised that Christ is exalted and enthroned in the heavens. What is difficult for us to comprehend is that we also are exalted with Him. If **"He that is joined to the Lord is one with Him in spirit"** (1 Corinthians 6:17), it cannot be otherwise. We are not surprised that all things have been put under His feet. What we have failed to comprehend is that as part of Him, His Body, all things are also legally beneath our feet. What we do not realize is that He is the **"head over all things to the church"** (Ephesians 1:22). This means that His headship over all things is assumed and held for the benefit of the Church and is directed toward His purpose for her.³

We have underestimated the supreme importance of the Church in God's economy. She is the motive of all His activity from all eternity. He does nothing solely for His own sake. She (the Church) is included as a full partner in all His plans. The Church is His Body, the fullness of Him that fills all things everywhere. This is only true because of God's voluntary self-limitation. In the absolute, God is wholly sufficient. He needs nothing and can be served by no one. Yet He has chosen voluntarily to limit Himself so that the Church share in His reign. It is true that the Body cannot function without the Head. It is just as true that the Head, by His own choice, will not function without the Body. Both are important to the accomplishment of His plan.⁴

Until Christ comes again, the Bride of Christ, the Church, is in training. He has planned for prayer to be an apprenticeship, a learning experience that prepares us for rulership in the ages to come. The enemy continues to employ a strategy of "guerrilla warfare," but the outcome will not change. Satan is defeated, and the knowledge of Christ's victory over him is spreading throughout the world. We must constantly remind ourselves of who we are in Christ to be effective in prayer. How do we fight? It starts in our thought life; this is where the battle begins. Remind yourself of your identity. You are accepted in the Beloved (Ephesians 1:6). You hold the same position in the Father's bosom as Christ does (John 17:22-26) and possess His righteousness, which is as valid as the righteousness of Christ in the eyes of the Father because it is HIS righteousness. All that God permits the enemy to do is ultimately used to manifest the marvelous grace of God for all eternity.

³ Paul E. Billheimer, *Destined for the Throne*, Published by Bethany House, Minneapolis, MN. 1975. Page 88-89.

⁴ Ibid

Let me say that I do not believe God is limited by anything. However, He chooses to use His people to carry out His work, and He also employs the enemy's tactics to prepare His Bride. Nothing is wasted! He oversees your transformation. He is doing a work that is profound and unseen, but it will be revealed when we don our new glorious bodies and are finally glorified.

Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 4:16).

We can approach the throne of grace boldly, not because we are worthy, but because He is worthy. To Him belongs all glory!

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