

Lesson #7

Our Identity and Authority in Christ

" . . . He [God the Father] seated Him [God the Son] at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in the one to come. And He put all things [i.e., 'all rule and authority and power and dominion', v. 21] in subjection under His feet" (Eph. 1:20b-22a). . . . "and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:6).

"and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority" (Col. 2:10).

A. *Our Identity in Christ*

One of Satan's primary weapons is the *lie*. He is committed to deceiving you into believing you **are not** what, in fact, **you are**, and that you **cannot do** what, in fact, **you can**. Why is this important to know? Because as Neil Anderson has said, "*No person can consistently behave in a way that is inconsistent with the way he perceives himself*" (43). That is why Satan will try to persuade you that you are:

- a failure,
- a fool,
- of no use to God or other Christians,
- worthless,
- an embarrassment to Christ,
- wasting your time to confess your sins (God won't listen),
- inferior to other believers,
- destined always to fall short of their successes,
- a hopeless victim of your past,
- helpless to change your future,
- a pathetic excuse for a Christian,
- owned by Satan,
- now what you will always be (no hope for improvement),
- stupid,
- beyond the reach of prayer, etc.

You must respond to such deceitful, destructive slander by remembering 2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 2:1-7; 5:8; 1 John 3:1-3; etc.

B. *Our Authority in Christ*

Luke 10:1,17-20

v. 1 - "Others" = other than the 12, i.e., non-apostolic disciples or followers of Jesus (contrast this with 9:1-5). They are sent out "two by two": 1) to provide mutual protection, encouragement, and support; and 2) to provide legal attestation to what happens; to provide for binding testimony (Dt. 17:6; 19:15).

Is it "70" or "72"? Two OT texts may provide some background for this. (1) Genesis 10:2-31 (from which is derived the belief that there were 70 nations in the world; hence Jesus would be emphasizing the global mission of his followers and not simply the ministry of the apostolic company); and (2) Numbers 11:16-25 (the 70 elders who assisted Moses and on whom the Spirit fell).

PT: the commissioning, authorizing, empowering of the 70 is a prelude to the ministry of the larger body of Christ universal. As Susan Garrett explains, "Luke may have conceived of the mission by 'seventy (-two) others' as foreshadowing the period of the church, when not only the twelve but *many* sons and daughters would receive the Spirit of the Lord and prophesy, and would thereby be enabled to carry out Jesus' work" (*The Demise of the Devil*, 48).

v. 17 - "**Even** the demons!" In other words, "Wow!" Note that the 70 do not say they are "subject to *us*" but rather "subject to us **in your name**." Christ's authority had been invested in them.

v. 18 - It is unlikely that the "fall" of Satan referred to here is a reference to his original fall into sin, since Jesus' comment was in response to their report concerning the success they had experienced in casting out demons. As Page points out, "the context demands a reference to a fall that is the result of being defeated, not a fall that is the result of sinning" (109).

What does Jesus mean when he says he was "watching"? The verb used here (*theoreo*) is not used elsewhere for visions Jesus had (although it is used to describe the visions that others experienced: see Acts 7:56; 9:7; 10:11). Whether or not Jesus experienced a "vision" or simply is using figurative language is unimportant. Of more significance is the nature and time of this "fall" of the enemy.

- This could be a visionary experience in which Jesus "saw" the impending fall or demise of the devil, an event yet to be fulfilled (cf. Dan. 7:2,4,6,7,9,11,13). Perhaps Jesus was looking forward to the judgment Satan would incur at the cross/resurrection (hence the same event as Rev. 12).
- Others see here a reference to Satan's "fall" that occurred because of his defeat in the wilderness when he failed in the tempting of Jesus.
- Still another possibility is that this "fall" is a reference to his defeat each time his house his plundered (Mt. 12) as a result of successful deliverance ministry.

Whichever view is correct, Jesus does not intend to suggest that because of this "fall" from heaven Satan is no longer active or a threat. In v. 19 he issues a promise that makes sense only if there are real dangers from which his disciples need to be protected.

v. 19 - The key is the statement: "**I have given you authority**." Authority = delegated power, i.e., not only the responsibility, not only the prerogative, but also *the spiritual power to enforce compliance*. Authority = the right and power to act and speak as if Jesus himself were present (v. 16). Anderson explains:

"Spiritual authority is not a tug-of-war on a horizontal plane; it is a vertical chain of command. Jesus Christ has all authority in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18). He's at the top. He has given His authority and power to His servants to be exercised in His name (Luke 10:17); we're underneath Him. And Satan and his demons? They're at the bottom, subject to the authority Christ has invested in us. They have no more right to rule your life than a buck private has to order a general to clean the latrine" (61).

Authority over what or whom? What are the "serpents" and "scorpions" mentioned in v. 19? They are not to be taken literally. They are, in all likelihood, a vivid way of describing demonic beings.

- Serpents and scorpions were familiar sources of evil and pain in Palestinian life and thus served to symbolize all kinds of adversity and affliction. See Num. 21:6-9; Deut. 8:15; Pss. 58:4; 140:3.

- The scorpion was a means of divine chastisement in 1 Kings 12:11,14; see also Luke 11:11-12.
- Satan is often portrayed as a serpent (Gen. 3; 2 Cor. 11; Rev. 12,20). Hence, his domain is that of snakes and scorpions. In this regard, see esp. Ps. 91:12-13.
- In v. 19, Jesus explains the meaning of what the 70 reported in v. 17. Thus the "serpents and scorpions" of v. 19 = the "demons" of v. 17.
- Also, within v. 19 itself, "serpents and scorpions" are parallel to "all the power of the enemy," i.e., Satan and his hosts.
- V. 20 also indicates clearly that "serpents and scorpions" are a reference to "spirits".
- Finally, Rev. 9:3,5,10 lend support to this interpretation.

v. 20 - It isn't wrong or sinful to rejoice in this authority over the demonic. If it were, Jesus would never have given such authority to his disciples! The point, rather, is that *in comparison with* being saved such power is far less significant. Authority over the demonic spirits is great! But being saved, forgiven, and having one's name recorded in the book of life is greater!!

This leads to a critical question: "Do we, the church, have this same authority? Or was this a temporary endowment?" My answer is: "We have even *greater* authority!"

(1) First of all, remember that this commission and the authority and power it entailed was given to the 70, not simply to the 12. It isn't possible to restrict this authority to a select few. Jesus' selection of 70 is surely in anticipation of the world-wide mission of the entire body of Christ. The 70 were not uniquely gifted or uniquely called people with high office or position in the body of Christ. They were ordinary followers of Jesus, just like you and me!

(2) We live and operate on this side of the cross, subsequent to the defeat of Satan. In other words, their authority and power, prior to the cross, can hardly be regarded as equivalent to ours, subsequent to the cross.

(3) We live and operate on this side of Pentecost. In other words, we operate with the fulness of the indwelling power and presence of the Holy Spirit. They did not.

(4) We have received the fulness of divine authorization as stated in the Great Commission (Mt. 28:18-19).

(5) We have been raised up and seated with the exalted Lord, under whose feet all principalities and powers have been subjected (Eph. 1:19-2:7; Col. 2:9-10).

(6) Finally, the proof of the pudding is in the eating. In other words, the evidence of authority is the exercise of authority - Acts 5:16; 8:7; 16:18; 19:12-16; 2 Cor. 10:3-4; Eph. 6:10-13; James 4:7; 1 Pt. 5:8; 1 John 2:13-14.

Note: This authority over the demonic was not restricted even to the 70. See Mark 9:38-41; Luke 9:49-50. See also Mt. 7:21-23.

C. *The Exercise of Authority: Binding, Resisting, Rebuking*

Is the verbal "rebuking" and "binding" of demonic spirits a legitimate biblical expression of our authority over the enemy? Those who answer "no" are often heard to say: "Why not just pray, 'O God, please resist,

rebuke, and bind this evil spirit for me?" In other words, they insist that we should always defer to God. But:

- Consider Eph. 6:10ff. where we are called on to take an active role in "standing firm" and "struggling" against the enemy. We must be responsible to avail ourselves of the power and weaponry secured for us by Christ's victory.
- Let us not forget that God has delegated His authority to us (Lk. 10). It is not God's desire to settle all our spiritual disputes. He desires for us to utilize the authority he has invested in us.
- God wants us to share in and to enjoy the thrill of victory (He is pleased with the response of the 70 in Luke 10).
- God is pleased to utilize means, i.e., us, in the pursuit of his ends. In other words, God wants to involve us in the work of the kingdom. We are his representatives, spokesmen, ambassadors in evangelism, ministry, and so too in spiritual warfare. No one would ever think of saying: "O God, preach the gospel to the lost," or "O God, teach the truth to your people." Rather, God desires to use us in proclaiming the gospel and in teaching the principles of Scripture. We have been entrusted with His authority, His power, His gifts to minister to His people and to participate in expanding His kingdom.

But what about binding, resisting, and rebuking?

(1) *Is it biblical to **bind** the enemy?*

The only texts in which the terminology of "binding" is used are as follows:

Matthew 12:29 - Here it is Jesus who "bound" the devil, most likely a reference to his victory over him in the wilderness. Whereas Jesus is nowhere recorded as saying, "I bind you", he did, in point of fact, "bind" or restrict or inhibit the ability of the enemy to keep people in bondage. Does this text give us grounds for verbally "binding" Satan or demons?

Matthew 16:19 - The "keys" (Lk. 11:52) are a reference to the power to know, understand, and proclaim the terms on the basis of which entrance into or exclusion from the kingdom of God is granted. Whatever we "bind" (prohibit) or "loose" (allow) through the proclamation of the gospel will prove to be an earthly application or confirmation of what heaven has already decreed. We have been given authority to pronounce forgiveness or judgment depending on a person's response to the truth (cf. John 20:23).

Matthew 18:18 - The context is church discipline and the decision of the church in adjudicating a dispute between two people. To "bind" = to declare someone guilty; to "loose" = to declare them innocent. The decision of the church on earth reflects the decision already made in heaven. I.e., when we conform to biblical guidelines and accurately declare the terms on which membership and fellowship in the church are possible, our decisions will be an earthly expression of heaven's prior decree.

It would appear that nothing in these three texts gives explicit endorsement to the practice of saying, "Satan, I bind you in Jesus' name." However, before we dismiss this as unbiblical, we need to observe other explicit commands.

(2) *Is it biblical to **resist** the enemy?*

See Eph. 6; 1 Pt. 5; Js. 4. To "resist" = lit., to stand against (*anti* + *histami* ["antihistamine"]) = to oppose, to set oneself against someone or something.

To resist Satan or his demons thus means to employ the authority and power given us by God to restrict his/their activities, to restrain his/their efforts, to thwart his/their plans. What does this mean, if not to "bind"? To "bind" = to inhibit, to restrain someone from an action or activity, to repress.

Therefore, on the one hand, it is true that neither Jesus nor anyone else in the NT ever says: "Satan (demon), I bind you." On the other hand, both Jesus and Christians do, in terms of practical and experiential impact, "bind" him/them. This is done primarily by the truth of God's word spoken (Mt. 4) and moral resistance (Eph. 6). Thus, I conclude that whereas we should not appeal to any of the three texts cited above in Matthew's gospel to support our practice, it is theologically permissible to use the terminology of "binding" when we "resist" the enemy. Remember, too, that no "binding" is absolute except for the last one (Rev. 20:10; contrast with 20:2-3,7).

(3) *Is it biblical to **rebuke** the enemy?*

The term "rebuke" (*epitimao*) is used frequently by Jesus in his encounters with demonic spirits (Mt. 17:18; Mk. 1:25; 3:12; 9:25; Lk. 4:35,41; 9:42). The term functions as a word of command by which evil forces are brought into submission. Thus "it combines the idea of moral censure expressed by the word *rebuke* with the notion of the subjugation of demonic powers. Thus, *epitimao* shows that Jesus has authority over the evil spirits and that they are powerless to resist his control" (Page, 143).

Conclusion:

In summary, observe Acts 16:18. Paul didn't say, "Evil spirit, I bind you," or "I rebuke you." But he *did*, in effect, both bind and rebuke the spirit when he said, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her!" Paul's words were a rebuke which, in experiential fact, bound (restricted or restrained) the evil spirit's activity as it pertained to the slave-girl.

What implications does this have for how *we* do spiritual warfare? . . .