

Spiritual Authority The Context of Spiritual Authority

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The matter of spiritual authority will be the subject of the next several broadcasts. Now at the outset I wish to say that whenever you talk about spiritual authority, people hear things because commonly when you speak about spiritual authority you are not speaking into the void because this subject has been covered in great detail by any number of people before. But the thing that people hear whenever there is a discussion of spiritual authority is "who gets to rule over whom". I think that this is a fundamental mistake in approaching the subject of spiritual authority because it's *not* about who gets to rule over whom. It's *not* about importance and unimportance. It's *not* about master and servant. It is *not* about who is important and who is unimportant.

To frame the issue of spiritual authority I'd like to dedicate this first program to a context. We will be looking at the context in which the matter of spiritual authority arises. Now as we start, I'd like to say that the initial thought that people have about spiritual authority, in terms of a context, is this: we have a church and here are the people that have authority in the church and here are the people who are being ruled over and here are the rules of the game that you have to play so that you get to have authority if you play the game by the right rules. *All of this is rubbish*. It's the way that it is normally thought of and it's the way that it is commonly presented and it is the context that everybody assumes.

In dedicating this first program to a context of spiritual authority I want to show you that a good part of our failure to properly understand spiritual authority is derived from the failure to understand the appropriate context. As a result, one of the central Biblical subjects is often dismissed as being marginally important when in fact the failure to understand this *is critical* to our walk as believers. The common context in which Americans think of spiritual authority is a democratic context, meaning by that we are equally important to God and therefore no one really should have any right to tell anybody else what to do. In fact people come out of all kinds of denominational backgrounds and one of the things that they want to hold on to is the freedom that they've found in Christ.

Spiritual authority is not about *the restricting* of these freedoms that we have in Christ and it is not an attempt in any way to capture you and put you back again under a new form of bondage. Spiritual authority is for a different and particular reason. Now I'd like to begin with a reading from the sixth chapter of the book of Ephesians as part of setting up the context in which spiritual authority is meant to be understood. In the sixth chapter of the book of Ephesians, the writer, Paul, says in verse 10, "**Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual**

forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then" (Inserted - **Eph. 6:10-13**) and so on.

Now this passage introduces us to the idea that Christians are at war, we're in *a state* of war, and we're not in a state of war with human beings. **"We do not wrestle against flesh and blood."** Now flesh and blood is a reference to human beings. Commonly, we think of spiritual warfare somehow as involving battles and battle scenes in which we are either fighting for the truth against other human beings' Baptist against Church of Christ against Methodist against Lutherans or whomever. Or we think that it is the Church fighting the world, the saved against the unsaved and sometimes we actually even think of it as believers in Jesus Christ fighting against the demonic forces.

Scriptures make it very plain that we are not wrestling against flesh and blood so if we find that our operation in this warfare is somehow against human beings then we are off on the wrong foot. In effect, we are attending the *wrong* war. Now, when it says that, **"our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."** (Inserted - **Eph.6:12**) he is telling us that the conflict is not between humans and humans, but against humans who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and an *entire array of demonic forces* which are arranged in a particular form. Here is the arrangement: against rulers, against authorities, against powers of this dark world and against spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

Now if you notice, this is a pretty profound array against the believer. For example, he says that we struggle against "rulers". Imagine now, non-flesh and blood rulers. Who might these non-flesh and blood rulers be? Well, on one occasion, and this is recorded in the book of **Daniel**, Daniel was praying to God and God sent an answer to the prophet Daniel and he sent the answer via an archangel, the same archangel who came to bring the message of the birth of Christ, the archangel, Gabriel. The archangel, Gabriel, was held up in his mission to Daniel, bringing a message from God, he was held up for 21 human, earth days. Twenty-one days, a fortnight. (Inserted - actual verse- **"Then he continued, 'Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them. But the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me twenty-one days. Then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, because I was detained thee with the king of Persia.'" Daniel 10:12,13**)

Now, what opposition is capable of detaining an archangel, a mighty archangel on a mission from God for twenty-one days? This opposition was called the Prince of Persia. He was a demonic spirit who ruled *the region* of Persia. Now, there are mighty angels who oppose us and these are the rulers. Now, these rulers have authority and power' that's what he says, **"we wrestle not against flesh and blood,"** not against humans, but against rulers, authorities, powers. That means that these rulers who fight against us *have authority* and they have *power*. Now, you know what the distinction is between authority and power? It is somewhat the distinction between a badge and a gun. The gun represents power and the badge represents the authority to use power.

So these spirits have both authority and power against us. And finally it says, **"and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."** So, not only do these rulers have authority and power, they have armed forces. Now what does this sound like to you? Here are rulers who have

authority, power and armed forces to carry out their opposition to us. What does this sound like? This sounds like an entire governmental array, arrayed *against the believer*. So whereas we've been thinking of spiritual warfare as either Christians against the world, you know, believers against other humans who are non-believers *or* we've been thinking about it as believers in one sect, or one kind, against others who believe differently or sometimes we even believe that it is Christians against demons or demonic forces.

The fact remains that it is the *believer* against an entire, unseen governmental array complete with powerful rulers who have great, stupendous, awesome power against us *and* they have the authority to act against us, *often*, and they have armed forces, an entire dominion, if you like, with the means, the personnel to carry out their actions against us. And I will point out one other thing from Ephesians; their method of operating against the believer is via a "scheme", so he begins by saying, "**Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.**" (Inserted - **Eph. 6:11**) Now a scheme is not a very well disclosed plan. A scheme is a fraudulent effort, or at least it is an effort that is meant to take *full advantage of our blindness*.

So here is all of this power... and array... and personalities against us but they also have the *additional advantage* of employing schemes against us. *Wow! I think that it is time that we woke up to the fact that spiritual authority has a very, very different context than who gets to rule over whom in the local church setting.* But before we even indicate... what I am doing is that I am laying out the pieces that form a basis by which, and upon which, you can understand the context for the need for spiritual authority.

Now, let's look further afield. What is the war actually about? We've identified that spiritual warfare is not between human beings and any other human beings but against an entire array. But what is the war about, with an entire array of demonic forces arrayed against us in a governmental form, organized in this fashion, operating in the manner of schemes to take full advantage of us. Now, having said all of that, here is the next question...*what is the war about?* This is a critically important question. Usually, this is what we think that the war is about: we think that the war is about us going to foreign countries or in different locations within the cities where we live and trying to get people who are enslaved to sin to become believers. And then we think of the war as being partly about that and partly about this: to hold on and maintain our faith against all forms of temptations and trials that the enemy brings upon us; trials through our health, through our children, through our jobs and so on. And our job, then, is to hold out and maintain our faith in the face of this opposition either until we die or until Jesus comes, whichever is the first to occur in time.

Once again, we have a dramatic *failure of context*. The war is not about going in and getting somebody who is lost in sin. How is it that we are in a war? Ask yourself this question. *How is it that we are in a war with an enemy that has already been defeated? Is it not true that Jesus defeated Satan on the cross?* Do you believe that He did? Now if you believe that He did, what's this war about, if we talk about it in terms of going in and rescuing people who are under Satan's rule and domain? Or what is it about if we say that the point of the war is to hold on until Jesus comes? If this enemy has already been defeated then clearly the war is about something *other than this* because we are already fighting with a defeated enemy. So what is the war actually about?

Isn't it amazing that we don't seem to ask these very basic questions? The fundamental reason that there is a war is this: I want to show you from the book of **Ephesians**, just earlier up in **Ephesians**. This is

from **Ephesians chapter 3, at verse 9**. Paul speaks about the grace that was given to him to preach the good news to the Gentiles, and at verse 9 he says, "**and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. His intent** (that is, God's intent) **was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known** (known to whom?) **to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms**, (same enemy-rulers with authority, power and spiritual forces, armed forces, and they operate from the heavenly realms) **according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence. I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.**"(Inserted - Ephesians 3:9-13)

Wow! What is this war about? This passage tells us that God had a plan, which He hid in Himself for long ages past. This plan was initiated in Christ and this plan, having been initiated in Christ, was very successful. Jesus overcame the enemy. Now, it is the intent of God to show, to *show* what he has accomplished in Christ; to show it to those principalities and powers in the heavenly realms. In other words, God *fully accomplished* the defeat of Satan on the cross. God's intent is that now He will show that defeat to the principalities and powers in the heavenly realms and that He will show it through the church, that is that He will show it through us. Well... how did we get to be in the picture? Apart from the fact that we are saved, why are we in the picture because this war is between God and Satan? Christ is the primary actor because He defeated Satan on the cross but now the intent is *to show this defeat* to these same principalities and powers in the heavenly realms through us, the church.

How did we get in the picture? Why are we a part of this war and while we are about it, why is Satan so mad at us... what did we ever do? These are questions before the questions we ask, aren't they? They are the questions before the questions. Now, here is the answer, and this answer will take us up through the end of this program. We will review and reposition this discussion in another program. We will actually have several programs dedicated to the discussion of spiritual authority, and at least two programs dedicated to the context of the war because here is where we actually fall down. Most people are clueless about this because the church simply doesn't teach people, either because it doesn't know what the answers to these questions are; it basically assumes everybody knows.

God wanted to have heirs; God wanted to have children and He decided on who His heirs would be. His decision was that He would create a race of beings that were, by definition, vastly inferior to all of the creation that existed at the time. Now there is a *seen* creation and an *unseen* creation, that is, from the standpoint of human beings, there is a visible world, a physical world, and there is an invisible world. Before the visible world came to be, the invisible world *was*. In the invisible world were the creatures that we now know as angels. Now, these were *awesome* beings. They were created to actually be in the presence of God. These are spiritual beings because God is a spirit and the presence of God could be accessed by the spirit; indeed that's still true today.

Sometimes God will choose to manifest Himself in very limited ways in human creation, such as what He did when he came down on the mountain in the book of **Exodus**, the nineteenth and twentieth chapters, to meet with the Israelites. But typically, God, who is a spirit, His presence is accessed and lived within *by spiritual beings*, so the unseen creation, from the standpoint of man, is that creation of spiritual beings. They are created beings but they are spiritual beings, a *different form of creation*. These created beings, by comparison to human beings, are vastly superior to human

beings. For example, when one of these spiritual beings comes into the realm of time and space, the realm of humanity, these beings enjoy a huge advantage because they are invisible.

Now it seemed to *these* beings that God made a very incredibly poor choice because the obvious choice that God *should* have made, from their standpoint, would have been these beings that were quite suited, or so it would seem that they were quite suited, for the holy and high estate of being the sons of God. And these beings knew perfectly well that human beings would be so vastly inferior to them and therefore simply not suitable, much like how we would think about someone like our children would bring home as a potential husband or wife. We want these persons to be more or less suitable to what *we think* those standards should be, and the angels who sinned reasoned in this way. When God chose human beings, God chose to create a race of beings, a type of beings who were *so vastly inferior that they represented the furthest point to which God could go to show that God is love*. Human beings represent a greatly diminished choice because any choice that God would have made would be a choice to bring into being beings who would be the beneficiaries of the love of God

If you chose a being who was more or less suitable to be your heir how does that demonstrate your love? If you have someone who is your equal you are not loving them, you are making a logical, intelligent choice. You are making the choice that everybody would agree was the right choice. When God chose humans, that choice was predicated upon God's desire to demonstrate the *full extent* of his love. So rather than human beings being such great and wonderful creatures, we were created to show the extent to which God is capable of loving and *demonstrating that love*. Because when it comes to the matter of who will be *not just the people that your children will marry*, but who will be your children... your own children, *who will be your children...* who will be like you. If you are demonstrating it through love, and God chose such a wide difference between His way and our way, between Himself and us... This choice was to demonstrate the love of God.

The angels who sinned were *furious* at God's choice because it was *so obvious* to them, in their reasoning it was *so obvious that it was the wrong choice* because they reasoned the way humans would reason, as opposed to how God saw things, *that is* that His choice was to demonstrate His love. As a result, they thought that God had made a mistake and they thought that God was foolish. Since they reasoned that God had made a mistake, a certain number of them, all of the ones that reasoned that way, agreed to revolt against God, to overthrow him and to establish their own sense of what was right and appropriate as God. *The war then is God showing that He made the right choice when He chose humans*, and the war is, from the standpoint of the enemy, a decision to show that God made the wrong choice. That's why human beings who believe in Jesus Christ are in the crossfire because we are the heirs of God. We will continue a discussion of our context of spiritual authority the next time. It gets even better. I'm Sam Soleyn, and I'll see you then.

Scripture References:

Ephesians 6:10-13

Daniel 10:12,13

Ephesians 3:9-13