

Because of the Angels

Principles of Spiritual Protection

Dear Friend,

When we are born again as Christians into the kingdom of God, we discover that we are caught up in a war with an opposing spiritual kingdom—the kingdom of Satan. In this we have no option. Because the kingdom to which we belong is at war, we are part of the war. We discover, too, that we have various kinds of enemies, but the most powerful and the most formidable is a kingdom of rebellious angels in the heavenly places, under the rule of God’s archenemy, Satan.

Because we have such powerful enemies, we all need to avail ourselves of the protection which God has provided. In 1 Corinthians 11:10 Paul explains that Christian women need the protection of scriptural authority over them—symbolized by an appropriate covering on their head. But this is only one example of a principle that applies more generally to all Christians—both male and female. Every Christian needs the protection of being under appropriate, scriptural authority.

Under Authority

Luke 7:1–10 records how a Roman centurion sent some Jewish elders to Jesus to ask for the healing of his servant, who was at death’s door. Jesus offered to go and pray for the healing of the servant, but the centurion responded:

*“Lord, do not trouble Yourself, for I am not worthy that You should enter under my roof.
“Therefore I did not even think myself worthy to come to You. But say the word, and my servant will be healed.
“For I also am a man placed under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to one, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes; and to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.”*

By saying “I also am a man placed under authority,” the centurion recognized that the authority of Jesus in the spiritual realm was analogous to the authority which he had in the military realm as a centurion in the Roman army. In each case their authority was derived from submission to a higher source. For the centurion, the source was the Roman Emperor. For Jesus, the source was God the Father.

Note, too, that the centurion did not say—as many would have done—“I have authority,” but “I am *under* authority.” He affirmed a basic principle of Scripture: to *have* authority one must be *under* authority. Authority always flows *downwards*.

In Matthew 28:18, after His resurrection, Jesus said, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.” There are chains of authority that descend from God the Father through Jesus the Son into every situation in the universe. In 1 Corinthians 11:3 Paul explains that there is a descending chain of authority that is designed to work in every family on earth: “The head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.” Authority descends from God the Father through Jesus the Son to the husband and through the husband to the wife.



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But what is true in the home applies to every other department of life. It applies to all Christians. Every Christian needs the protection of being under an appropriate authority. *A Christian not under authority is an unprotected Christian.*

Authority In The Church

In Ephesians 1:22 Paul says that God gave Jesus to be “head over all things to the church.”

The Greek word for church is *ekklesia*. In its original meaning, *ekklesia* denoted a group of citizens in a city-state (such as Athens) who were the collective government of the city. When applied to Christians, it indicates that in His redemptive acts Jesus exercises His authority through the *church* which is His *ekklesia*.

To be under Christ’s authority, therefore, means to be rightly related to His church. We cannot claim the protection of Christ’s authority over us if we do not respect the authority which He has vested in His church.

This is clearly illustrated in the appointment of Paul as an apostle. In 1 Timothy 1:1 Paul calls himself “an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the commandment of God our Savior and the Lord Jesus Christ, our hope.” The ultimate authority of Paul’s apostleship was a decision of God the Father and God the Son made in heaven. But by definition an “apostle” is “one sent forth.” Paul’s apostleship did not become effective, therefore, until he was “sent forth” from a local church in Antioch.

In Acts 13:1 Paul (still called Saul) is listed as one of five men who are described as “prophets and teachers.” Then, in response to a direction from the Holy Spirit, the other three men laid hands on Barnabas and Saul and sent them forth. After that, both men are called *apostles* (see Acts 14:4, 14). The apostleship of Paul was determined in heaven, but it only became effective when it was acknowledged and acted upon by a local church on earth.

In more than fifty years of worldwide ministry, I have always sought to recognize and respect the authority of Christ operating through a local church. First Lydia and I—and then Ruth and I—always identified with a local congregation wherever our place of residence was. When we went out on our ministry journeys, we were officially sent out from a local church. When we returned, we gave a report to the church that sent us out. This was the practice established by Paul and Barnabas in Acts 13:3 and 14:26–27.

Some Christians are looking for a perfect church. I have to acknowledge that in more than fifty years I have never yet found such a church. But then I have to acknowledge also that if I ever should find such a church, I could not join it, because after I joined it would no longer be perfect! Meanwhile I am grateful for everything good I have received through various imperfect local churches.

Members of One Body

In Ephesians 1:22–23 Paul also gives a second picture of God’s people here on earth. He says “the church, which is His [Christ’s] *body*.”

In 1 Corinthians 12:27 Paul develops this theme: “Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.” He uses various examples from the physical body to emphasize that, as Christians, we are all interdependent and we all need each other.

The most complete and authoritative picture of the church as the body of Christ is given in Ephesians. It is most significant, therefore, that throughout this epistle Paul consistently speaks of Christians in the plural. He has virtually nothing to say to or about individual Christians.

For example, in Ephesians 1:3–12 Paul says the following: God has blessed *us*—He chose *us*—He predestined *us*—He made *us* accepted—*we* have redemption—He has made known to *us* the mystery of His will—*we* have obtained an inheritance—*we* should be to the praise of His glory.

A careful reading of the rest of the epistle will confirm that this is its message from beginning to end. There are no promises and no prayers for any individual. Only in the last six verses is there one brief exception: Paul closes by asking for special prayer for himself.

This focus on the collective body of Christ comes to its climax in Ephesians 6:10-18 where Paul speaks about our spiritual warfare. In verse 12 all the key words are in the plural—both those which refer to God’s people and those which refer to the opposing forces: *we* wrestle against *principalities—powers—rulers—hosts*. . .

The spiritual warfare thus depicted is not a conflict between individuals, but a vast war between opposing armies. There is no room here for “lone rangers” pursuing their individual goals. Victory will require controlled and concerted action by God’s people working together as members of one body. This will demand discipline and a readiness to submit to scriptural authority.

In the Midst Of Abounding Lawlessness

One feature of the close of the present age concerning which Jesus warned His disciples was an upsurge of *lawlessness*: “And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold.”¹ Jesus indicated that many Christians would be infected by this prevailing lawlessness and as a result their love for God and His people would grow cold.

The essence of lawlessness is a rejection of authority. This has become an obvious feature of our contemporary culture. There is a widespread contempt for any rules or regulations that interfere with each person’s individual liberty. People are very forceful in asserting their “rights,” yet very reluctant to acknowledge their corresponding responsibilities. At times, the consequence is a condition bordering on anarchy. As Christians, we have to guard ourselves against this kind of attitude. We are required to show our respect for legitimate secular authority.

But first and foremost, we must cultivate and maintain an attitude of respect and obedience toward God our Father and toward Jesus our Savior. This will be expressed in a corresponding attitude of respect and obedience towards God’s Word, the Scripture.

In John 14:23–24 Jesus said: “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word. . . . He who does not love Me does not keep My words.” We may make claims to love God and we may even pray long and eloquent prayers or preach long and eloquent sermons, but in the last resort we do not honor and obey God more than we honor and obey His Word. In the midst of prevailing lawlessness it would be appropriate for each of us to make a fresh affirmation of our unreserved and total submission to the authority of Scripture. “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God.”²

Our Personal Relationships

One main area in which our submission to God and His Word will be tested is that of our personal relationships. Jesus has laid down some very strict rules.

Concerning forgiving other people, for instance, He says in Mark 11:25–26: “And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses.”

Again, at the end of the pattern prayer which Jesus taught His disciples in Matthew 6:9–13, He added only one comment: “For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”

We always need to remember that forgiving another person is not an expression of emotion but an act of *self-discipline*. For this we can depend upon the Holy Spirit, who is a Spirit “of power, of love and of self-discipline.”³

Self-discipline is also required to produce the kind of attitude Paul describes in Ephesians 5:21: “submitting to one another in the fear of God.” This attitude of mutual submission is the key to right relationships both in the home and in the church.

Christians who refuse to forgive others or to submit to one another are in defiance of Scripture. Their root problem is *lawlessness*. They have opened themselves up to the spirit prevailing in the world around them. It will inevitably make them vulnerable to the evil angels who are their relentless enemies in the heavenly places.

Three Uncompromising Demands

We are confronted with three areas in which Scripture reveals clear, uncompromising demands of God, that apply to all Christians. The first is respect for Christ’s authority operating in and through each local church. The second is unqualified forgiveness for all who have wronged us or harmed us. The third is an attitude of submissiveness toward all our fellow Christians.

Obedience in these three areas provides Christians with a covering of scriptural authority that protects them from the attacks of satanic angels in the heavenly places. Conversely, disobedience inevitably makes Christians vulnerable to such attacks.

This letter is written out of a deep personal concern. On the basis of many years of experience in the body of Christ, I am convinced that the consequences of disobeying these three requirements of Scripture can be tragic in the extreme. I believe that it is one main reason why many fine, dedicated servants of the Lord have become casualties. I pray that God may grant us all a new respect for the authority of Christ vested in His Church and that He may renew in each of us an attitude of forgiveness and submissiveness.

In my next letter I will deal with the weapons of our warfare.

Yours in the Master’s service,



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¹ Matthew 24:12

² 2 Timothy 3:16

³ 2 Timothy 1:7 (NIV)