

# Understanding & Recognizing SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY

Dr. Steve McEvoy

The subject of authority in the Church can be a very confusing issue. Unless we have studied this and been taught by the Word of God, we will naturally and even unknowingly form our understanding from the world's demonstration of authority.

## The World's Authority

The authority that we see in the world is typically based solely upon a position granted to individuals. When leaders in a business context, the educational system, within government or any other sphere are granted a position, it gives them authority to function in that position within their sphere. Depending on the organization and its historical handling of authority, each one will demonstrate authority in a slightly different way.



There are definitely things to learn about authority as we look at it in the world. However, this lens or view falls far from the mark of authority that we see revealed in the Word of God.

## Spiritual Authority Introduced

As an introduction to this subject and its relationship to the Church and the Body of Christ, we first need to form a spiritual world view. Without this lens, we will only be able to address the issue of authority as we see it expressed in the world. Paul said,

*3. For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, 4. for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses.*

2 Corinthians 10:3-4

Paul also said,

*12. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.*

Ephesians 6:12

In both of these passages of Scripture, Paul is referring to an unseen realm. He is revealing that many things that happen in our lives or in our world have their source of origin in this unseen realm. We are told satan and his demonic army are a factor working to influence the mind of man and events that occur on the earth.

If we are going to address what authority is, then we must factor in this spiritual reality. Spiritual authority is much more than simply asking, "Who is the boss"? *In some way, spiritual authority must be effective in dealing with this unseen enemy and his influences upon the earth.*



Jesus taught us on this unseen realm as well. He said,

*8. Therefore do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need, before you ask Him.*

*9. Pray then in this way; 'Our Father who art in*

# Understanding & Recognizing SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY

-2-

*Heaven, Hallowed be Thy Name'.*

10. *'Thy Kingdom Come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven'.*

Matthew 6:8-10



It is interesting that Jesus begins by saying, **“do not be like them”**. He was referring to individuals who assumed that their many words and grand appearance would obtain the Father's attention. But their attempts

to impress others and their earthly accolades had absolutely no effect upon releasing the Kingdom of God into their midst.

Jesus went on to say, **“your Father knows what you need before you ask Him”**. This is a very significant point in understanding the spiritual realm. Jesus is introducing the fact that prayer is a key to access the Kingdom power and authority that resides in the unseen realm. The fact that our Heavenly Father knows our need is not all that is required for Him to move on our behalf. Though this is not a teaching on prayer, it is important to see that our prayers play a significant part in receiving from the Father and releasing the Kingdom of God. This truth will help open our understanding concerning spiritual authority.

Jesus proceeds to instruct us in how our prayer activates the Kingdom of God. He reveals that there is a human element that plays a part in the movement of God on the earth. In this instruction He said, **“Pray then in this way”**. Our pattern begins in recognizing that God our Father wants to enter our world and influence our lives. We begin with the instruction to **“hallow”** His name, which means to praise Him and acknowledge that He has first place in our lives. As believers, this is where spiritual authority has its point of beginning. Any authority that is given by God to man is to bring His Presence and His Kingdom on the earth.

Jesus continues with the phrases, **“Thy Kingdom Come”** and **“Thy will be done”**. In the Greek these

are commands and actually read as declarations. The word order in the Greek is, **“COME! Thy Kingdom”** and **“BE DONE! Thy will”**. Jesus is revealing that, through our prayer declaration, we all have spiritual authority and have the ability to influence the earth through this activation of the Kingdom of God.

My point in bringing this passage into this subject is because a careful study of God's Word reveals two things. One, it reveals that we have an enemy who has authority to move and influence affairs on the earth. Two, the Kingdom of God, or His presence and power, is also ready to move and affect affairs on the earth. In both cases, the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of darkness originate in the unseen realm and influence the earth from an unseen source.

If we are going to understand spiritual authority and its relationship to the Church and the Body of Christ, then we have to begin with understanding this unseen realm. Genuine God-given spiritual authority will affect or access this unseen realm. Spiritual authority will influence and release the authority of the Kingdom of God in our midst. Spiritual authority will also influence, dispel or disband the work of the enemy. This is the kind of authority that we want to understand and recognize.



## Positional Authority and the Church

Paul said to Timothy,

*“It is a trustworthy statement if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do.”*

1Timothy 3:1

# Understanding & Recognizing SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY

-3-



In this text, Paul used the word, **“overseer”**. He is referring to the position of leaders in the Church. This is the Greek word episkopos.

The word carries the meaning, *“a watchman, overseer, bishop or superintendent”*. As we moved into the organization of the Church, whether a local Church or a family of Churches, there was a need for an individual to be recognized as the **“overseer”**. These individuals have a unique function in their “oversight” leadership of the affairs of the local Church or larger family of churches. The **“overseer”** carries the responsibility to oversee the intended outcome of that Church’s vision and work. The unique gifts that dwell within these individuals will determine the ways that they express and fulfill their overseeing role.

For years I struggled in confusion in my role as **“overseer”** in my local Church. Traditionally, we have built a culture that doesn’t embrace all of the Ephesians five-fold ministry gifts. We have linked the **“overseer”** and the “pastor” in the same role. Personally, I struggled to break free from this mindset because, as an appointed **“overseer”** in my Church, I lacked the pastoral gifting. I was very strong in my apostolic/teaching gifting but definitely did not possess a pastoral ministry. Now, I can look back at years of confusion and the reasons are so simple. But in the journey, I lived in confusion and I sowed confusion into the lives of others as well. Because of my appointed calling to “oversee”, I felt culturally pressured to be a “pastor”. I tried to meet the expectations of myself and others but I consistently failed and personally suffered. There were times when, because I wasn’t gifted pastorally, I felt that I was mistaken in my call to “oversee”. In various ways, I would lay down my oversight and create more confusion and conflict.

I lived this roller coaster between being the **“overseer”** and not being the **“overseer”** because I didn’t understand spiritual authority. Based on traditional culture, my confusion said, “If I am called to oversee a Church, then I must be a

pastor”. I would try for a season and fail. Then I would reason, “well I must not be called to oversee because I don’t have the gift to pastor”. This caused me to stand up and then sit down again and again. Sadly, I hurt others along my journey of coming into a place of clarity.

The fact is there must be a single **“overseer”** over every work. Without this, confusion or disagreement will inevitably arise in the direction of the work. This can create a big challenge within the Church. On the one hand, we must embrace a single **“overseer”**. On the other hand, we must understand how spiritual authority is to manifest within the church. In their unique function, the **“overseers”** will watch and care for the spiritual health of the Church and lead the fulfillment of its vision. They possess the God-given authority to oversee the big picture. At the same time, the overseer function lacks authority in other areas needed to grow the church into the fullness that God intends.

While there must be one **“overseer”**, a diversity of authority must also be allowed to function within the Church.

## Diversity of Authority in the Church

Ephesians tells us that, when Jesus left the earth, He released five unique functions of His earthly ministry to His church. We are told what these functions are:



*11. And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers.*

*12. for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ.*

Ephesians 4:11-12

Each of these equipping gifts functions with a unique authority. Before I address the five gifts,



# Understanding & Recognizing SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY

-4-



notice that they all exist for the same purpose which is to “**equip the saints for**” their “**work of service (ministry)**”. In the context of this article, I simply want to point to the

fact that for every believer to fulfill God’s intended design and ministry calling for their lives, everyone needs to receive from the function of these five gifts.

I call these gifts ‘God’s dream team’. Why? Because they are designed to function differently yet are designed to serve the same purpose. Each gift in its unique function has the same mission, that is, to “**equip the saints**”. How each gift does this “**equipping**” will look different.

This is where my confusion arose as an overseer. I was appointed by God to oversee my Church and had the authority for this function. At the same time, I lacked the pastoral gifting and therefore lacked the authority to function in that gift. I had not been trained to recognize the authority to oversee the body as a whole and, at the same time, recognize the limited authority in my five-fold function.

I am grieved when I see leaders appointed by God to the overseer function who miss this just like I did. Along with the overseer’s authority to lead and oversee the big picture, the ongoing life of the Church also requires the expression of diverse authority of the other five gifts.

Some simple steps must be taken. First, overseers must settle that they have been appointed by God. Second, overseers must do a true examination of the gifts they possess because those specific gifts will determine how their authority will be expressed in the ongoing life of the Church. Third, overseers must make room for the unique authority of the other gifts to also be expressed in the Church.

## The Five Gifts and their Unique Authority

I want to explain this by briefly examining characteristics of each of the five gifts given by Jesus. Each gift possesses an authority from Jesus that manifests uniquely.

**APOSTLES:** This characteristic lays foundations. Apostles emphasize the advancement of the body into new areas, whether regionally, nationally or internationally. Apostles who have unique assignments will at times instantaneously dispel the presence and activity of the enemy.

**PROPHETS:** This characteristic calls people into alignment with the Kingdom of God. This can happen through a call to repentance, or through their unique ability to see and hear what the Spirit is saying in the present moment. Prophets often work with apostles in the foundation laying work of the Church.

**EVANGELISTS:** This characteristic emphasizes the lost and dying world. Evangelists often demonstrate the Kingdom presence with signs and wonders. Individuals with this gift are uniquely used by God to lead people into His Kingdom.

**PASTORS:** This characteristic guides, guards and cares for the sheep. Pastors emphasizes the community and family that the Body is called to be. Those with this gift will continuously work to protect people from straying from the flock.

**TEACHERS:** This characteristic makes plain the Word of God. Teachers explain the Word of God in such a way that people understand and gain revelation from its truth. Teachers have different teaching emphasis according to God’s gifting in their lives.



# Understanding & Recognizing SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY

-5-

In their individual and unique function, all of these five gifts have limitations. The apostle is pressing to advance into exciting new territory and to drive out the enemy. At the same time, the pastor sees sheep who are scattered and need to be part of a family and community. The evangelist is pressing to



reach lost people, while the teacher is yearning to see more of the Word taught. The prophet continuously desire to keep calling us back to what God is saying or doing in the present season.

This diversity, when not understood, can cause havoc in the Church. There are times when the emphasis of one gift can seem to be the complete opposite of the emphasis of another gift in the church. If this is not understood, great division can arise. It is absolutely important that the individuals who possess these gifts understand both the *nature* and the *diversity* of their gift.

The *nature* of each gift is so unique that every individual has to press in to clarify the genuine abilities that they have been given by Jesus. Honest assessment that includes the voice of others is essential in the development of a person's gift. To be truly effective, a person will fully use the gifts that they have been given and designed for, but they will recognize where they lack and be willing to make way for the other gifts.

The *diversity* of the gifts is so great that division can arise between individuals because the emphasis they bring comes from the different lens given by Jesus. For example, when all at the same time the evangelist wants to reach the lost, the apostle wants to take new territory, and the pastor wants to create community, a crisis can easily emerge. Each uniquely gifted individual must recognize the need for all the five gifts and learn to make way and give preference to each other.

When we add *spiritual authority* to the *nature* and the *diversity of the gifts*, we take it to a whole new level. When the wind of Spirit moves in the flow of a meeting or event, there could be discernment that a particular authority is required. For instance, there could be a recognizable corporate oppression. Typically the apostolic gift has authority to dispel it. Or, there could be an awareness that people are to be called into God's kingdom. Typically, the evangelist gift has authority to do this. Or, the need could be to create family. The pastoral gift has authority to call people to community.

This is equally true in both listening to and discerning what God is saying to the Church in its forward movement. For example, there will be a different lens of what is being heard when a pastor is leading than when an apostle is leading. The pastor will hear from the heart of God concerning family, gathering the sheep and creating community. The apostle will hear concerning advancing the body into new territory and engaging and driving out the influence of the enemy. Both are equally valid and both (along with the other five gifts) are needed to hear and contribute to what Jesus is saying to the Church.

Regardless of the position or title given to a person, the big question needs to be asked, "When so and so stands in their function, what authority manifests?" When I stood as overseer with an apostolic/teaching gift, I could try and try and try to pastor and create a family but never succeed. You could give me the title of pastor but nothing would change because there would be no Kingdom authority of the pastoral function imparted to me.



When this is not understood, leaders can easily try to fulfill a function for which they have not been given the spiritual authority. The individual can be driven to function by expectations, either self-imposed or imposed by others. When expectation

# Understanding & Recognizing SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY

-6-

drives what we do, the end result is that we miss the manifestation of the authority of the Kingdom of God in our midst.

## How is Authority Recognized?



To answer this question I need to take us back to the beginning of this article. We are consistently taught in the Word of God to be aware of and to effectively deal with the unseen realm. This is where the issue of authority has its greatest application. Ultimately, in the life of the Church and its impact upon our Earth, we want two things. First, we want more of the Kingdom of God to be revealed. Secondly, we want to see more dispelling of the hold the enemy has in the lives of people, communities, regions and even nations. This is where true authority will be measured and recognized.

Notice what Paul said about himself in his apostolic ministry,

*13. But we will not boast beyond our measure, but within the measure of the sphere which God apportioned to us as a measure, to reach even as far as you.*

2 Corinthians 10:14

Paul said concerning his own calling that he had a “**measure**” or something marked off by God that was “**apportioned**” to him. A measure is that which is used for measuring a determined extent or portion. It is also used to keep something within its proper perimeter. In his apostolic calling, Paul had a spiritual territory “**apportioned**” to him in which he was to function. Within this territory he possessed authority to release the Kingdom in powerful ways. However, he was limited to the measure that was given to him. He also had authority to dispel the enemy in specific ways.

In the next verse Paul said this powerful line. He said,

*14. For we are not overextending ourselves....*

2 Corinthians 10:14

Because Paul knew the measure and sphere of his calling, he did not overextend himself beyond the territory and function given by God. He stayed within his own authority doing what God gave him to do.

He then said,

*15. Not boasting beyond our measure, that is, in other men’s labors....*

2 Corinthians 10:15

Paul’s boasting was not bragging or arrogance. Rather, his boasting was a confidence that every time he did what God gifted him to do, God showed up and the enemy was pushed back. His Kingdom authority was directly tied to his Kingdom function. He was so keenly aware of this authority in his life that he knew also where his authority was not. Because of this, he would not attempt to boast about what someone else was assigned to do because he knew God had so diversely gifted people with His gifts and divine authority.



This is not how we have seen the Church operate nor is it how we have trained leadership. Traditionally, pastors are expected to fill many roles. In ignorance, they take upon themselves roles outside of their true gift and Kingdom authority. There is a lack of fruit evident in their ministry. Because they are outside the measure of their apportioned authority, the enemy prevails and many leaders just wear out.

# Understanding & Recognizing SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY

-7-



Years ago, the Holy Spirit spoke to me and revealed that part of my calling is to rescue leaders from the enemy. This assignment is part of my unique authority. It is no surprise that leader after leader has come to me and confided some area of need. In many cases, a leader or leadership couple have literally showed up at my door. I was instructed by the Holy Spirit once to declare debt cancellation over two pastoral couples. Within 3 days, both had their debts cancelled. On one occasion, I received instruction on a Wednesday morning to fly two days later to a far-away city. I had no direction other than to join a prayer meeting scheduled for that Friday evening. I had no knowledge of why I was to do this, nor did I have the financial ability to take the trip. That same morning, a man called who had been directed to provide me an airline ticket though he did not know why. Each of us did our part, and I was able to fly to that city. With leaving out immense detail, I ended up on a sidewalk laying hands on a pastor and warring over his life because of the unique gifts of the Holy Spirit which are in my life. I found out later the significance of that event. I have story after story of the ways that this assignment has manifested in my ministry.

The point is that the Father's intention is for all of us to recognize the perimeter of our individual authority and to grow more and more in its unique function. When we function in our God-given authority, His Kingdom presence shows up every time.

## The Role of the Overseer

In the local Church, overseers have a very important role. They steward and lead the vision of that Church. They carry a unique responsibility to oversee the ongoing development of the Body as a whole. If they have been appointed by God, then they possess the authority to hear from God for the big picture of the affairs of the Church.

However, every overseer will face the same challenge. They will be limited by their unique function and see the needs within the Church from this lens.

If the overseer is strong in **apostolic** gifts, their oversight will lean in the direction of advancing the Church into new territory and aggressively dispelling the enemy in their region and beyond.

If the overseer is strong in the **prophetic**, this overseer will lean on hearing and discerning the voice of God. The Church life will be built around being on the cutting edge of what God is doing or wants to do.

If the overseer is strong in **evangelistic** gifts, this overseer will put a strong emphasis on community impact. The lost will be a constant point of discussion, strategy and emphasis.

If the overseer is strong with **pastoral** gifts, then building a family and community will be dominant. Developing a variety of means to build this family will consistently be at the forefront of discussion.

If the overseer is strong with **teaching** gifts, then bible studies, seminars and others means of teaching the people will consistently dominate the life of the Body.

An overseer may possess any of these gifts and in any combination of strength. Therefore, each overseer will first bring their unique gift(s) into the gift mix within the life of the Church.

Are any of these wrong? No! In fact, they all are right because they all have come from Jesus. Also, all possess a unique authority tied to their functions.





# Understanding & Recognizing SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY

-8-



One of the greatest and most challenging roles of the overseer is to know when to objectively oversee the diversity of authority that is needed in the Church. While overseers

must be free to function in their authority, they do have a unique dominant and visible role. This is good when the gifts they possess are needed. It can present a challenge when the authority of other five-fold gifts is needed to bring a different aspect of Jesus into the Church.

We can recognize anyone because they possess a position or a title. However, the title means nothing to demons. It is also powerless to release the presence of God if the gift and its authority are not given by Him. This has confused many in the Church. We have attempted to submit to the authority of positions and titles given to leaders. By doing this, we have applied the world's system of authority and brought it into the church. While we should submit to the leaders over us, we want to truly submit to the recognizable Kingdom authority that has been given to individuals. This is the authority that releases the Kingdom of God and drives out the presence and activity of the enemy. When a genuinely called individual functions in this authority, the tangible release of Heaven is present every time, according to God's unique intention.

Because we have been so strong pastorally in the current history of the Church, there is a battle over embracing the authority of other members of the five-fold ministry team. Traditionally, the pastoral gifts most often are the voices that speak into the life and direction of the Body. But God intends for His voice to manifest through all the five gifts given to the Church. Without all five gifts bringing the authority of their lens, the Church remains limited in what it hears and receives from Jesus.

It is easy to see the apostolic/prophetic gifts as those who go "out there". However, we miss that these gifts are also portions of the eyes and voice

of Jesus that every Church needs "in here". When the overseer is appointed and clearly established in a local body, the diverse authority of all five gifts is waiting to be released to bring life in its fullness to the body.

As an apostolic leader, it is my responsibility to submit to the overseer of the church where I minister. In light of the fact that overseers will be in different places in spiritual understanding, submission to the overseer is always the first priority when releasing our individual function. Whatever the degree an overseer recognizes the authority and voice of all five gifts will determine the degree that these gifts (mine included) will function in their fullness. Will the greater fullness of Jesus potentially be missed? Most definitely! This is a significant reason why we want to pray for our leaders, and especially for those in positions of oversight. It is imperative that we don't sow division by giving in to the tactics of the enemy to divide us.

I believe that we are in an era where titles are going to give way to recognizable spiritual authority. Leaders, and the body as a whole, will recognize and make place for the ministry gifts that are needed at different times and settings.

Ask yourself the question, "Jesus, what are the unique perimeters of Your authority that You have given to me?" "Jesus, where do You want this authority to be used in the building of Your Body and in advancing the mission of Your Church?"

Ask the Holy Spirit to open your eyes to recognize the authority that He has given to those who are in your midst.

It is a new hour for the Church!





# Understanding & Recognizing SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY

-9-

Dr. Steve McEvoy has his doctorate in Leadership and Organizational Development.

- Through his apostolic teaching ministry, Steve assists leaders in the church in *“helping activate their people in fulfilling the calling of God on their lives”*.
- In the marketplace, he works alongside Government, Business and Education leaders and influences them in applying kingdom principles of leadership within their organizations. Steve *“assists marketplace leaders in creating a corporate ‘Who Am I Culture’”* in their current position of leadership.



To learn more about what Dr. Steve offers visit his websites at:

[www.stevemcevoyministries.org](http://www.stevemcevoyministries.org)



[www.whoamiculture.ca](http://www.whoamiculture.ca)

