

# (A Spiritual Leader) 10. Exercising Spiritual Authority

by Zac Poonen

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*A spiritual leader must exercise spiritual authority, relying on the Holy Spirit's power, rather than human strength or control, to lead and transform others.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 7:29, Luke 16:13, John 15:26, 1 Corinthians 5:5, 2 Corinthians 10:8, 1 Timothy 4:12

**Topics:** "Spiritual Authority", "Christian Leadership"

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## Description

Zac Poonen emphasizes the importance of ministering with spiritual authority, highlighting the difference between having knowledge and having the backing of the Holy Spirit in our ministry. He warns against controlling others through human ways such as money, music, or intellectual power, stressing the need for spiritual authority that comes from God alone. Poonen urges Christian leaders to lead with humility, casting people onto the Lord for their spiritual growth, and to focus on building the Body of Christ rather than their own empires, following the example of Paul's loving authority in the early church.

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## Transcript

A spiritual leader will minister with spiritual authority.

The multitudes were amazed at Jesus' preaching, because they saw a difference between the way He taught and the way the Pharisees had taught them for so many years. The Pharisees had a lot of knowledge. Jesus had even more knowledge than they had. But it was His authority that impressed His hearers, not His knowledge (Matt.7:29).

If we have knowledge but no spiritual authority in our ministry, we will be like the Pharisees. God backed up the words that Jesus spoke. This is what it means to speak with spiritual authority.

Jesus told His disciples in John 15:26, 27 that the Holy Spirit would bear witness along with them. This meant that whenever they preached, the Holy Spirit would back up what they said. That's certainly how I want my ministry to be at all times. As I bear witness to Jesus, the Holy Spirit must also bear witness to what I say. He must speak to the hearts of my listeners saying, "Listen to that. That's from God". Then I'll be speaking with Divine authority. But if I merely give a very accurate testimony about Jesus, and the Holy Spirit doesn't back up what I say, I won't be called a heretic, because my doctrines are all evangelical. But I will still be ministering death, and not life.

There are many ways in which we can exercise authority over people. There are human ways, religious ways and spiritual ways. And there's a lot of difference between these three. Jesus authority was not human or religious. He never spoke or acted like an earthly king or like the religious leaders of Israel. His authority was Divine and spiritual.

A good example of human authority would be the authority that film stars and rock musicians exercise. Look at the way people worship them and go crazy over them. People stand for hours in the rain and the sun to get a glimpse of them. They have great authority over people. They use their human abilities to rule over people's minds and emotions - and then get the people to pay them money too! This type of authority is found among many preachers in Christendom too. It is the power of the human soul and not of the Holy Spirit.

Another way to exercise human authority would be through money. The world is controlled today not by those who have weapons but by those who have money. Money is a very important factor in wars and in elections too. The business community in every country has to please the political leaders in order to thrive. And the political leaders in turn, have to please the business community in order to get money to get to power. So money has tremendous power. And this power is being used extensively in Christendom too. Money can certainly do a lot of good. But because money is powerful, it does a lot of damage too.

If Christian work anywhere is controlled by financial power, it can never be a spiritual work. Jesus placed money in direct opposition to God. He said that God and Mammon (material wealth) were the only two masters in the world competing for the attention of men (Lk.16:13).

The authority that a Christian leader has, through giving money to others is not spiritual authority. Both in the world and in Christendom, it is the one who has the money who pulls the strings. People will bow down to anyone who has money. They will agree to anything you say and do everything you tell them to, if only you pay them! This is true in secular companies and in Christian organisations as well.

Almost every pastor is controlled by the board members of his church, because the board determines his salary. Such a pastor dare not say anything that will offend those board-members! Churches usually have their richest men on their boards. And these rich men are usually the ones who need to be rebuked the most. But how can a pastor rebuke them if his mouth is full of the money they have stuffed into it? He can't. So he has to tickle those rich men's ears and say exactly what they want to hear. If he displeases them, they won't give him his annual increment and that'll be enough to make him change. He'll think of his poor family that will have to struggle. He'll have to vacate his convenient pastoral house and he'll have to take his children out of that good school. Such thoughts will make him quickly submit to the board and toe the official line quietly! This is the main reason why we have hardly any prophets in India today. Almost every preacher has fallen a prey to the lure of money. How can such preachers ever exercise spiritual authority?

I want to say to those of you brothers who are in authority over others, that if you control anyone through money, what you are exercising will not be spiritual authority.

Jesus never controlled anyone through money. Not one of His disciples followed Him for money, for He had no wealth to give them. He offered them no retirement benefits in this world, but only tribulation and suffering. He taught them to seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness first and told them that the material things they needed (the bare minimum of food and clothing) would be added to them by their Heavenly Father.

Jesus sent out His apostles to evangelize the world, without any money so that those apostles would never be able to draw anyone (or control anyone) through money. Yet they did a much better job of evangelizing the then-known world than we have done with all our money and our gadgets and our many conferences on evangelism!

Financial power is something that we have to be very careful about in God's work, for it can rob us of spiritual authority.

Music power is another power that we have to beware of. Rock music can sway people to the point where they even commit suicide. There are many forms of power like that in the world today. We have to be careful that we don't mistake these for spiritual power. If we are unable to distinguish between spiritual power and soul-power, it will be easy to deceive ourselves about the success of our ministry.

With some of us, the power we're using may not be money-power or music-power but intellectual power. That too is the power of the soul - and that is very different from having spiritual authority. We can try and impress people with our qualifications in order to get them to listen to us! Maybe you're so theologically qualified that you can explain the root meanings of the Greek words that Peter used in his epistles - meanings that Peter himself did not know!

But a spiritual man will teach the Bible in an entirely different way - and the results will be different too. The Bible can be taught by the power of the human intellect or by the power of the Holy Spirit. And there is a vast difference between these two ways of teaching - and their results.

One of the greatest needs in the church today is for a demonstration of spiritual authority in the ministry of its leaders. Spiritual authority is very different from religious authority. What we commonly see in Christendom today is religious authority, where strong leaders dominate their flock.

A local church was never meant by God to be run as a democracy where everybody is given a vote to choose its leader. Neither did God intend it to be run as a dictatorship by a strong leader who rules the poor believers and makes them bow down and obey him.

It's easy, when we preach God's word to have power over people. People appreciate our ministry because it helps them. Then it becomes easy for us to become like little gods to our admirers. We must always live in fear of that. We must never take advantage of the authority we have over

others through our gift. We must never try to run other people's lives. If we find them clinging to us, we must gently cast them on the Lord - for their own good and their spiritual growth. Our calling is to build the Body of Christ and not our own little empires. This is the way of spiritual

authority.

Paul had such spiritual authority given him by God that he could even deliver a person in the church at Corinth to Satan for the destruction of his flesh so that the man could be saved (1 Cor.5:5). The man was saved later and came back to the church in repentance. Paul was the founding father of that church and such fathers have a spiritual authority that no-one else can exercise. Those apostles had Divine authority given them by the Lord to build people up. This is the type of loving authority that we need too. We see many manifestations of such spiritual authority in the life of the apostle Paul, that are a tremendous challenge to us.

When the disciples observed Jesus for 3½ years, they saw that He was totally different from the leaders and preachers they had seen in their synagogues. They had never met anyone who lived like Him or who spoke like Him. He had authority in His life and in His ministry. Until they met Jesus, they had thought that spiritual ministry was what they had seen in their priests and their bishops in the synagogues. And if they had never met Jesus, they would have made those priests and bishops their role-models. But now they had a new role Model they could follow.

What our young people need are better role-models to follow. It is our responsibility to be those role-models, as men with spiritual authority.

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