

AUTHORITY



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AUTHORITY
THE LEADER'S CALL
TO SERVE
JAMIE MUNSON

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by Jamie Munson

For more insight on life, leadership, and legacy, visit www.jamiemunson.com

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First edition. Sample version.

IN AND UNDER AUTHORITY

All authority comes from God.¹ All authority belongs to Jesus.² But God puts us in and under authority with relation to one another in various ways.³ Each of us has heard of or experienced authority figures abusing, misusing, or neglecting the responsibilities that come from their power. We've also seen plenty of people rebel against the authority in their lives.

The reality is, each of us will have some measure of authority at some point in our lives. It should be our goal to faithfully steward this authority, but it can be difficult to know what that looks like.

THIS BOOK IS FOR YOU...

...if you are **in authority**. God wants you to use your authority for his glory and for the good of others, whether that means your family, your company, or the Church. He wants you to serve him by serving those he has placed under your care, even when it is difficult.

...if you are **under authority**. God wants you to be humble in submission to authority, whether that means your parents, your boss, or your pastor. He wants you to serve him by serving those he has placed over you, even when it is difficult.

I laid the book out to have a narrowing focus, beginning with broader concepts of authority in the first section (Understanding Authority). The second section (When Sinners Play Trinity) is a combination of practical and theoretical perspectives on authority and leadership. The third section is almost entirely application; it is titled "How We Interact With Authority."

If you take nothing else away from this book, remember this: leaders are called to be both **in and under authority**.

"For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

- Jesus (Mark 10:45)

¹ Romans 13:1 "For there is no authority except from God..."

² Matthew 28:18 "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."

³ Romans 13:1 "...those [authorities] that exist have been instituted by God."



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AUTHORITY WITHOUT BAGGAGE

Many of us carry emotional baggage that we received at a very young age from authority figures. Sadly, more kids are raised and influenced by their parents' absence than they are by their parents' presence. Maybe they never knew their father, or their parents are divorced, or they're too busy spending their time on "more important" things like work or hobbies. Few of us grew up with a family that demonstrated the blessing of godly leadership.

Influenced by our sin and the sin around us, it can be difficult to understand undistorted authority or willing submission. The only way we are able to do this is through observing the Trinity. We have to pick up the baggage from our bad experiences and lay it down in the presence of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Instead of fixating on what we dislike or hate about authority, we examine their interactions and find what we can love about authority. Within the relationship of the Godhead, we can see authority marked by what it should be: humility, love, and generosity.

AUTHORITY MARKED BY HUMILITY

Humility may be the most profound aspect of God's divine leadership. The infinitely powerful God of the universe leads by humbly serving his own creation (Matt. 20:28). Jesus laid aside his rightful authority and "made himself nothing" (Phil. 2:7). In the incarnation, he lived amidst a creation that rejected him (Is. 53:3; John 1:11), and then the King of the Universe died as the substitutionary sacrifice for human sin.

God the Father is also humble: he *"has in the Trinitarian order the place of highest authority, the place of highest honor, yet he chooses to do his work in many cases through the Son and through the Spirit rather than unilaterally."*⁹ He shares—or delegates, if you will—much of his work to Jesus and the Holy Spirit. And God the Holy Spirit is amazingly content to play a supporting role in the gospel story, *"mediating Christ's presence to believers,"* as J.I. Packer writes.¹⁰ Every member of the Trinity possesses power beyond belief, and yet every member of the Trinity uses his power to serve.

AUTHORITY MARKED BY LOVE

The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit love each other perfectly. The Trinity not only proves that perfect love can exist within an authority structure, but also that love is actually expressed through the authority structure. *"I do as the Father has commanded me,"* Jesus said, *"so that the world may know that I love the Father"* (John 14:31). Jesus obeys the Father, he submits to his will, and Jesus calls this love. Jesus gives up his individual rights in order to obey someone else's directives.

⁹ Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*, 44.

¹⁰ J.I. Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit*, 49.



This is completely countercultural. (Isn't Jesus free to make his own decisions? That must've been such a drag, working 24/7 for three straight years). Rather than considering how the demands of the Father might interfere with his own agenda, Jesus says that his obedience not only shows love for the Father but also brings fullness of joy (John 15:9–10). Jesus knows that God is love, and therefore trusts that the Father's commands are good. John 14 depicts this loving interdependence of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Their submission is not demeaning, nor does it belittle their love for each other. They work together in a way that is awe-inspiring and should give us hope for our communities.

AUTHORITY MARKED BY GENEROSITY

How many people in authority in your life would you describe as generous? When I was leaving my paid position at Mars Hill Church in 2011, a pastor of another church called me. He didn't know me extremely well, but he and his family gave my family a vacation. No strings attached.

It says a lot about someone in authority when they demonstrate generosity. The generosity within the Trinity overflows throughout creation. God's unmerited favor is found everywhere, in staggering proportions. God made the world good; we sinned. Jesus died to atone for our sin, and God is creating a better, sinless, eternal world for us to enjoy. Rather than the condemnation we deserve, *"we have all received grace upon grace"* (John 1:16).

The Son is a gift from the Father (John 3:16; 1 John 4:10). The Spirit is a gift from the Father (Acts 1:4; 2:33). *"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father"* (James 1:17). Everything bad comes from our sin and rebellion, while everything good comes from God. Nothing but gratitude and worship are due to God for his good and perfect gifts. Rather than questioning the wisdom of his authority, God's generosity should move our hearts to complete trust and surrender (Romans 8:31–32).

AUTHORITY FOR THE GLORY OF GOD

The humility, love, and generosity that flow through God's authority are not arbitrary expressions of benevolence, or capricious acts of manipulation to win our allegiance. Instead, the authority of God magnifies the glory of God.

Self-glory is a problem in human authority, as with the leader who establishes himself as some sort of demigod. For a perfect being, however, who exists as the very definition of goodness, love, and truth, God's glory represents the triumph of his perfect kingdom. John Piper writes, *"The deepest longing of the human heart and the deepest meaning of heaven and earth are summed up in this: the glory of God. The universe was made to show it, and we were made to see it and savor it."*¹¹

¹¹ John Piper, *Seeing and Savoring Jesus Christ* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2004), 13.



Even in glorifying himself, however, the humility, love, and generosity of God are evident. The Spirit glorifies the Father and the Son, and the Son glorifies the Father. God the Father is the ultimate destination of all glory, and justifiably receives it all. Yet remarkably he shares it, by receiving the glory due him through the Son.

All three Persons of the Trinity are filled with joy at the giving and receiving of glory from each other. Their mission is mutual glory for their own joy and the joy of mankind, not personal enrichment. They suffer no envy or jealousy. Each receives glory, and each shares it readily with the others. God is glorious.

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<i>Type of Authority</i>	<i>Positive Use</i>	<i>Negative Use</i>
<i>Spiritual Leadership</i>	Leading church members and equipping them for ministry.	Extending authority to matters outside the church.
<i>Prophetic</i>	Casting vision and teaching rooted in Scripture.	Not having vision in check with the authority of Scripture.
<i>Founder</i>	Making sure the original DNA of the organization is intact.	Not empowering other leaders.
<i>Tenured</i>	Has a historic perspective on what might and might not work.	Feeling entitled based on past track record instead of current effectiveness.
<i>Legal-governing</i>	Keeping other leaders accountable.	Not connected with day-to-day operations.
<i>Relational</i>	Influencing people to support the organization's mission.	Using influence to push people in a negative direction.
<i>Organizational-position</i>	Overseeing projects under other leaders to run the organization efficiently.	When ill-equipped: becoming overburdened and not asking for help when needed.
<i>Voting</i>	When well-informed: making good decisions for the organization.	When ill-informed: becoming a roadblock to progress and change.
<i>Ownership</i>	Making decisions for the health of the organization.	Growing too cautious and holding up progress.
<i>Results</i>	Becoming a rock star at executing projects and gaining respect of peers.	When not promoted accordingly: gaining influence that disrupts organizational structures.
<i>Expert</i>	Having a lot of practical experience to attack today's problems.	Getting bogged down in the past; not seeing that past solutions aren't always presently needed.
<i>Academic</i>	Supplying good theoretical knowledge for leaders on the ground.	Trusting theory over practice.

With a clear understanding of where we are in authority and where we are under it, we can begin to grasp how God wants us to interact with authority. *What types of authority do you possess? And how does your authority vary depending on the context?*



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MOVING FORWARD AS TRINITARIAN LEADERS

Leadership isn't a particularly revolutionary topic to write on. Like Rick Warren implies in his tweet I quoted earlier, there is no shortage of books on leadership. But if we pay attention to its eternal foundation, we have much to learn and apply—enough to fill a lifetime.

Each of us has authority in some area of life. If it isn't obvious to you where you have authority, just wait: you will have it someday. Or perhaps you had a measure of authority in the past.

It matters how we handle our authority. It matters how we respond to authority. To do either of these in a way that honors God, we must understand authority. We need to recognize that God gives authority, and that good authority stems from his interactions within in the Trinity.

In closing, here are a few questions to ask yourself. Examine your heart. We all have a long, long way to go towards godly leadership.

- *How do you handle authority? How do you lead? What motivates you in situations where you have authoritative decisions to make?*
- *What can you learn from the Trinity, and how could you learn to lead with humility, love, and generosity?*
- *When conflict arises with those in or under you in authority, do you seek to win? Or do you strive to wrestle through what is best for your organization?*
- *How can you respond in a more godly manner to authority?*
- *How can you be more like Jesus as a servant leader?*



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