

NEIGHBORHOOD CHURCH OF CHICO

# Position Statement on Healing and the Believer's Authority in Christ

Revision 1.0 – January 2012

## Introduction

The Triune God, in His vast wisdom and love, created our universe to be a place in which multiple wills influence its course of events. He did not create a cosmos responsive to His will alone, but one in which other rational beings – human and angelic – would determine what happens and how. Such volitional pluralism, or freewill agency, is a hallmark of our world and the basis for the kind of collaboration and trust He intended.

This collaborative arrangement reflects God's very nature. As a plurality of Persons – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – united in essence and purpose, God is inherently communal. Each Person of the Trinity cooperates with, and participates in, the actions of the others. It is no surprise, then, that His creation would express this communal instinct, and that He would choose to give other beings the privilege and responsibility of exercising significant influence over the rest of the created order.

While the angelic and human rebellions against God temporarily spoiled God's plan for harmonious collaborative dominion, God did not abandon His original strategy. Instead, in the Person of Christ, God took every step necessary to reverse the effects of these revolts and provide, once again, for the orderly and effective co-regency of the earth through unfallen angels, redeemed humans, and direct divine action.

This paper examines the nature of the authority we Christians have been given and sets parameters for the exercise of that authority at Neighborhood Church of Chico. Because this is such a critical subject and has been the focus of much debate over the years, it is important we be explicit about what Neighborhood Church teaches and practices.

We do not wish to be contentious. While this paper reflects what we believe to be the most satisfying explanation of Scripture's teaching on these subjects, we acknowledge there are other, very different, interpretations of the Biblical material. This paper represents our best effort to wrestle with the Scriptural narrative in an exegetically responsible way. It is our hope these clarifications will help those who attend Neighborhood Church to understand why we believe and practice what we do.

Equally important, we hope these guidelines will help liberate God's people to use their God-ordained rights and empowerments to minister in this broken world and help reestablish God's rule!

## Human Authority: Lost and Found

1. Humankind was originally given dominion by God over the earth (Genesis 1:26-27; Psalm 8:4-8). Our original mandate was to "subdue" the earth and "rule over" its varied life forms (Genesis 1:28; Ps 8:6-8). In this way, we were to serve as God's agents or representatives on earth, exercising his authority with loving concern and wise compassion over his creation, as His image bearers.
2. While we cannot know with any degree of certainty, it is plausible that, in Eden, Adam and Eve possessed similar kinds of powers Christ displayed during his earthly ministry, including authority over natural forces and the power to heal.<sup>1</sup> In this pre-fallen world, our first parents would have enjoyed an unparalleled cooperation with natural forces and would likely, as God's vice-regents, have exerted an unchallenged authority concerning their operation and their use for righteous purposes.<sup>2</sup>
3. When Adam and Eve listened to the serpent and obeyed Satan rather than God, they abdicated their (and our) authority to Satan (Luke 4:6), who became the "ruler of this world" (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; 2 Cor 4:4) and the one to whom humankind subsequently became enslaved (2 Corinthians 4:4; Ephesians 2:2; 1 John 5:19; Rev 12:10; Heb 2:14-15).
4. Christ, the second Person of the holy Trinity, came to earth as the "last Adam" to succeed where the first Adam failed and reassert human authority and dominion over the earth (Rom 5:12-19; 1 Cor 15:45; 2 Cor 5:14-21). By assuming human flesh and living a life of perfect righteousness and submission to the Father, Christ, as a true man, "won back" humanity's right to co-reign over the earth on God's behalf. In doing so, Christ was able to "destroy the devil's work" (1 John 3:8; cf. Heb 2:14). Through his death and resurrection, he disarmed and condemned Satan (John 16:11; Colossians 2:15), figuratively crushing his head

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<sup>1</sup> Natural forces might include weather, seismic and volcanic activity, and other potentially harmful phenomena. Even though there was, evidently, no disease in Eden, injuries of various sorts would have been a possibility and would require healing, since the laws of physics were presumably the same as those in existence today.

<sup>2</sup> This is admittedly speculative but is a reasonable inference from the biblical material. What is incontestable is that Adam and Eve were given dominion over the earth with adequate means to carry out that mandate.

(Genesis 3:15), and – upon ascending to heaven - took his seat at the right hand of the Father, “the highest place,” “far above” every earthly and angelic authority (Ephesians 1:20-21; Phil 2:9; 1 Pet 3:22). As a result, “all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to [Him]” (Matt 28:18; cf. Jn 3:35; 5:22, 27; 17:2). So, right now in the council of the Godhead sits a man, the new head of the human race, the God-man, Jesus Christ.<sup>3</sup> This man reestablished the right of humans to rule over the earth on God’s behalf. Consequently, we will one day judge angels (1 Cor 6:3) and, in the eschaton, reign with Christ on a renewed earth (Rev 3:21; 5:10).

5. While He was on earth, Jesus lived a fully human life, so as to completely identify with human weakness and suffering as a sympathetic high priest (Heb 2:10-18). Having “made Himself nothing” (Phil 2:7), He did not call upon his divine power to effect miracles. Rather, His supernatural lifestyle was attributable to His entire submission to the Father and reliance on the Holy Spirit.<sup>4</sup> In this way, He modeled for us what authentic Christian living looks like. Through the power of the Spirit, He exerted His authority over Satan, disease, death, and natural forces as proof that God’s kingdom – the range of His effective will - had come to earth (Mt 12:28; Lk 11:20). In this way, He made it possible for humanity to once again co-reign over the earth by God’s power with His authority and as His representatives. Christ’s advent inaugurated or began the restoration of God’s earthly kingdom. As a result, God’s rule is here now; it’s real, but it is invisible and incomplete. Christ’s second advent or *Parousia* will consummate the restoration of God’s earthly kingdom, when His rule will be made visible to all and His righteous will shall be actualized in all things (Mk 13:26; Eph 1:9-10; Rev 21:1-4).
6. In the meantime, we live in the eschatological “in-between time” and experience the “already, but not yet” tension inherent in any process that has begun but is not yet complete. We are in the “last days,” fighting against a fatally-wounded but still active enemy, who exerts his limited power to “steal, kill, and destroy” God’s good creation and seeks to “sift as wheat” God’s people, prowling about “as a

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<sup>3</sup> Christ is a theandric Being (from the Greek *theos* = ‘God’ and *anthropos* = ‘man’), the only such being, ever, in the entire universe. Although He is fully God, retaining all the rights, privileges, and attributes of deity, He is also truly man, these two natures residing within His one person “without confusion, without change, without division, without separation” (Definition of Chalcedon, AD 451) in one indissoluble hypostatic union (from *hypostasis* = ‘person’). It was in His capacity as man that He “won back” humanity’s right to exercise power and authority over the earth, recapitulating Adam’s role as head of the human race and reestablishing forever our place of honor, authority, and power as God’s earthly regents (Rom 5:12, 18; 2 Cor 5:14, 17-21; Rev 5:9-10).

<sup>4</sup> Jesus was anointed by the Spirit at His baptism (see Mt 3:13-17, par.), just as we receive power when we are baptized in (or “with”, “by”, “into”) God’s Spirit at our conversion and filled through successive fillings. Examples of Jesus’ submission to the Father and reliance on the Spirit fill the Gospel accounts (e.g., Lk 4:14, 18-19; 5:17; Jn 8:28, 38, et al.)

roaring lion, waiting for someone to devour” (1 Tim 4:1; 2 Tim 3:11; John 10:10; Lk 22:31; 1 Pet 5:8-9).<sup>5</sup> He has been defeated and judged, and his doom is certain, but he still has power to do mischief (Eph 6:11; cf. Rev 12:9-12). So, our job is to resolutely “stand” against him and use God’s weapons to counter Satan’s malicious works and advance God’s kingdom (2 Cor 10:4-6; Eph 6.10; Jas 5:8).

7. By virtue of our union with Christ (John 15:1-5; 17:20-26; 1 Cor 6:16), we are, at the present time and in a very real sense, seated with Him in that place of honor and authority over Satan and all his forces (Ephesians 2:6; cf. Col 2:9-10). Repeatedly, the New Testament assures us we are “in Christ” and He is “in us.” In other words, our union with Him is not merely theoretical or positional, but actual and organic. Christ and His people share the same body, of which He is the head and we are its members (Rom 12:4-5; 1 Cor 12:12-27). The implications of this are vast. It means that wherever Christ is, we are. And wherever we are, Christ is. By virtue of the Holy Spirit’s regenerative work, we now share His nature (Eph 4:24; 1 Jn 3:7-9).<sup>6</sup> His Spirit is in us (Gal 4:6). We carry His presence, His authority, His power wherever we go (Matt 28:18-20).
8. To summarize: Every Christian has, by virtue of his/her union with Christ, both the *authority* and *power* required to exercise dominion over the earth, influence natural and supernatural forces, and extend God’s kingdom as God’s co-regent. Accessing that authority and power is the Christian’s individual responsibility and requires a habituated pattern of obedient faith, intimate trust, and holy living to exercise God’s power on a consistent basis.

Our *authority* (Greek *exousia*) is our legal right to rule on God’s behalf. Christ won back this right through His life, death, resurrection, ascension, and present session at the Father’s right hand. It is this authority that gives us the legal right to cast out demons, heal the sick, raise the dead, and perform other miracles (e.g., Mt 10:1, 7-8). Our authority is delegated to us by Christ, who has unlimited authority over all creation (John 13:2; 20:21; Matt 28:18-20). Our authority is actualized

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<sup>5</sup> A significant change took place through the Christ Event (the incarnation, life, death, resurrection, ascension, and session [or ‘seating’ at the Father’s right hand] of Christ). Through this series of discrete historical occurrences, Satan’s power became severely restricted. Once dominant over humankind, he is now subject to the new head of the human race, Jesus Christ, who ascended to the place of highest authority over him. Thus, Satan’s wings are clipped. Yet he is still powerful, and he and his minions exert their power continually over natural forces, non-Christians, governments and cultural institutions and Christians who are ignorant of their authority in Christ. He is, therefore, still called the ‘prince’ of this world (e.g., Jn 12:31; 14:30; 16:11).

<sup>6</sup> We share Christ’s nature insofar as we have been “born from above,” have God’s “seed” in us, and, therefore, “participate in the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4). We are not, nor ever will be, God, however. There is, rather, an unbridgeable ontological gulf between the infinite and transcendent Creator and all His creatures.

when, having been baptized with God's Holy Spirit upon our conversion and filled through subsequent fillings, we exert His power over natural and supernatural forces to accomplish His will (e.g., Acts 1:8; 2:1-19; 4:31).

Our *power* (Greek *dunamis*) is the physical and spiritual ability to carry out our legal rights. Our power comes from the Holy Spirit who lives in us. It is this same power Jesus used when doing His miracles during His earthly ministry. To the extent that we live in obedient submission to God, follow His promptings, and rely on the Holy Spirit, we will experience this power working through us for the good of others.

It is important to note that our authority and power give us the ability to actually *do* miraculous works, not merely ask the Lord to do them. This is a critical distinction. A careful examination of Christ's miracles reveals that He did not ask the Father to do them; rather, He commanded they be done, whether they involved healing sickness, exorcising demons, or exerting power over natural forces (e.g., Mk 1:23-26; 40-42;). The same is true of the disciples as recorded in the book of Acts (e.g., Acts 3:1-8; 9:33-34; 14:8-10; 16:16-18, et al).<sup>7</sup>

So, as we serve God, we can be entirely confident of several things: 1) We have God's permission to use our authority to counter the enemy's schemes, proclaim the gospel, heal the sick, raise the dead, and do other miracles. In fact, He expects us to use this authority! 2) our authority exceeds that of the enemy, for it derives from Christ's authority, which is higher than any other, 3) we possess all the power we need to accomplish God's will as we help extend His kingdom.

## Exercising our Authority in Christ

1. Jesus modeled how we are to live and minister. Following His baptism, Jesus preached the gospel and exercised God's power as dual aspects of His singular redemptive work in a seamless and complimentary way (e.g., Mt 4:23). He did not just preach: He cast out demons, healed the sick, raised the dead, and

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<sup>7</sup>This is not to suggest, of course, that prayer is unimportant or unrelated to our use of supernatural authority. In fact, just the opposite is true. All our authority and power flow out of a vibrant, interactive engagement with the Lord through continual prayer and fellowship (cf. John 15:1-8). And there are particular challenges that we face in the spiritual realm that require extraordinary prayer and fasting (see, for example, the healing of the epileptic boy in Mk 9:25-29 and Peter's reviving of Dorcas in Acts 9:40). What it does suggest, however, is that the normative pattern of supernatural ministry for Christ and His disciples was to command healing, deliverance, and other miracles on the authority given them by the Father, rather than appeal to the Father to undertake these miracles on their behalf.

- performed other miracles as an essential, indispensable part of His ministry of salvation.<sup>8</sup>
2. During His lifetime, Jesus mentored His disciples in ministry. He gave them authority to do the same supernatural ministry He exercised (Mt 10:1,7-8; Mk 3:14-15; 6:7,13; 16:17-18; Lk 9:1-2; 10:1-12,17). They, too, were to do miracles as part of their mission. Prior to His death, Jesus prophesied they would do even greater works than He (Jn 14:12), by virtue of the fact that He was returning to the Father and would pour out His Spirit on them to regenerate and indwell them, incorporate them into His body (the Church), and empower them to live supernatural lives (Lk 24:49, et al).
  3. Therefore, to proclaim the gospel only, unaccompanied by signs and wonders, is to obey just half of what Christ modeled and commanded. It results in a diminished, comparatively powerless Christianity (cf. 2 Tim 3:5), and reduces “salvation” to a mere cognitive apprehension of facts, without its holistic, pneumatic, and cosmic dimensions.<sup>9</sup>

## Aspects of Our Authority

1. The authority that Christ delegates to His people is vast and multifaceted. In Col 2:9, the Apostle Paul informs his readers: “For in Christ, all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority.” Similarly, the Apostle Peter notes in 2 Peter 1:3 that “His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness.” So the believer is complete in Christ and fully equipped, through His Spirit, to successfully live and minister on His behalf.
2. Speaking generally, our authority empowers us to “re-present” Him or “image” Him to the world. We are His ambassadors (2 Cor 5:20). In fact, so closely are we

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<sup>8</sup>The miracles Christ did were neither gratuitous nor indiscriminate (in fact, He specifically refrained from doing miracles “on demand” [Lk 23:6-9; Jn 6:30-40]). His miracles were, rather, proof that the “finger of God” (Mt 12:28; Lk 11:20) was at work in His ministry for the benefit of those whose hearts were spiritually receptive. The Apostle John points out they were “signs,” validating Christ’s divine authority (John 2:1-11, 4:46-51, 5:1-9, 6:1-14, 6:16-21, 9:1-7, 11:1-46; cf. Heb 2:4). They were also tangible expressions of the will of our compassionate and good God (Mk 5:18-19). These demonstrations of God’s kingdom were thus necessary accompaniments to the preaching of the kingdom.

<sup>9</sup>Salvation (Greek *soteria*) in scripture is comprehensive in scope, implying healing, rescuing, and a restoration of wholeness or integrity. Thus it includes the reconstitution of God’s *shalom* (peace, health, wholeness, prosperity) to every dimension of the human person – physical, mental, emotional, relational, volitional – and to the whole of created reality, extending to all the cosmos (cf. Rev 21:1).

identified with our Lord that He tells us, in Luke 10:16, “He who listens to you listens to me; he who rejects you rejects me.” (cf. Mt 10:42).<sup>10</sup> Every Christian is, in effect, an extension of Him, just as grape branches are extensions of the vine, sustained by the same life-giving nutrients that nurture the vine and produce visible fruit on the branches (John 15:1-8).

3. It is in this capacity then, as “extensions” of Christ, we have the resources at our disposal to accomplish God’s will and counter the works of the enemy. Jesus assured His disciples, “I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome *all the power of the enemy*; nothing will harm you” (Lk 10:19, emphasis added). Let’s look in more detail at the various facets of this authority:

- The authority to proclaim God’s Word with power. The Word of God has inherent power. It is thus compared to a hammer that shatters rock and a fire that burns (Jer 23:29), a seed that produces life (Lk 8:4-15 par.; 1 Pet 1:23), a sword that pierces (Heb 4:12), and a mirror that reflects back to the one exposed to it what he/she is actually like (Jas 1:23). As we live in prayerful dependence on God, we can trust that His Spirit will give us the right words to speak at the appropriate times as we give witness to God (Lk 12:11-12). And we can be confident God’s word will be efficacious. As He promised Isaiah, “so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it (Isa 55:11). All Christians have this authority. Some (those with apostolic, prophetic, or teaching gifts) are particularly effective in using it.
- The authority to break demonic bondages. Whatever authority demons possess to harass humans due to human collusion (through occultic activity, unforgiveness, habitual sin, etc.), the Christian’s authority to exorcise demons and emancipate their victims through the gospel and the power of the Spirit is greater. Just as Jesus, early in His public ministry, announced His intention to “proclaim freedom for the prisoners and . . . to release the oppressed,” so Christians are given power to “drive out demons” (Mk 16:17; Lk 4:18).
- The authority to heal. Physical and emotional “*dis-ease*” is essentially a disruption of God’s aboriginal *shalom*, and results in a violation of unity, wholeness, joy, peace, and function. The salvation (*soteria*) Christ achieved for us includes – along with legal pardon and relational

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<sup>10</sup> The reason for this is simple to grasp. As members of Christ body, whatever is done to the body is done to Christ. If you are drowning and a lifeguard extends to you his hand, and you reject it, you are rejecting not just the person’s hand but the person himself and the salvation he is offering.

reconciliation – ideas of restoration to health, deliverance, preservation, and safety. Sometimes the Gospels attribute physiological disorders to demonic origin (Mt 12:22; Lk 13:16) and refer to these disorders as “afflictions” (from *mastix* = whippings, scourgings), emphasizing this demonic connection (Mk 3:10; 5:29, 34; Lk 7:21). Christ’s authority restores psychosomatic wholeness and can include deep inner healing of the cognitive and affective dimensions of personality. Every Christian has this authority, but there are some believers who have specific endowments for different types of healing ministry (1 Cor 12:9, 28).

- The authority to raise the dead. Death is an alien intrusion into God’s plan, resulting from human rebellion (Gen 2:8-9, 16; 3:19, 22). Satan still retains certain, limited power in the area of human death (Heb 2:14). But the risen Christ ultimately holds the keys to death and hell (Rev 1:18). During his earthly ministry, Jesus raised the dead on three occasions (the widow’s son, Lk 7:11-17; Jairus’ daughter, Mt 9:18-26, par.; Lazarus, Jn 11:38-44). He also was instrumental in His own resurrection (Jn 10:18). He delegated authority over death to His Church, saying “the gates of death” could not withstand His Church’s authority (Mt 16:18; cf. Mt 10:8).<sup>11</sup> Using this power, the disciples twice raised individuals from the dead according to the Acts narrative (Tabitha, Acts 9:36-41; Eutychus, Acts 20:7-10). Because of these facts, Paul was able to insist that Christ “destroyed death” and, as a result, “death has been swallowed up in victory” (1 Cor 15:54-55; 1 Tim 1:10; cf. Isa 25:8).
- The authority to prescribe, as directed by Scripture and guided by the Spirit, the dogma, ethical standards, organizational structure, and order of the Church. This is a grave responsibility given to Church leaders (elders, pastors, deacons) who will give account to God for the faithful performance of their duties (Heb 13:17; 1 Peter 5:1-4; cf. Jas 3:1).<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>The Greek word here, *hades*, translated “hell” in some Bible translations, actually means the underworld or place of the dead. See Job 38:17, Ps 9:13, and 107:18, where its OT equivalent, *sheol*, is used.

<sup>12</sup>The New Testament recognizes two leadership positions, or “offices,” within the local church, that of elder (Greek = *presbuteros*, or pastor = *poimen*, or overseer = *episkopos*. These terms are used interchangeably to refer to the same office; see 1 Peter 5:1-2) and deacon (1 Tim 3:1-13 and Titus 1:5-9). In addition, there are several trans-local church “offices.” These were of an itinerate nature. These individuals did not lead local assemblies but traveled between them, exercising their gifts for the benefit of the Church at large. These included apostles, prophets, and evangelists (see Eph 4:11-13).



In an important passage, Jesus gave the “keys to the kingdom of heaven” to Peter, as leader of the apostles. With these keys, Peter was given the power to “bind and loose” what is bound and loosed in heaven (Mt 16:19).<sup>13</sup> In Mt 18:18, this same power was extended to the other apostles and, by inference, to the entire Church.

In essence, this power constitutes the authority to open (or shut; cf. Mt 23:13) the door of heaven to people, by means of proclaiming the gospel (thus extending God’s forgiveness) and interpreting Scripture. Jewish rabbis were said to exercise a similar authority, so this language was familiar to Jesus’ audience.<sup>14</sup> In a similar vein, Jesus gave the Apostles the authority to forgive or withhold forgiveness from people (John 20:23). Jesus Himself exercised this authority during His earthly ministry (Mk 2:10). And He instructed His Apostles (Mt 10:14-15, par.; cf. Mt 7:6) and disciples (Lk 10:5-12) to exercise this aspect of this authority by pronouncing judgment on the unrepentant. Examples of its use include Paul’s cursing of those who do not “love the Lord” (1 Cor 16:22), Peter’s

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<sup>13</sup> Roman Catholics cite this fact to support their doctrines of “Petrine Succession” and “Papal supremacy,” conclusions not warranted by this or any other text and unsupported by the consensual tradition of the larger Church. In reaction, many Protestant scholars have interpreted this verse to mean that it was Peter’s confession of faith, not Peter himself, which was the referent of Christ’s comment. While possible, this explanation does not appear to be the best way to understand this passage. A straightforward reading suggests that Jesus was telling Peter that he, as the most visible and outspoken of the Apostles, would be given the authority in question, not exclusively, but prototypically. Two chapters later, the same authority was given to the other Apostles (Mt 18:18).

<sup>14</sup> In some Pentecostal and charismatic circles, it is taught that Christians have the authority to “bind” Satan and “loose” things like health, finances, possessions, or other desirables. But such authority is not suggested here or elsewhere in the New Testament. Proponents of demonic “binding” believe that Jesus describes our “binding” authority in Matt 12:28-29 when He asks rhetorically, “how can anyone enter a strong man’s house and carry off his possessions unless he first binds the strong man? Then he can rob his house.” But this and its parallel passages (Mk 3:27; Lk 11:21-22) have a clear Christological focus: Christ is the one who has bound the strong man, Satan, and has begun despoiling his house through the proclamation of the gospel. The church is able to continue that plundering by faithfully preaching that same gospel, because of Christ’s finished work.

The terminology of “binding” and “loosing” (Greek *deo* = “bind” and *luo* = “loose”) has a well-established etymology. “‘Binding’ and ‘loosing’ (also Mt 18:18) were terms regularly used for rabbis’ legislative authority in interpreting Scripture (‘prohibiting’ and ‘permitting’).” Craig Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary New Testament* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993, 90. There is broad scholarly consensus on this point (Thayer, Schreiner, Hendriksen, et al.) In fact, there is an interesting parallel in non-Israelite usage. In the Mesopotamian Epic of Gilgamesh, dating perhaps to the second millennium B.C., the god Enlil says to the Gilgamesh, king of Uruk: “You were given the kingship, such was your destiny, everlasting life was not your destiny. Because of this do not be sad at heart, do not be grieved or oppressed; he has given you power to bind and to loose, to be the darkness and the light of mankind.” Here, the “bind and loose” have reference to the king’s executive and legislative powers over others. *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, translated by N.K Sandars (New York: Penguin Books, 1987), 118.

It is interesting that both Matthean passages that speak of “binding and loosing” (16:19 and 18:18) are distinctively ecclesiastical. In fact, they are the only two times in the Gospels where the word church (*esslesia*) appears. This suggests that whatever the phrase entails, it has ecclesial application.

judgment of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-12), and Paul's judgment of Elymas (Acts 13:8-12) and the Corinthian guilty of incest (1 Cor 5:1-5). So, although God alone has the ultimate authority to forgive sins, He gives the Church, specifically its leaders, the responsibility of helping steward that authority on earth through its preaching of the Word, interpreting of Scripture, and enforcement of ethical norms. We are, in this sense, God's arms and voice. He alone saves, but He does so through the cooperative agency of the Church, His body. This accords with the Apostle Paul's point in Romans 10:9-15: "...how can they hear (and be saved) without someone preaching to them?" (v.14).

To summarize this particular dimension of Christ's delegated authority: Jesus gave Church leaders wide-ranging power to oversee the work of His kingdom on earth. This includes, among other things, the authority to admit, discipline, excommunicate, and restore members (cf. 1 Cor 5:1-5; 2 Cor 2:5-11; 2 Thess 3:14-15), to proclaim forgiveness (or unforgiveness) of sins on His behalf, to interpret dogma, and to enforce ethical norms. These are weighty responsibilities. No wonder James warned would-be leaders to think twice before assuming them (Jas 3:1). It bears repeating that Church leaders were never intended to operate independently but always and only in reverent, humble submission to the Scriptures and obedient sensitivity to God's Holy Spirit.

- The authority to bless and curse. Before sending them out, Jesus instructed the twelve and later the seventy to pronounce a blessing of "peace" upon arriving at a "worthy" home and to allow the blessing to "return" to them if the home's occupant should prove "unworthy," evidently a reference to the owner's lack of receptivity to the gospel. If the gospel was not received in a particular town or village, they were then to pronounce judgment on it (Mt 10:11-15 par., Lk 10:5-12). It is apparently in this connection that Paul pronounced a curse on everyone "who does not love the Lord" (1 Cor 16:22; cf. John 3:18). The idea here seems to be that a person's response to the gospel reveals his/her true condition, whether receptive (worthy/blessed) or unreceptive (unworthy/cursed). The Christian is to proclaim what is already true,<sup>15</sup> exposing what is in the heart and confirming God's judgment on human sin.

Jesus modeled speaking the blessing of "peace" to His disciples in John 20:19, 21, 26. And He blessed children (Mk 10:16, par.), although the

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<sup>15</sup> This is a practical application of "binding" what is "bound" in heaven; making explicit and visible what is unclear and invisible through our words and actions. In this way, the Christian becomes God's instrument of judgment as well as blessing on earth.

precise content of those blessings is unknown to us. He also modeled the pronouncement of judgment on several occasions (Mt 11:20-24; 23:13-39) and cursed the fruitless fig tree (Mt 21:18-19). He did not, however, curse anyone for merely personal reasons. Instead, He asked forgiveness for those who were complicit in His crucifixion (Lk 23:34). Further, He directed His disciples not to curse those who cursed them, but to exchange blessing for cursing (Lk 6:28; cf. Rom 12:14; 1 Co 4:12).

Later, the Apostle John would warn the churches to not bless heretics, nor “even say, ‘Peace be with you.’ For anyone who wishes him peace becomes his partner in the evil things he does” (2 Jn 9-11). And Jude would warn us not to curse angelic beings (Jude 8-10; cf. 2 Peter 2:10-11). On the other hand, the Apostle Paul began most of his letters with a blessing (e.g., Rom 1:17; 1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 1:2; Gal 1:3; 1 Tim 1:2; 2 Tim 1:2; etc.) and the Old Testament is replete with examples of blessing. All told, there are approximately 300 references to blessing in Scripture.

The common theme running throughout these Biblical data is that God has given us the authority to pronounce blessing on those whom He has blessed, and judgment on those whom He has cursed.<sup>16</sup> We are to be alert to what the Lord is directing us to do at all times. We are to neither bless nor curse indiscriminately, but to follow His promptings. This is a solemn responsibility, which can be exercised only through a discerning examination of spiritual fruit and a careful reliance on His Spirit.

## Some Cautions in the Exercise of Authority

From the brief survey above, it can be seen that God has given Christians substantial authority over natural and supernatural forces for the exercise of His will and extension of His dominion on earth. Stewarding this authority is a serious and sobering duty. As we seek to be faithful to this entrustment, we need to insure:

1. That we neither inflate nor depreciate our authority. Both extremes are wrong. If we overstate our authority we can become proud, careless, and perhaps disdainful

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<sup>16</sup> Presumably, this might also apply to cursing such things as viruses, germs, cancers, and other organisms opposed to God’s intent to heal in specific cases. However, we must be careful to not be dogmatic on this point, given the absence of any explicit examples or directives in Scripture.

of celestial authorities (see Jude 8-10). If we understate our authority, we will not make use of the ministry tools at our disposal and thus limit our ministry effectiveness and leave ourselves (and others) vulnerable to demonic resistance and oppression. So, we must maintain a balanced, Biblically informed appreciation of our authority (cf. Rom 12:3).

2. That we be realistic about the successes we can expect. Although stripped of his usurped legal rights to rule over this world and limited in his power, Satan can still oppose God's work and do great harm to its people (cf. 1 Peter 5:8), for he is a being of considerable cunning and power and unmitigated malice. We should not, therefore, expect a life of uninterrupted victory. We are at war. Jesus and the Apostles taught us to expect trials, suffering, and persecution in the present life (e.g., Mt 24:9; Jn 16:33; 1 Thess 3:4; 2 Tim 3:12; Jas 1:2-4; 1 Peter 1:6-7).<sup>17</sup> This is because we live in the eschatological tension of the 'already, but not yet.'

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<sup>17</sup>A denial of this reality is one of the more problematic aspects of certain teachings collectively known as "Word-Faith" or "Word of Faith." Its adherents espouse a triumphalist gospel that certainly would have sounded alien to Paul, Peter, or Jesus. Word-Faith churches teach that God wants His children to be healthy and prosperous, and that the means of enjoying these blessings is through something they call "positive confession" (or "faith confession," or "name it and claim it"). It is taught that, "confession brings possession;" that is, if we do not speak something out, it will not be ours. Word-Faith practitioners support these claims by appealing to certain texts in isolation from the broader Scriptural witness: Nu 14:28; Prov 18:21; Isa 53:5; Mk 11:22-24; Rom 4:17 and 10:8. Some of the more popular proponents of at least some Word-Faith teachings include: Kenneth Hagin, E.W. Kenyon, Kathryn Kulman, Kenneth Copeland, Benny Hinn, Creflo Dollar, Joel Osteen, Fred Price, Paul Crouch, and Joyce Meyer.

A specific application of Word-Faith teaching to the discussion of divine healing is the insistence that our healing is guaranteed by Christ's work of atonement: just as Christ's death procured forgiveness for every sin of every believer, so it procures healing of every disease for every believer. Isaiah 53:5 is frequently cited to support this assertion. Some teachers maintain that God must heal us because He has entered into a blood covenant with us whereby He obligates Himself to heal our every disease. Thus, if we pray for a person to be healed and he/she is not, the reason for the failed healing attempt must be either hidden sin in that person's life or a lack of faith, since God is obligated to heal him/her.

To thoroughly critique this teaching is outside the scope of this paper. However, a few comments are in order. First, while recognizing the importance of our spoken and written words we disavow any teaching that suggests we create reality through our words or that God's freedom to act is restricted by them. God is free to do whatever He wills, however He chooses. Second, we believe that, while Scripture teaches that our healing was made possible through Christ's work on the cross, His atonement did not obligate God to heal in every instance. God is faithful to His promises (Josh 21:45; Ps 119:140; 2 Cor 1:20), but nowhere in the Bible does God promise to heal in every single case. Third, although a person's sin (1 Cor 11:30; Jas 5:16) and level of faith (Jas 5:15; Mk 6:4-6) can, at times, influence whether he/she is healed, this is not always so, and to suggest otherwise runs the risk of conceiving of healing as a *quid pro quo* reward for our obedience and faith rather than an example of divine grace. Fourth, until Jesus comes again to establish His direct rule over the earth, we will live in a world at war, where trials, suffering, and set-backs are an unfortunate yet undeniable part of the human condition. For a good treatment of this subject, see L. Lovett, "Positive Confession Theology," *International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, revised ed., edited by Stanley Burgess (Grand Rapids: Zonervan, 2003), 992-94.

Consequently, some people for whom we pray will not be healed, some ministries will not succeed, and bad things will still happen to God's people.<sup>18</sup>

3. That we allow room for God's mysterious sovereignty. We do not have the whole story.<sup>19</sup> We have only partial revelation (Dt 29:29). There are a great many things we do not know about spiritual authority, spiritual warfare, divine and creaturely causality, limitations on healing, and God's decretal and permissive wills. While seeking greater understanding, we must also admit mystery and espouse a theology characterized by humility and a frank acknowledgment of the limits of human understanding. We must resist the temptation to be doctrinaire and smug regarding speculative truth claims. And we must be careful to not disenfranchise those who, for whatever reason, do not receive healing when prayed for or, having received healing, subsequently "lose" it. We do not know the content of people's hearts nor the complete will of God in each unique situation. We are rarely in a position to know why a person is not healed, so we are wise to not speculate about the causes or the relative measure of a person's faith. On the other hand, if we observe sin in their lives, we are under obligation to call it out lovingly and humbly (Mt 18:15-20; Gal 6:1). And if the Lord gives us supernatural revelation about hidden sin or demonic activity, then we must pray for discernment about how to act on this revelation.
4. That we not privilege healing gifts over other, less demonstrably supernatural gifts such as serving, teaching, and mercy, and so devalue those who faithfully exercise these gifts in service to the Church and the world.
5. That we not hype what we are doing nor exaggerate results. We must seek to always speak the truth in an unvarnished way (Ps 51:6; Mt 5:37; Jas 5:12; Ep 4:15). Specifically, we should not announce healings prematurely without first

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<sup>18</sup> For example, the Apostle James was killed by Herod while Peter was freed (Acts 12:1-11), Paul was repeatedly thwarted by Satan from visiting the Thessalonian church (1 Thess 2:17-18), and numerous Christian workers did not receive desired healing (Epaphroditus in Phil 2:27; Timothy in 1 Tim 5:23; Trophimus in 2 Tim 4:20; and Paul in Gal 4:13-14). Martin Luther cautioned Christians against adopting a 'theology of glory' (*theologia gloriae*), a lopsided gospel that emphasizes only the victories and positive aspects of a life of faith. Instead, he suggested we adopt a balanced 'theology of the cross' (*theologia crucis*) that embraces the reality of pain, difficulty, and occasional defeat in our living out of the gospel in a hostile world (see 2 Cor 2:14; 4:7-12).

<sup>19</sup> This appears to be the controlling motif of God's two speeches to Job in Job 38-41. It also is a major emphasis in the prophetic literature (e.g., Isa 55:8-9; Daniel 10:12-14, et al.).

getting empirical confirmation.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, we are commanded to not accept any spiritual claims uncritically but to “test everything” (1 Thess 5:21).

6. That we guard against pride and every tendency to regard ourselves as “spiritual elites” who possess privileged status or abilities. All Christians are given the right to exercise God’s authority and power through His Spirit. We each have different ministries and empowerments determined by the Holy Spirit, so there is no room for hubris or bragging (1 Cor 4:6-7; 12:11). A respectful understanding of these facts will produce in us deep humility and even awe that God would choose to use us to minister to others (1 Cor 1:26-29).
7. That we not fixate on our authority, on charismatic manifestations, or on “power encounters.” Jesus warned His disciples about the dangers of obsessing on such things and reminded them that they should, instead be grateful their names are recorded in heaven (Lk 10:20).
8. That we keep in mind Satan’s ability to counterfeit miraculous works. Jesus warned us about thinking our use of spiritual authority is evidence of our salvation (Mt 7:21-23) and made clear that false christs and prophets would perform “great signs and wonders” in the last days (Mt 24:24; cf. Ex 7:10-12). We therefore need to be very discerning in evaluating supernatural phenomena and not uncritically endorse something simply because it appears to be from God (cf. 1 Jn 4:1).
9. That we aim for faithfulness, not attention, notoriety, or successful ministries. Jesus assured us that consistently faithful stewardship of His resources leads to increased influence and authority, both in the present life and the life to come (Lk 16:10-12; 19:11-27; 22:28-30). If we are faithful with the gifts and opportunities He gives us,<sup>21</sup> we can be confident of His pleasure and reward, whether our ministries are small and unobtrusive or large and conspicuous.

## Healing: Principles and Protocol

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<sup>20</sup> This does not preclude instances when the Lord gives subjective confirmation to us through the gift of “faith” (1 Cor 12:9; cf. Jas 5:15). There may be times when, despite outward appearances, healing has occurred as a means of growing our trust in God.

<sup>21</sup> It is worth noting that Jesus did not heal everyone he encountered. Instead, guided by the Holy Spirit He healed those whom the Father indicated (e.g., Jn 5:1-47, et al.). Similarly, we are to be alert to the opportunities the Father gives us and seek to know His will in these various situations.

1. God is not the author of evil and the various forms of suffering it produces (Gen 1:31; Hab 1:13; Jas 1:13), even though certain verses appear, on the surface, to attribute causality to Him (e.g., Ex 4:21; Dt 2:30; 32:39; 2 Sa 17:14; 24:1; 1 Ki 12:15; Isa 45:7; Am 3:6).<sup>22</sup> Rather, unrestrained or usurped natural forces, fallen angels, and humans are the direct agents of suffering. As a result of humanity's fall into sin, the world was cursed (Gen 3:17) and even now "groans" under the collective weight of sin (Rom 8:18-23). Jesus' redemptive work, begun at His incarnation, will not be culminated until His Second Coming. Until then, suffering and evil will be part of the human story.
2. Although God is not the author (or efficient cause) of evil and suffering, He makes use of suffering to accomplish His will. He uses suffering to punish sinners, discipline His children, and for other, oftentimes inscrutable, purposes (e.g., Gen 50:20; Dt 8:2; Ps 119:67, 71, 75; Rom 8:28; Heb 12:4-11; Jas 1:3-4; 1 Pet 4:1-2, 12-13; 5:10, et al.).<sup>23</sup>
3. Because of these facts, we can, when guided by the Holy Spirit, pray for another person with complete confidence God will meet their needs through His grace. In many cases, He will heal their suffering either instantaneously or gradually, with or without medical intervention. In other cases, they will not be healed, but God will minister to them in the midst of their pain, comforting them and using their condition to grow them in faith and character. In either case, God's compassionate response to their suffering can be a source of immense good to the person and bring glory to God.
4. At Neighborhood Church of Chico, we will, in addition to minding the cautions outlined in the previous section, observe the following guidelines in our exercise of healing:
  - We will seek to teach a Biblically-balanced theology of suffering and healing, involving a proper emphasis on God's loving character, His overruling sovereignty, the reality of spiritual warfare, the dynamics of God's kingdom, the authority of the believer, and the eschatological realities of our present age. We believe that solid Biblical teaching is essential to our individual and corporate health, particularly when it

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<sup>22</sup> Each must be understood within its unique literary, rhetorical, theological, and historical contexts. This has been the object of considerable scholarly output but goes well beyond the scope of this paper.

<sup>23</sup> For example, Joseph's mistreatment and estrangement from his family were used by God to save His family and countless others from starvation (Gen 50:20); Paul's "thorn" kept him from becoming conceited (2 Cor 12:1-10); Joni Erikson-Tada's paralysis resulted in a world-wide ministry to others afflicted with similar disabilities.

concerns theologically nuanced, potentially divisive, and easily misunderstood doctrines and practices.

- We will seek to promote a high level of faith in God's willingness to heal but will not make false assurances to people. Rather, we will leave room for the mystery of providence and the realities of complex supernatural dynamics.
- We will be quick to celebrate God's miraculous healings but will also exercise caution regarding premature assessments. Specifically, we will not assure people, "God has healed you!" unless we have compelling reasons (empirical evidence or a positive Word of knowledge) to do so. This is intended to protect people's faith from false hopes and guard against bogus truth claims, which denigrate God's work and lead others to reject all healing claims.
- We will recognize that, for a variety of reasons, people for whom we pray sometimes go unhealed. In these cases, we will refrain from speculating about the reasons for the failed healing attempt (sin in the person's life, lack of faith, etc.) but instead encourage the person to continue trusting God and seeking His will in their situation.
- We will uphold the Neighborhood Church value of living out the Christian life in a naturally supernatural way. Accordingly, we will seek to develop an "Evangelically charismatic" culture that is an authentic expression of our unique identity and calling as individuals and as a church. We will avoid formulaic approaches to healing and other sub-cultural idiosyncrasies such as shouting, engaging in strange behaviors, and using uncommon language or tones of voice.
- We will ask to pray for the sick only those people whom we know to be mature, balanced, trained, and who embody the values and beliefs of Neighborhood Church. We will not allow just anyone to lay hands on the sick, except during limited, spontaneous, ad hoc prayer times during a service. Our regular prayer teams will go through an approved training process.
- We will observe proper ministry protocol at all times. We will pray for the sick in teams, generally as couples or with men ministering to men and women to women. We will not touch patients without first asking permission and then only in appropriate ways. These guidelines protect the reputations and dignity of everyone involved, honor the Lord, protect the Church, and create a safe and respectful ministry environment.



## Conclusion

We Christians have been honored with the inexpressibly great privilege of partnering with God in His redemptive plan for the world. It is a sacred and holy calling to be faithfully stewarded. Our authority in Christ to heal and engage in other supernatural activities is substantial and must be exercised judiciously to avoid abuse, honor the Lord, and promote the interests of His kingdom.

At Neighborhood Church, we are enthusiastic about our role in God's plans and pray that this document will help those who call Neighborhood "home" to understand their authority and actively use it to bring healing and hope to our convulsed world!

To this end we offer this with our sincere hopes it blesses God's people as we seek to be a blessing to others.

Approved by the Board of Trustees: January 18, 2012

## Additional Reading

*Note: The inclusion of these books does not constitute a blanket endorsement of everything they teach. They are included here because they are, on balance, believed to contain a great deal of information that can further inform our understanding of spiritual gifts. But like the Christians in Berea (Acts 17.10-12), we must carefully compare all truth claims against the canon of scripture. With that caveat, then, we think you will find the following books helpful.*

Banister, Doug. *The Word and Power Church*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002.

King, Paul. *Genuine Gold: The Cautiously Charismatic Story of the Early Christian and Missionary Alliance*. Tulsa: Word and Spirit Press, 2007.

Kraft, Charles H. *I Give You Authority*. Grand Rapids: Chosen Books, 1997.

———. *Christianity with Power*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2005.

Nathan, Rich and Ken Wilson. *Empowered Evangelicals: Bringing Together the Best of the Evangelical and Charismatic Worlds*. Ann Arbor: Vine Books, 1995.

Wimber, John and Kevin Springer. *Power Healing*. New York: HarperOne, 1991.