




MESSAGE

STUDY GUIDE

GROUP MATERIAL

SONGS

Defeating the Dark Powers

Bible Reading: Eph. 1:18-23 

[WATCH LIVESTREAM AT 10AM](#)

[Join our 11AM post-service discussion on Zoom](#)

Defeating the Dark Powers

Bible Reading: Ephesians 1:18-23

- “I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened so that you may know what is the hope of his [God the Father’s] calling, what is the wealth of his glorious inheritance in the saints, **19** and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the mighty working of his strength. **20** He exercised this power in Christ by raising him from the dead & seating him at his right hand in the heavens—**21** far above every ruler & authority, power & dominion, & every title given, not only in this age but also in the one to come. **22** And he subjected everything under his feet and appointed him as head over everything for the church, **23** which is his body, the fullness of the one who fills all things in every way. [Eph. 1:18-23 CSB]

SUMMARY

- Today many people reject the supernatural; yet they can’t explain the evil manifest in horrendous violence & cruelty, war & genocide. The Bible traces the cause back to cosmic powers of darkness, spiritual forces of evil which impact humanity. Paul’s readers were well aware of unseen evil powers; they feared these hostile forces. Now Paul brought good news—Jesus’ death not only took care of trespasses & sins, but also (in a decisive battle at the cross) Jesus defeated these dark satanic powers, bringing freedom from bondage & fear. Plus, Jesus rose & ascended to rule the universe, launching his

kingdom of light. Today the same divine power is available to us, the believers—his church, as we ‘wrap up the war’ against the hostile cosmic powers. Together let’s learn how to be warriors in this spiritual warfare.

God’s Peace-Mission involves Warfare

A. “Ephesians...[presents] *the triune God’s peace-making mission* and our participation in it. Ironically, this divine peace-making mission [is] *expressed*, in part, [as] *divine warfare* and thus our warfare too.” —Michael Gorman

Major Theme—God’s Defeat of the Dark, Cosmic Powers (Eph. 1:20-22; Ps. 110:1; 8:6)

- “Eph. 1:20-23 contains the *thesis statement of the letter*, Paul’s audacious claim that Jesus Christ is the victorious and exalted cosmic Lord...of all creation, including the fallen powers...” —Timothy Gombis
- A. God’s ‘immeasurably great power’ —is resurrection, ascension, enthroning, all-subjecting power (Eph. 1:20-22)
- B. Power that defeats God’s enemies—enthroning, subjugating (Ps. 110:1; 8:4, 6)
- C. Christ’s exaltation—Not a peaceful Coronation, but a triumphant Victory over enemies
 - “There has been a victory...[It’s] *a dramatic victory rather than a peaceful scene of coronation*”—Timothy Gombis
 - 1. Christ Enthroned—Seated “at God’s right hand” (Ps. 110:1; Dan. 7:13)
 - The Lord says to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand, ‘til I make *your enemies* your footstool.’...” (Ps. 110:1-2 ESV)
 - 2. All Things Subjected to Christ—subjugated “under Christ’s feet” (Ps. 8:6; cf. Dan. 7:14; Phil. 2:9-11; 1 Pet. 3:22)
 - “What is man that You are mindful of him...? **6**? You gave him dominion...you *put all things under his feet*.” (Ps. 8:4, 6)
 - Christ “was put to death in the flesh?but made alive by the Spirit...through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,**???**who has gone into heaven?& is at the right hand of God?with *angels, authorities, & powers subject to him*.” (1 Pet. 3:18-22)
 - “Christ’s victory over evil spirits is basic to...the NT...dealing with hostile angelic powers.” —William J. Dalton
 - 3. Christ’s cosmic reconciliation—imposing peace by conquest (war) (Eph. 1:10; Col. 1:20; 2:15)
 - God “reconciled everything...on earth or...heaven...making peace—through his blood, shed on the cross.” (Col. 1:19-20)
 - “Reconciliation applied to [the ‘powers’] means...pacification, the *imposing of peace...by conquest*.”—F. F. Bruce
 - 4. Ultimately abolishing all rival rule, authority & power (1 Cor. 15:24-25, 27)
 - Then “the end,?when [Christ] hands over the kingdom to...the Father,?when he *abolishes all rule... authority & power*. **25**?For he must reign?‘til he *puts all his enemies under his feet*. **27**?God...put everything under his feet.”?(1 Cor. 15:24-25)

Who are the Dark, Cosmic Powers? (Eph. 1:21-22; 3:10; 6:10-18)

- “We struggle...against the rulers...authorities...[dark,] *cosmic powers...evil spiritual forces in the heavens*.” (Eph. 6:12)
- “Powers & authorities’ In Paul’s inherited world view, based on the OT, the heavens are populated with archangelic ruler figures to whom God had originally delegated authority over aspects of creation [incl. nations].” —Timothy Gombis
- “The powers are subordinate authorities [‘gods,’ delegated by God] raised to a position of absolute authority.”—G. Caird
- “The powers...in Eph...must be understood as *evil supernatural powers...hostile supernatural beings*.” —David Aune

What Do these Hostile Satanic Powers Do? (Rom. 8:38-39)

- A. Oversee the Gentile Nations (Dt. 32:8)
 - “The Most High?gave...the nations their lands...he?divided mankind,?according to the number of the *sons of God*.” (Dt. 32:8)
 - “The point Dt. 32:8 is that [when] God separated the people...at?Babel...he *assigned each of the 70 nations to the fallen ? sons of God*”—Michael?Heiser
- B. Seek to separate us from God’s love in Christ (Rom. 8:38-39)

- “I’m persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels *nor rulers...nor powers, 39?*...nor any other created thing will be able to separate us from the love of God that’s in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Rom. 8:38-39)

C. Frustrate God’s response to His peoples’ Prayer (Dan. 10:12-13, 20)

- The angel told Daniel: “from the 1st day you...humbled yourself...your prayers were heard. I have come because of your prayers. 13? But the prince...of Persia opposed me for 21 days...[later] the prince of Greece will come.” (Dan. 10:12-13, 20)?
- “The princes of Persia & Greece in Dan. 10 [are]...understood [as] angelic beings of the unseen world [that] engage in warfare against God’s angel, to prevent Gabriel from reaching Daniel...with a heavenly message.” —Tony Siew

D. Instigate conflict on Earth (Rev. 12:7-9)

- “War broke out in heaven: Michael & his angels fought against the dragon...& his angels... 8? The great dragon was thrown out—the ancient serpent...called the devil & Satan...He was thrown to earth, & his angels with him.” (Rev. 12:7-9)
- “Satan’s defeat in the heavenly war & his casting down...to earth is the cause of the conflict between society & the church on earth... This earthly conflict is the result of the war in heaven....” —Tony Siew

God’s Defeat of the Dark, Cosmic Powers at the Cross (Col. 2:15; Jn. 12:31-33; Heb. 2:14)

- “Jesus...shared in [flesh & blood], so that through his death he might destroy...the devil” (Heb. 2:14)
- Jesus: “...Now the ruler of this world will be cast out. 32?...If I’m lifted up from the earth I’ll draw all people to myself.” 33? He said this to indicate what kind of death he was about to die.” (Jn. 12:31-33)
- At “the cross. 15? He disarmed the rulers & authorities & disgraced them publicly; he triumphed over them...” (Col. 2:15)
- “...God is on a mission to liberate humanity—and indeed the entire cosmos—from the powers of Sin & Death...through the sin-defeating and life-giving death & resurrection of His Son” —Michael J. Gorman

A. God Defeated & Disarmed the Cosmic Rulers & Authorities (Col. 2:15)

B. The Paradox of the Cross—Jesus: Victim or Victor?

- “Anyone looking at the cross of Jesus with a normal [1st-century] understanding...would think: the [Roman] rulers & authorities stripped him naked & celebrated a public triumph over him...Read Col. 2:15 again. On the cross, Paul declares, God stripped the armor off the rulers & authorities!...He was holding them up to public contempt! God was celebrating his triumph over the principalities & powers, the very powers that thought it was the other way round. Paul never gets tired of ...the glorious paradox of the cross...” —N. T. Wright

C. The Church shares Christ’s Cosmic Victory (Eph. 2:6)

- “The exaltation of Christ [represents] victory over cosmic powers...The [Christian] community shares in the cosmic victory...as it sits ‘in heavenly places’.” —James Thompson

The Church currently at War with Cosmic Dark Powers (Eph. 6:12; Col. 2:8)

- “Put on [God’s] full armor so...you can stand against the Devil’s schemes. 12? Our struggle...is against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this darkness, against evil, spiritual forces in the heavens.” (Eph. 6:11-12)?
- “See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy & empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, & not according to Christ.” (Col. 2:8 ESV)
- “The church is...in a ‘war of the worlds’...Paul says, ‘our struggle is...against the cosmic powers of this darkness... These powers include ideologies that compete for the hearts & minds of individuals & nations.’ —Kevin Vanhoozer
- “Some of these ‘powers’ have taken on a life of their own...various ‘isms’...that dominate the news”—R. Paul Stevens
- “-isms”: Marxism, socialism, capitalism, libertarianism, Republicanism, Progressivism, nationalism, tribalism, racism, etc.

God's Great Power "toward the believers;" Christ "head over all to the church" (Eph. 1:19, 22b)

- "...be strengthened by the Lord & by his vast strength. Put on the full armor of God..." (Eph. 6:10-11)?
- God's "anointed king Jesus already triumphed over all the 'spiritual forces of evil in heavenly places' (Eph. 1:20-22) [has] made available to his people the same power that brought Jesus...victory."—Frank Thielman
- "The church has a role in the...cosmic plan of God... *The church does not exist for itself but for God & his glory* among the nations...The church participates in God's...purpose to unite everything in Christ. [It] is the instrument of Christ to bring together all things..." —Timothy van Aarde?
- **Watchman Nee's Prayer** at the 1938 Christian Convention in Keswick, UK. Against the backdrop of Japan's invasion of China, W. Nee prayed: "The Lord reigns: we affirm it boldly. Our Lord Jesus *is* reigning & He is Lord of all; nothing can touch His authority. It is spiritual forces that are out to destroy His interests in China & Japan. Therefore we do not pray for China, we do not pray for Japan, but we pray for the interests of Your Son in China & Japan. We do not blame any men, for they are instruments in the hand of Your enemy. We stand with Your will. Shatter, O Lord, the kingdom of darkness, for the persecutions of Your church are wounding You. Amen." [Angus Kinnear, *Against the Tide*, p. 149]