



MESSAGE

STUDY GUIDE

GROUP MATERIAL

SONGS

Examining the text & our hearts:

Bible Reading: Eph. 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.

1. God’s Peace-Mission involves Warfare

- “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...This irony...expresses a profound...truth about the [*Mission of God*] & our participation in it.” [Michael J. Gorman, *Becoming the Gospel*, pp. 182-183]

2. Major Theme—God’s Defeat of the Dark, Cosmic Powers

- “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...[which] God put in subjection under His (Jesus’) feet.” [Timothy G. Gombis, *Drama of Ephesians*, p. 89]
- 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. God has triumphed in the death and resurrection of Christ over the evil powers that oppress creation & humanity...[In Eph. 1:20-22] Paul is depicting a *dramatic victory rather than a peaceful scene of coronation*...he indicates this by using Ps. 110.” [Timothy G. Gombis, *Drama of Ephesians*, pp. 89-90]
- a. 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)
 - “God’s triumph ‘in Christ’ over the forces of evil & his restoration ‘in Christ’ of creation emerge[s]...God ‘*seated Christ at his right hand in the heavens*.’ (Eph. 1:20b) alludes to Ps. 110:1 “the LORD said to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand ‘til I make your enemies your footstool.’” “Paul believed that this...had been fulfilled in...God’s... raising [Christ] from the dead [which] led to his exaltation to a place of equal authority with the King of the universe...YAHWEH’s defeat of the king’s enemies in Ps. 110:1; [a] clear allusion [exists in] Paul’s statement that Christ [is] ‘far above every ruler and authority, power & dominion...’ (Eph. 1:21)...In Eph. 6:12...these are [hostile] powers...that God has defeated...at the resurrection.” [Frank S. Thielman, “*Eph.*,” in Beale, Carson (eds.) *Commentary on the NT use of the OT*, pp. 814-815]
- b. All Things Subjected to Christ—subjugated “under Christ’s feet” (Ps. 8:6; cf. Dan. 7:14; Phi 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, **22** 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
 - Ephesians takes Psalm 8 “as an implicit reference to pre-fall Adam & the restoration of man’s glory. Before the Fall Adam is depicted as a little lower than God, crowned with glory & majesty, with creation at his feet. In Eph. [1:22], the recapture of this glory comes about by the enthronement of the new man, Christ...The reinstatement of man’s glory [comes] through Christ & the church, and *domination over the powers*.” [R. M. Cozart, *This Present Triumph*, p. 99]
 - Eph. 1:22a “*he subjected everything under his feet*,” quotes Ps. 8:6b saying that, in creation, “You [Yahweh] *put all things under his [humanity’s/Adam’s] feet*.” “Paul explicitly claims...that God has begun to restore his fallen creation...God has not simply conquered Christ’s cosmic enemies...he has also subjected all creation to him [Eph. 1:22]... The [rule] that God intended for humanity...over all creation [Ps. 8:5-8] is...coming to pass through... Messiah’s kingly rule over ‘all things’.” [Frank S. Thielman, “*Ephesians*,” in GK Beale, DA Carson, *Commentary on NT use of the OT*, p. 816]
 - “In...Eph. 1:17-23...Paul foreshadows a theme that will grow in prominence [through] the letter. When God raised the Messiah from the dead, he began the process by which he would *subdue the enemies of his people* and restore their rightful place as rulers of his creation. Just as God...acted on behalf of his Messiah...so also his Messiah acts on behalf of God’s people.” [Frank S. Thielman, “*Ephesians*,” in Beale, Carson (eds.) *Commentary on the NT use of OT*, p. 816]
- c. Christ’s cosmic reconciliation—imposing peace by conquest (war) (Eph. 1:10; Co 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
 - “This reconciliation of the universe includes...*pacification*. The ‘principalities & powers’...in Col. 2:15 are certainly not depicted as gladly surrendering to divine grace but [rather]...*compelled to submit to a power*... they are unable to resist...[They are] decisively subdued to [God’s] will...whether they please or not.” [F. F. Bruce, *Colossians...Eph.*, p.]
- d. 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)

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

- “Our struggle is...against the rulers, against the authorities, against the *cosmic powers of this darkness, against evil spiritual forces in the heavens*.” (Eph. 6:12)
- “Powers & authorities’ [reflect] the Jewish worldview...of the cosmos being dominated by supra-human cosmic forces...[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 G. Gombis, *Drama of Ephesians* pp. 36, 40]
- “The powers are subordinate authorities [‘gods,’ delegated by YAHWEH, the Most High God] raised to a position of absolute authority [against God].” [George B. Caird, *Principalities & Powers*, p. 83]
- “The powers mentioned in Eph...must be understood as *evil supernatural powers*...The lists of supernatural beings...in Paul[’s writings] are hostile supernatural beings.” [D. Aune, in K. van der Toorn, *Dictionary of Deities & Demons*, p. 79]
- “Paul wrote...to...Gentile Christians [who] lived in a world where...power...belonged to ‘rulers,’ ‘authorities,’ ‘world rulers,’ & ‘spiritual forces of evil in heavenly places’ (Eph. 6:12; 2:2). They could see signs of it...in...statues, [wall] friezes, & inscriptions in the markets &...street corners... The gods, this propaganda proclaimed, had given Rome the eternal right to govern the universe...Paul wrote...to encourage them...The Creator was their Father [etc.]...Through his anointed king Jesus, he had already triumphed over all the ‘spiritual forces of evil in heavenly places’ (Eph. 1:20-22a) and had made available to his people the same power that brought Jesus...victory... & [Paul hoped] to encourage them in their battle with the forces of evil around them (Eph. 6:10-20).” [F. Thielman, “Eph.,” in Beale, Carson, ...*on the NT use of the OT*, p. 813]
- The Bible talks about such spiritual beings—“the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit now working in the disobedient.”(Eph. 2:2) “Powers” that exist to exploit the collective brokenness in our [modern] society to cause chaos, damage, etc. For e.g., what forces were operative to convince Germany in the 1930s & 1940s that it was good, acceptable to exterminate millions? How much are we still under the influence of the ‘powers’ operating in/upon modern culture in destructive ways? How can our lives, choices be brought out of that into “the kingdom of the Son of God’s love”?—Tim Mackie
- “The NT [asserts that] the power of evil is bigger than individual sins. [In] the Bible Satan is not merely the individualistic tempter to petty sins; he is the deceiver of nations (‘*Satan...will go out to deceive the nations*’ Rev. 20:7-8). We might label this as ‘systemic evil’...It pictures the vastness of the reservoir of evil by which we are threatened & from which we cannot deliver ourselves.” [M. E. Boring, F. B. Craddock, *People’s New Testament Commentary*, p. 129]

4. 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)
 - “Some suggest...angels are assigned care of the nations (Dt. 32:8; Dan. 10:13; Mic. 4:5) &...[intimate] that divine beings can be punished for failing in their duties (Ps. 82:6-7; Is. 24:21-22).” [E. Janet Warren, *Cleansing the Cosmos*, p. 106]
 - “The point Dt. 32:8-9 is that sometime after God separated the people...at Babel...he then *assigned each of the 70 nations to the fallen sons of God* (...also 70 in number)” [M. S. Heiser, “*Deut. 32:8 & the Sons of God*,” BIBLIO. SACRA, #158 p. 71]
 - “Paul was well aware of...nations under lesser [gods] & [view]ed them a threat to believers.” [M. Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, p.]
- b. Seek to separate us from God’s love in Christ (Rom. 8:38-39; Dan. 10:12-13, 20)
 - “I’m persuaded that neither...*rulers...nor powers...will be able to separate us* from [God’s] love...in Christ” (Rm. 8:38-9)

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] traditionally understood [as] angelic beings of the unseen world [that] engage in warfare against God's angel, to prevent Gabriel from reaching Daniel on earth with a heavenly message." [Tony Siew, *War Between the Two Beasts & the Two Witnesses*, p. 78 #34]

d. Instigate conflict on Earth (Re 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)
- "John... 'saw' the war in heaven between the angel host of Michael & Satan & his angels...Satan's defeat in the heavenly war & his casting down from heaven 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...The outcome of the war-in-heaven in Rev. 12...determines what transpires on earth in Rev. 11 & 13...[It] has unimaginable...repercussions." [T. Siew, *War Between 2 Beasts & 2 Witnesses*, pp. 77-78]

5. 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)
- At "the cross. **15** He disarmed the rulers & authorities & disgraced them publicly; he triumphed over them..." (Col. 2:15)
- 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)
- "...*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, *Becoming the Gospel*, p. 24]

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

- "*He disarmed the rulers & authorities.* The cross of Christ marks the decisive defeat of the demonic powers. On the cross, they were stripped of their power to accuse Christians before God... Nevertheless, these demons continue to exist & to exercise power to incite evil, so Christians must continue to struggle with them (Eph. 6:12, 16). *Put them to open shame*....The cross publicly reveals the failure of the demonic powers to thwart God's plan of salvation through Christ (1 Cor. 2:6-8). *Triumphing over them.* The image...[is] of a triumphal Roman military procession. The defeated king with...his surviving warriors & the spoils of war were paraded through [Rome's] streets as a public spectacle." (ESV Note Col. 2:15)

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

- a. "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*...Here...Paul is saying...all the authorities & rulers that might try to take over your life [were]...shamed by [God's] triumph [at] the cross of Jesus." [Tom Wright, *Paul for Everyone: Prison Letters*, pp. 170-171]

b. The Church shares Christ's Cosmic Victory (Eph. 2:6)

- "The exaltation of Christ [represents] victory over cosmic powers. This cosmic victory is a central feature of the [Christian] community's identity...The victorious One has rescued...readers from the cosmic powers that once enslaved them...The community *shares in the cosmic victory*...as it sits 'in heavenly places' (2:6)." [J. Thompson, *Moral Formation...*, p. 184]

6. The Church currently at War with Cosmic Dark Powers (Eph. 6:12; Co 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)
- “When Paul talks about ‘spiritual’ battles, he has in mind very concrete situations of life: marriage, family, work, church, society, it is in these structures that spiritual forces are at work.” [R. Paul Stevens, ...*Book of Everyday Christianity*, p.]
- “A number of interpreters, perhaps...a majority...conclude...the ‘*elements of the world*’ refers to spiritual powers...[On] this...interpretation we could [take this] as an inclusive term embracing the whole host of spiritual beings...principalities, powers, demons & rulers, equivalent to the angels or gods of the nations.” [G. Hawthorne, *Dict. of Paul & his Letters*, pp.]
- “The church is...in a ‘war of the worlds’...Paul says, ‘our struggle is...against the cosmic powers of this darkness, against evil, spiritual forces...’ (Eph. 6:12) *These powers include ideologies that compete for the hearts and minds of individuals & nations...*[&] unseen forces [which] compete for man’s allegiance.” [K. J. Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, p. 111 & #117]
- One “vehicle for the powers’ enslavement of humanity...is through *destructive ideologies...*” [T. Gombis, *Eph.*, pp. 46-47]
- “Some of these ‘powers’ have taken on a life of their own, making idolatrous claims on human beings: government, religion, culture, *various ‘isms’...that dominate the news* (Gal. 4:8-9; Eph. 1:21). In Eph. 6 Paul suggests these powers have been ‘colonized’...by Satan himself.” [R. J. Banks, R. Paul Stevens (eds.) *Marketplace Ministry Handbook*, p. 203]
- “-isms”: Marxism, socialism, capitalism, libertarianism, Republicanism, Progressivism, nationalism, tribalism, racism, etc.

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

- “The [need of] divine strengthening for...*engaging the spirit-forces of evil* (Eph 6:10–20) is... crucial...This is the only place...where believers are explicitly called upon to struggle against the ‘principalities & powers.’ The ‘struggle’ is not merely...a parenthetical aside. It’s...integrally connected with the foregoing.” [Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians*, p. 103]
- 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 gracious purpose to unite everything in Christ. [It] is the instrument of Christ to bring together all things...” [T. van Aarde, “...*Missional plan...of God in Eph. 1:3-14*,” *Missionalia*, V. 43, p. 60] **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 Kinneer, *Against the Tide*, p. 149]

8. QUESTIONS:

- a. Eph 1:21 refers to Christ being exalted above “every ruler & authority, power & dominion.” Some people think this refers simply to human rulers & authorities, such as the Roman emperor, & Herod, ‘King of the Jews.’ Looking at other references in Ephesians –e.g. Eph. 3:10; 6:12–do they support this view? What deductions might we draw from this?
- b. What indications do you find in the New Testament –from Jesus, Paul, et—for the existence of hostile, spiritual forces? What evidence do you see—in history, in today’s society & in your own personal experience—for the existence of hostile, dark, spiritual forces?

- c. In the eyes of the Rome, Jesus of Nazareth was just another rebel stirring trouble in a small corner of the Roman Empire; he was captured, condemned, shamed & execute Yet, Paul claims that, on the cross, Jesus was the victor who defeated & shamed the “principalities & powers” (Col. 2:15). What evidence does Paul present supporting his bold claims?
- d. Paul says that Jesus defeated the “principalities & powers” on the cross (Co 2:15), yet he also exhorts us fight against them (Eph. 6:10-20). How should we reconcile these two aspects of this issue?
- e. Some Christians ignore “spiritual warfare” entirely; others seem overly occupied with it, seeing Satan &/or evil spirits everywhere. What is the proper attitude & perspective for Christians?