



MESSAGE

STUDY GUIDE

GROUP MATERIAL

SONGS

The Evil Cosmic Power Alliance

Bible Reading: Eph. 6:10-13; Rom. 5:12-17; 6:6, 11-14, 22

[Watch LIVESTREAM here at 10am](#)

[Join our post-sermon discussion on Zoom at 11am](#)

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SUMMARY:

The Bible declares God is warring to reclaim his world from opposing cosmic forces. Jesus Christ's cross marks God's 'D-Day invasion' securing a beachhead in enemy-occupied territory. Believers are co-opted into this combat. Neutrality is not an option; we're on one side or the other. We don't fight 'flesh & blood,' humans—they're merely 'pawns,' proxies. Some assert the 'powers' inhabit earthly institutions, corporations, & social structures; but our opponents are heavenly, spiritual. There's an 'air war' against 'rulers & authorities,' plus a 'ground war' against the 'evil cosmic power alliance' of Sin, Death, & the Flesh. 'Sin,' like a wild animal, needs subduing; 'Flesh' highlights our vulnerabilities. Yet, God supplies his mighty strength & his full armor. We align with God by applying Christ's victory & offering our whole being to God. Let's fight the good fight!

Preliminaries—Existence of Supernatural Evil

The 4 Gospels present Jesus' words & actions as affirming supernatural evil. (e.g. Mk. 3:22-27)
Integral to the Christian Faith

We're in a War: *"The world is not neutral ground; it's a battlefield & everyone is a combatant."*—Samuel Ferguson

Paul's Cosmic View—God's Invasion Defeats the Dark Cosmic Powers

- “*God wages war with the [cosmic] powers in & through Jesus Christ...The central problem [is] the cosmic powers to which humans...are enslaved...God & Jesus are not the only ones who wage war on the powers. Believers too must enter the fray [battle]...believers are commanded to clothe themselves in the full armor of God.*”—Cary Newman

“Our Warfare: Not against flesh & blood, but against...cosmic powers” (Eph. 6:12)

- A. Origin of these cosmic rulers, authorities, principalities & powers (Dt. 32:8-9; Ps. 82:1-4, 6-7)
- B. “Does ‘spiritual warfare’ involve seeking to save the powers? *Wrong Answer: “Yes”*— Berkhof
- C. Social-Political-Institutional View of ‘cosmic powers’ (Eph. 6:12; cf. Rom. 13:1ff)
 - “It’s the *supra-human dimension of power in institutions...which must be fought*, not the...human agent.”—Walter Wink
 - “*It’s a major leap to find social-political systems in...Eph. 6 [where] the powers are...explicitly...personal spiritual powers... They’re spiritual in nature; their motivation is evil; & their sphere...is cosmic realms.*”—Daniel Darko
- D. Cosmic Powers behind Human Beings? (Eph. 6:12; 1 Cor. 2:8)

Cosmic powers & rulers in Romans (Rom. 8:33-39; 16:15a)

The ‘Evil Cosmic Power Alliance’ (Rom. 5:12-17; 6:6, 11-14, 22)

- “This [*cosmic*] *power alliance*’ consisting of the *supra-human ruler figures* [‘principalities, powers’] *and the cosmic entities of Sin, Death, & Flesh...conspire[e] together...against God & his people.*” —Tim. Gombis
- “The [*cosmic*] *power alliance*’ operates as a whole, as...seen in Romans 7.”—Derek Brown ? The ‘Air War’— vs. ‘Principalities & Powers,’ etc.
- The ‘Ground War’— vs. Sin & Death, etc.

Personified ‘Sin’—a Cosmic Power (Rom. 5:12-17; 6:6, 11-14, 22)

- A. Sin—A Personified Power
 - In “Rom. 5-8...Sin [is] *an entity with a will, aims, intentions & a strategy to fulfill its goals*”— Gombis B. ‘Sin’ as a ‘Crouching Tiger’ (Gen. 4:6-7)
 - “Given his “use of Gen. 1-3 Paul may have derived [this] from the...personification in Gen. 4:7—Sin crouching (like a wild beast) at Cain’s door.”—James Dunn
- B. “Sin—a Cosmic Terrorist”—Beverly Gaventa
- C. “Sin cannot be avoided or passed-over, it can only be *either served or defeated.*” —Beverly Gaventa
- D. Sin: from External to Internal; Sin condemned at the Cross (Rom. 8:3)

Sin & Death—a ‘Tag Team’ of Cosmic Powers (Rom. 5:12-21)

- “God[’s]...good creation [was] *hijacked by supra-human cosmic forces...include[ing] the powers of Sin & Death...Sin has [made] the human heart...its spawning ground for perpetuating chaos...Jesus didn’t die simply [for] human sins, but also to eradicate the cosmic forces that capture human hearts within their grip.*”—Scot McKnight

Our Response—“Everyone’s Gotta Serve Somebody”

- A. “Paul [in] Rom. 5...map[s]...the cosmos, he sees 2, & *only 2, power structures at work in the cosmos.*”—John Barclay
Song: ‘Gotta Serve Somebody’ —Bob Dylan

Cosmic Rulers dealt with at the Cross (Col. 2:15; 1 Cor. 2:8)

Final Defeat of Death & the Cosmic Powers (1 Cor. 15:24-28)

QUESTIONS:

- A. 6:12 says “our struggle [wrestling] is not against flesh & blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this darkness, against evil, spiritual forces in the heavens.”
1. Why do you think Paul uses such a long and ‘confusing’ list of opponents—“rulers, authorities, cosmic powers, evil, spiritual forces” (Eph. 6:12)? Plus, other places he uses other terms “angels, rulers, powers, etc.” (Rom. 8:38)
 2. In Rom. 13:1-3 Paul tells “everyone [to] submit to...*authorities*” (13:1) & commends “*rulers*” (13:3). Yet here we are charged to “wrestle against the *rulers*, [&] the *authorities*” & “resist” them (Eph. 6:12-13). How to reconcile this?
 3. So, if “spiritual warfare is not against humans (‘flesh & blood,’ on this earth) but against ‘spiritual beings/forces’ in the heavens’ (‘somewhere out there’)”—how do we apply this practically here on earth? Discuss
 4. If we’re not ‘wrestling against humans (‘flesh & blood’) do we just ignore people who vehemently &/or violently oppose/attack us? Are they simply ‘not part of the equation’? Discuss
- B. Some scholars assert the ‘powers’ inhabit earthly institutions, corporations, & social structures; this suggests we oppose &/or reform institutions (government, army, schools, laws, courts, banking & financial systems, etc.) to counter the corrupting influence of evil powers, rulers, authorities, etc. Does Eph. 6 support this view & its policy implications?
- C. Eph 6:12 talks about ‘spiritual warfare’ with “principalities & powers, authorities, etc.” Yet Rom. 5-7 talks about the “cosmic power alliance” of Sin, Death, the Flesh, etc. Are these the same? Are they different? (If so, how?) Discuss.
- D. What (if anything) is the difference between “sins” (i.e., trespasses, etc.) and (personified) “Sin” (Rom. 5:12...)?
1. How should we deal with “sins”? How should we deal with “Sin”?
 2. What has Christ done about our “sins”? What has Christ done about “Sin”? How do we apply each?
- E. Eph. 6:10-18 focuses on ‘spiritual warfare’; it talks about ‘the armor of God’ (Eph. 6:11, 13), it mentions ‘wrestling, struggling &/or resisting’ (alternate translations). These are ‘militaristic terms.’ Yet, consider the following...
1. Jesus told us to ‘love our enemies’ (Mt. 5:43) & ‘don’t resist our opponent/evil-doer’ (Mt. 5:39). How would you reconcile Jesus’ ‘pacifism’ (in the Gospels) with Paul’s ‘militaristic statements’ in Eph. 6? Discuss.
 2. If Jesus ‘won the victory’ on the cross/resurrection why are Satan, demons, ‘cosmic powers’ still active in the world?