



MESSAGE

STUDY GUIDE

GROUP MATERIAL

SONGS

Examining the text & our hearts:

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

- “Finally, be strengthened by the Lord & by his vast strength. ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God so that you can stand against the schemes of the devil. ¹² For our struggle 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. ¹³ For this reason take up the full armor of God, so that you may be able to resist in the evil day, & having prepared everything, to take your stand.” (Eph. 6:10-13 CSB)
- “*Sin entered* the world through one man, and death through sin, [and]...death spread to all people, because all sinned...[So,] *Death reigned*...even over those who did not [replicate]... Adam’s transgression...[But,] the grace of the one man Jesus Christ overflowed to the many... ¹⁷ If by the one man’s trespass, *Death reigned*...how much more will those who receive the overflow of grace & the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.” (Rom. 5:12-17 CSB)
- “Our old self was crucified with [Christ] so that the body ruled by Sin might be rendered powerless so that we may *no longer be enslaved to Sin*...Consider yourselves dead to Sin & alive to God in Christ Jesus. ¹² *Don’t let Sin reign* in your mortal body ...¹³ & don’t offer any parts of it to Sin as weapons...But...offer yourselves to God, and all [your] parts...to God as weapons... ¹⁴ For *Sin will not rule over you*, because...you’ve been *set free from Sin* &... become *enslaved to God*.” (Rom. 6:6, 11-14, 22)

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 are 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!

1. Preliminaries—Existence of Supernatural Evil

- a. The 4 Gospels present Jesus' words & actions as affirming supernatural evil. (e.g. Mk. 3:22-27)
 - Scribes accused Jesus "He drives out demons by the ruler of the demons." Jesus retorted 'How can Satan drive out Satan? ²⁴ A kingdom divided against itself...cannot stand. ²⁵ A house divided...cannot stand...²⁷ No one can enter a strong man's house & plunder his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man. Then he can plunder his house. (Mark 3:22-27)
- b. Integral to the Christian Faith
 - "True Christianity is stuck with the Devil, like it or not...The decision for or against the Devil is a decision about the integrity of Christianity as such. *We simply can't subtract the Devil, along with demons, angels, principalities and powers, & elemental spirits* without doing violence to...the Christian faith as transmitted by Scripture" [Carl E. Braaten "Powers in Conflict: Christ & the Devil," in Robert W. Jenson (ed.) *Sin, Death, & the Devil*, p. 96]

2. We're in a War:

- "The world is not neutral ground; it is a battlefield & everyone is a combatant...A person finds him/herself in relation to several 'powers' including Sin, supernatural beings, and the world (age)." [Samuel D. Ferguson, *Spirit & Relational Anthropology in Paul*, p. 108]
- "The world is not a...neutral place...There is no arena free from the claim...of some power in this world of competing forces...[There's a] confrontation between God & the [spiritual] principalities of this world...*Humanity is in the midst of a war* between two spheres of power for the sovereignty of the world *that began with the death and resurrection of Christ*, which...inaugurat[ed] the cosmic triumph of God." [Sang M. Lee, *Cosmic Drama of Salvation*, p. 9]

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

- a. Paul's Cosmic View "places Jesus on a cosmic stage...[as] *God wages war with the [cosmic] powers* in and through Jesus Christ...[It's] God's invasion of the human world & God's engagement with the [end-time] cosmic powers...The *central problem [is] the cosmic powers to which humans & the cosmos are enslaved*...The resurrection [is] the decisive moment (how God defeats the powers through the Lord)...The good news [is] about a God who has brought the world to a dramatic new beginning." [Carey C. Newman, *Ephesians & Reading Paul*, in J. A. Dunne (ed.) *One God, One People*..., pp. 494-5]
- b. "Ephesians [exhorts] its readers to know the supremacy of God's raw power (Eph. 1:19). This power...invades the world in the resurrection of Jesus, confronting & vanquishing any & all who've dared to oppose God... Jesus' exaltation places him above all rule, authority, power, & lords & each & every name...in this age & the age to come (Eph. 1:21)." [Newman, p. 497]
- c. "The ascension of Jesus throws open wide heaven's doors providing liberty for humans [whom] Evil...held hostage. Jesus' ascension...turns the tables on humanity's demonic oppressors, who find themselves...plundered...These heavenly events link to earthly ones—even to the affairs of the abyss. The death of Jesus...opens the door to the underworld, through which he...passes in his [descent into Hades]. The effects of the descent & ascent ripple outwards...in a larger chain of cosmic events. In his [defeat, plundering] of Evil &...empowering of humanity, Jesus fills the universe." [Carey Newman, p. 497]
- d. "God & Jesus are not the only ones who wage war on the powers. *Believers too must enter the fray* [battle]. The Christian march to maturity occurs when...believers are commanded to clothe themselves in the full armor of God." [Newman, p. 499]

4. "Our Warfare: Not against flesh & blood but against...cosmic powers" (Eph. 6:12)

- "Our struggle 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.*" (Eph. 6:12 CSB)
- a. Origin of these cosmic rulers, authorities, principalities & powers (Dt. 32:8-9; Ps. 82:1-4, 6-7)

- “The universal dimensions of evil [relate to] the fallen angelic powers which...control the social order... [led] by the ‘ruler of the power of the air’ (Eph. 2:2, Satan, the Devil)...The background for *these supernatural ‘principalities & powers’...is found in the universal care of angels over creation (Dt. 32:8) who are now fallen...*[This] gives a cosmic and universal dimension to evil...[Our] struggle against evil [is] grounded in Christ’s conquest of these powers [at the cross] (Col. 2:15) [Yet,] the victory won’t be completed...until the end of history (1 Cor. 15:24). *In Ephesians the church is pivotal in the struggle against the powers of evil (Eph 3:10...)*” [S. C. Mott, in G. Hawthorne (ed.) *Dictionary of Paul & Letters*, p.]
- “These angelic overseers were to maintain the separation between the various people groups...[But,] instead of ruling well on God’s behalf [these] corrupt angels usurped their God-given authority & sought to be...the source of power & authority. [Hence: ‘heavenly rulers & authorities’] The OT conception of (dis)unity [among peoples/nations] has a direct bearing on ...Ephesians, especially Paul’s [talk] of ‘rulers & authorities’ in Eph. 3:10. He feels compelled to proclaim this mystery ‘to heavenly rulers & authorities’ (Eph. 3:10).” [Benjamin L Gladd, *Adam, Israel...Church: Theology...People of God*, 150]

b. “Does ‘spiritual warfare’ involve seeking to save the powers? [*Wrong Answer*.] “Yes.

- H. Berkhof talks about ‘Christianizing’ the powers, & this is implicit in Reformed social ethics as a whole.” [T. McAlpine, *Facing the Powers*, p. 29]
- “The angels [gods] of the nations [in] texts such as Deut. 32:8-9 & Dan. 10...are associated with nations...[Walter] Wink summarizes his argument, ‘*The gods or angels of the nations...are part of the redemptive plan of God...our role in this redemptive activity is to acknowledge their existence, love them as creatures of God, unmask their idolatries, & stir up in them their heavenly vocation*’ (Walter Wink, *Unmasking the Powers*, p. 88)” [T. H. McAlpine, *Facing the Powers*, p. 21]

c. **Social-Political-Institutional Interpretation of ‘cosmic powers’ (Eph. 6:12; cf. Rom. 13:1ff)**

- a. *Walter Wink* (1935–2012) American biblical scholar, theologian, & activist; important figure in ‘Progressive Christianity.’ Dr. Wink taught at Auburn Theological Seminary in New York City, USA. He wrote extensively: *Naming the Powers* (1984) *Unmasking the Powers* (1986), *Engaging the Powers* (1992), *When the Powers Fall* (1998), *The Powers that Be* (1999). o *Walter Wink*: “We contend not against human beings as such (‘blood & flesh’) but against the legitimations, seats of authority, hierarchical systems, ideological justifications, & punitive sanctions which their human incumbents exercise & which transcend these incumbents in both time & power. It is the *supra-human dimension of power in institutions... which must be fought*, not the mere human agent.” [Walter Wink, *Naming the Powers*, pp. 85-86]
- b. “For W. Wink ‘principalities & powers’ are the spiritual dimensions of earthly, human institutions & structures...In Wink’s view these spiritual powers can’t exist apart from their corresponding human institutions & structures [since] they are the ‘spiritual interiority of human social structures’...[Plus,] Wink understands these ‘powers’—including Satan & the demonic—as ultimately destined for reconciliation with God[!]....Some evangelical scholars...conclude that [this view] represents *an unwarranted deviation from Biblical teaching...*” [James K, Bielby, *Understanding Spiritual Warfare: 4 Views*, pp.]
- c. A social-political view “of the powers in Eph. 6:12...suggest[s] they comprise *social structures*, kings, *institutional powers*, *laws*, *traditions* & rituals. Proponents see the battle as...against ‘seats of authority, hierarchical systems, ideological justifications, & punitive sanctions...’ [Walter Wink, *Naming the Powers*, pp. 85-6; Wink is] a leading proponent...[But this interpretation] override[s]...the text. *It is a major leap to find social-political systems in...Eph. 6:12 [where] the powers are described explicitly as personal spiritual powers...in the heavenly realms. They are spiritual in nature; their motivation is evil; & their sphere of operation is cosmic realms.*” [Daniel K Darko, *Against Principalities & Powers*, p xx]

d. **Cosmic Powers behind Human Beings? (Eph. 6:12)**

- “Our struggle 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.*” (Eph. 6:12 CSB)
- “The crucifixion of Jesus was carried out by evil cosmic powers through human agents...In 1 Cor. 2:8 Paul refers to ‘the rulers of this age’ as *evil cosmic powers standing behind the human political rulers.*” [S. M. Lee, *Cosmic Drama... 8 #8*]
- “Consider the naming of the enemies in Eph. 6:12, which is regularly translated as indicating that the contest is *not at all* against flesh & blood (i.e. humans), but against ‘the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places’ (Eph. 6:12), i.e. against all manner of spiritual beings. However, there’s good reason to support *another way of viewing this text*. It is common to take the [Gk.] *alla* in Eph. 6:12 as representing 2 mutually opposite options—the enemies are *not* flesh & blood, but they *are* spiritual. However, one might also consider the possibility that we have here what can be called a *contrast of significance*.

Thus, the negation is more in terms of the relative value of the options—the enemies are not *merely* flesh & blood, but *more importantly* are the rulers & powers of the heavenly realms. This latter proposal has much to commend it, with good support from other cases of this use of [Gk.] *alla*. H. Schlier explains it this way: ‘Naturally, blood & flesh can be found on the ‘front lines.’ But the conflict runs much deeper. The struggle is finally against a myriad of tirelessly—attacking opponents, too slippery to grasp, with no specific names, only collective designations’...The point of Eph. 6:12 is rather that believers do not ‘wrestle’ ... *merely against human beings* or even in human terms (i.e., with bloody warfare...). *Rather, they are engaged in ideological-spiritual conflict with evil human rulers and evil authorities in the heavenly realms.*” [Nijay K. Gupta; F. J. Long, “Politics of Ephesians,” Journal of Greco-Roman Christianity & Judaism, Vol. 7 (2010) pp. 124-5]

5. Cosmic powers & rulers in Romans (Rom. 8:33-39 CSB)

- “Who can bring an accusation against God’s elect?...³⁴ Who is the one who condemns?...³⁵ Who can separate us from the love of Christ? Can affliction or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?...³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ I am persuaded that neither death nor life, *nor angels nor rulers*, nor things present nor things to come, *nor powers*, ³⁹ *nor height nor depth*, nor any other created thing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.’ (Rom. 8:33-39 CSB)
- Rom 8:38-39 “implies that without ‘Christ Jesus our Lord’ human beings could be separated from the love of God & by the things Paul lists in these verses.” [Samuel D. Ferguson, *Spirit & Relational Anthropology in Paul*, p. 110 #103]
- “The end of Rom. 8 turns...to the conflict between God & God’s enemies. [Paul asks (repeatedly) ‘who?... who?’]...There follows first a list of circumstances, including famine, hardship & persecution. But Paul continues, ‘we are more than conquerors through him who loved us’ (Rom 8:37)...Finally comes a list of the powers that produce the circumstances: ‘Death, life, angels, rulers...powers’ & so forth (Rom. 8:38-39). In all of this, Paul insists, nothing will be able to separate us from God’s love in Christ Jesus...Paul looks at all the *harmful circumstances*...*He sees behind those the work of God’s own enemies*, & he confidently declares that God will have the last word.” [Beverly R. Gaventa, *When in Romans*, p. 40]
- At the end of Rom. 8 Paul asks “who might threaten ‘us,’ [as]...God’s children (Rom. 8:33): ‘Who will bring any charge against God’s elect?’ *The scene here is one of conflict*, & Paul...names... [entities/events] that might seek to harm God’s chosen: hardship, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, & the sword. No mere survivors, ‘we’ are ‘more than conquerors’ in the face of the litany of powers that follows, the first of which is Sin’s cosmic partner, Death. The gospel of ... Jesus Christ[’s] crucifixion...resurrection, &...triumphant place at God’s right hand has already secured victory over all these things (Rom. 8:34).” [Beverly R. Gaventa, “Cosmic Power of Sin in...Rom.,” Interpretation Vol. 58, #3 p. 237]
- “This point is recapitulated...in the closing of the letter... ‘The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.’ (Rom. 16:15a) ...Here Satan appears as [a] shorthand reference to all the powers that oppose God & threaten God’s people... The point is this: *Paul’s understanding of salvation is cosmic. Salvation concerns God’s powerful action in Jesus Christ to reclaim humanity...from the powers of Sin & Death.* The human situation is not simply that humans do bad things...*The problem is that actual powers, prominent among them Sin & Death, hold humanity in their grasp.* God has interceded in the death & resurrection of Jesus Christ to break their power (Rom. 8:3), but the struggle between God & the powers continues until God’s final triumph, the redemption of the whole of creation.” [Beverly R Gaventa, *When in Rom.*, pp 40-1]

6. 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,’ etc.] *and the cosmic entities of Sin, Death, & Flesh*...conspire[e] together...against God & his people.” [Timothy Gombis, “Paul,” in K. L. Johnson (ed.) *T&T Clark Companion to the Doctrine of Sin*, p. 106 #14 Note: We use “cosmic” for scholars’ “apocalyptic”]
- “Paul’s concept...of evil...is multifaceted...A chief agent of evil [the Devil/Satan] has authority over & works through a range of *arch-angelic ruler figures to hold God’s creation enslaved & oppressed*, preventing it from...flourishing. These figures are in *alliance with the cosmic forces of*

Sin & Death, forming...the '[cosmic] power alliance,' a matrix of forces hostile to God & his purposes." [Tim G. Gombis, "Saint Paul," in T. Angier (ed.) *History of Evil in Antiquity*, p.]

- "The ['cosmic] power alliance' operates as a whole, as...seen in Romans 7 where Paul describes how each of the members of this 'alliance' plays a role in his description of human sinfulness." [Derek R. Brown, *God of this Age: Satan*, p. 67]
- "Paul develops a roster of the enemies we face...*Sin, Flesh, Law & Death*...[that's] been called Paul's '[cosmic] power alliance'...[1.] In speaking of the principalities & powers, Paul begins with the 'political alliances' of the cosmos & unfolds their impact on humankind; [2.] the personified powers of *Sin, Flesh, Law, & Death* begin from a [human-focused] perspective & reach out to the cosmic dimensions of that predicament—Death...In Rom. 5-7 Paul casts the alliance of *Sin, Flesh, Law, & Death* in a narrative of conflict & subsequent defeat." [T. Longman, D. G. Reid, *God as Warrior*, 158]
- "The [human-centered] *alliance of power*—Sin, Flesh, Law & Death—is defeated [by]...Christ, as the last Adam [who] overthrows the enemy in the triumph of righteousness...We've seen that in Rom. & 1 Cor. Paul speaks of the Law as part of this alliance of [human-focused] powers. Though the law is...holy, just & good (Rom. 7:8, 11)...from the perspective of the human predicament, it serves & empowers Sin (Rom. 7:8, 11)." [T Longman, D Reid, *God as Warrior*, 159-160]
- "The death of Christ...marks the defeat of the [cosmic] power alliance & signals the immanent defeat of Death (1 Cor. 15: 26)...Colossians [is] correct...on this point 'On the cross. [God] disarmed the rulers & authorities & disgraced them publicly he triumphed over them in [it]' (Col. 2:15). The death of Christ does not refer primarily to...the forgiveness of [mankind's] transgressions...To the contrary, the death of Christ addresses Sin as a cosmic power & slave-master, i.e., to the human condition 'under the power of Sin'. It announces the negation of the power of Sin that controls the world." [J. Christiaan Beker, *Paul the Apostle*, pp. 190-1] "[Yet,] the powers continue...active & insubordinate to God, although [being dethroned,] they no longer have dominion over the Christian." [Neil Elliott, *Liberating Paul*, 177]

7. Personified 'Sin'—A Cosmic Power (Rom. 5:12-17; 6:6, 11-14, 22)

- "Sin entered the world through 1 man, & Death through Sin, [so] death spread to all people, because all sinned" (Rom. 5:12)

a. Sin—A Personified Power

- "Throughout Rom. 5-8 Paul speaks of sin as an enslaving cosmic power. Sin does not merely consist in human misdeeds. Rather sin is a cosmic force for Paul...Sin appears as *an entity with a will, aims, intentions & a strategy to fulfill its goals*...Sin plays a significant role in the cosmically-contested battleground [of] present human experience...The cosmic actors, Flesh & Death in league with Sin, have hijacked God's good gift of the Law & made it an unwitting accomplice in their enslavement of humanity. These cosmic forces are *in league with other supra-human cosmic rulers*...[known as] '*powers & authorities*'...[So,] there's an enslaved cosmos...[&] God's work [consists of] invading this enslaved condition in his Son who...deals a death-blow to these anti-God forces in his death, resurrection & sending of his Spirit." [Timothy Gombis, "Paul," in K. L. Johnson (ed.) *T&T Clark Companion to the Doctrine of Sin*, pp. 105-6]
- "In Romans...sin is Sin—not a lower-case transgression, not even a human disposition or flaw in human nature, but an upper-case Power that enslaves humankind & stands over against God. Here, Sin is among those anti-God powers whose final defeat the resurrection of Jesus Christ inaugurates & guarantees. Th[e] larger picture of the cosmic battle is necessary to understand...Romans...[We note] Paul's frequent use of Sin (Gk. *hamartia*) as the subject of a verb & describe Sin itself as a major character in the letter—a character who enslaves, who brings death, who ensnares even God's Torah [Law], & whose demise is guaranteed by God's action in the death & resurrection of Jesus Christ" [Beverly R. Gaventa, "Cosmic Power of Sin in...Romans," *Interpretation*, Vol. 58, #3, pp. 231-2]

b. 'Sin' as a 'crouching Tiger' (Gen. 4:6-7)

- "The LORD told Cain, "Why are you furious? ...Sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it." (Gen. 4:6-7) **Note:** Given his "use of Genesis 1-3 Paul may have derived his [characterization of Sin] from the closely related but enigmatic personification in Gen. 4:7—Sin crouching (like a wild beast) at Cain's door." [J. Dunn, *Paul*, p. 112]

c. "Sin—a Cosmic Terrorist"—Beverly R. Gaventa

- “*The problem is that actual powers, prominent among them, Sin and Death, hold humanity in their grasp. God has intervened in the death & resurrection of Jesus to break their power (Rom. 8:3).*” [B. R. Gaventa, *When in Romans*, p. 41]
- “Nowhere [in Romans] does [Paul] talk of forgiveness...because Paul sees the *human problem as larger than that of repentance & forgiveness*...This is clear from the slavery language in Rom. 6: slaves cannot repent their way out of slavery; neither can they be forgiven. They can only be delivered... Salvation, for Paul, doesn’t consist of simply being forgiven for sins; it is being delivered from Sin’s power.” [Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *When in Romans*, p. 43]
- “Paul’s letter to the Romans depicts *Sin as one of the anti-God powers* whose final defeat the death & resurrection of Jesus Christ guarantees. The framework of cosmic battle is essential for reading & interpreting [Romans].” [Beverly Roberts Gaventa, “*Cosmic Power of Sin in...Romans*,” *Interpretation* Vol. 58, #3 (2004) p.]
- “These ‘achievements’ of *Sin...create the portrait of a cosmic terrorist. Sin...entered the cosmos with Adam, it enslaved, it unleashed Death itself, it even managed to take [God’s] law...captive to its power.* This résumé of Sin’s accomplishments requires something more than a generous God who forgives & forgets, & something entirely other than a Jesus who allows people to improve themselves by following the example of his good behavior. Sin cannot be avoided or passed over, it can only be *either served or defeated.*” [Beverly R. Gaventa, “*Cosmic Power of Sin...*,” *Interpretation* V. 58, #3 p. 235]
- “*Humans are not merely victims...of cosmic forces of evil. [In] the scriptural narrative...humanity is responsible for the entrance of Sin & Death into the world. Paul...describe[s] fully the enslave[ment]...of creation to...cosmic forces in an effort to portray evil more completely...Many treatments of Paul’s theology in western context bracket [out] these cosmic dimensions, but Paul’s theology...accounts for the pervasive effects of evil in God’s good world.*” [Timothy Gombis, “*Saint Paul*,” in T. Angier (ed.) *History of Evil in Antiquity*, p.]

d. Sin: from External to Internal; Sin condemned at the Cross (Rom. 8:3)

- a. From Rom. 5 through 7 “Sin has developed from an external force...to an internal, manipulative & tyrannical [force] working against [humanity.] That which once ruled over humanity now stirs up sinful desires within them...Sin develops from an external force that universally rules over sinful humanity to that which is an internal force.” [Joseph R. Dodson, *Powers of Personification*, 135]
- b. “God...condemned Sin in the flesh by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh as a sin offering.” (Rom. 8:3)

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

- “In Rom. 5:12-21...Sin is accompanied by Death, & both appear as powers that rule human life. [e.g. Rom. 5:12, 14, etc]... Throughout...[Rom.] 5-7, we meet supra-human powers by the names of Sin & Death...Sin & Death have humankind under their control, all humankind...They can even make use of God’s holy law (Rom. 7:8, 11)...Sin & Death are defeated only by God’s action in Jesus Christ.” [Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *When in Romans*, pp. 37-38]
- “God[’s]...good creation [has been] *hijacked by supra-human cosmic forces* that oppose...the creator God...These forces include the *powers of Sin & Death*—forces with intentionality that roam within God’s good creation & have conscripted the human race in their efforts to [deny] God of his good creation. The *power of Sin* has found the human heart to be its spawning ground for perpetuating chaos...[So,] Paul...claims in Rom. 3:9 ‘all [people] are under the *control of Sin & subject to its power.*’ (Amp.)...Human sinfulness [indicates] malign powers are at work...In Rom. 5, Paul speaks of...*Sin & Death as powers that ‘reign’* like cosmic overlords (Rom. 5:14, 17, 21). The power of Sin is in full view in Rom. 6 & 7. In Rom. 6 the Christian has died to the power of Sin & in Rom. 7 the ‘I’ decries...his failures [viz-a-vi Sin]. For Paul...*Jesus did not die simply to take care of human sins, but also to eradicate the cosmic forces* that capture human hearts within their grip.” [Scot McKnight, J. D. Modica, *Apostle Paul & the Christian Life*, pp.]
- “Paul presents Sin & Death as the supreme rulers of the old age...[After Christ’s cross] they are *former* [ruling] figures now dethroned...[Yet,] although Sin & Death have been defeated, their residual effects remain, since Death (& presumably Sin) will not be completely destroyed ‘til the *Parousia* [Christ’s return].” [Joseph R. Dodson, *Powers of Personification*, p. 124]

9. Our Response—“Gotta Serve Somebody”

- “When Paul pauses, midway through Romans 5, to redraw the map of the cosmos, he sees *two, and only two, power structures at work within the cosmos.*” [John M. G. Barclay, “*Under Grace*: B.

Gaventa (ed.) *Apocalyptic Paul*, pp. 59-76]

◦ **'Gotta Serve Somebody'—Bob Dylan**

- You may be an ambassador to England or France
 - You may like to gamble, you might like to dance
 - You may be the heavyweight champion of the world
 - You may be a socialite with a long string of pearls
- *But you're gonna have to serve somebody, yes*
 - Indeed you're gonna have to serve somebody
 - *Well, it may be the devil or it may be the Lord*
 - *But you're gonna have to serve somebody*
- You might be a rock 'n' roll addict prancing on the stage
 - You might have drugs at your command, women in a cage
 - You may be a business man or some high-degree thief
 - They may call you doctor or they may call you chief
- But you're gonna have to serve somebody, yes you are
 - You're gonna have to serve somebody
 - Well, it may be the devil or it may be the Lord
 - But you're gonna have to serve somebody...

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

- At “the cross. ¹⁵ [God] disarmed the rulers & authorities & disgraced them publicly; he triumphed over them in [it]” (2:15)
- “None of *the rulers of this age* knew [God’s wisdom], because if they had known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.” (1 Cor. 2:8 CSB)
- “What does Paul mean by *‘the rulers of this age’*? ...It’s evident from the immediate context...that Paul is not interested in examining...Judea or...Pilate’s career some two decades earlier...The context of his interpretation of Jesus’ crucifixion is... the Jewish *powers of the age: Law, Sin & Death*’ as these appear in Rom. 5-8.” [Neil Elliott, in *Paul & Empire*, pp. 176-7]
- “The *‘rulers of this age’* [1 Cor. 2:8] are *not human rulers, but cosmic figures of authority*, whom God...appointed over various realms within creation...[Their] origins are spoken of in Israel’s Scriptures [Dt. 32:8-9; Ps. 82; Dan. 10, etc.]...In the 1 Cor. text...the *‘rulers of this age’* were not aware of God’s way of working...God subverts human expectations...
- Through Jesus’ shameful death...God has struck a decisive blow to these [cosmic] rulers, breaking their enslaving & dominating grip over creation.” [Tim. Gombis, “*Saint Paul*,” in T. Angier (ed.) *History of Evil in Antiquity*, p.]
- “According to Paul, the crucifixion of Jesus was carried out by evil cosmic powers through human agents...In 1 Cor. 2:8 Paul refers to ‘the rulers of this age’ as *evil cosmic powers standing behind the human political rulers* of the world.” [S. M. Lee, *Cosmic Drama of Salvation*, p. 8 & #8]
- “Given Paul’s depiction of humanity...enslaved to the powers of Sin & Death, nothing less that the powerful death & resurrection of Jesus Christ can defeat the powers by ‘tricking’ them into their own defeat... ‘None of the [cosmic] rulers of this age knew [God’s] wisdom, because if they had known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory’ (1 Cor. 2:8). By crucifying Jesus Christ, the anti-God powers bring about their own defeat, since their destructive power is no match for God’s resurrecting power.” [Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *When in Romans*, pp. 42-43]
- “With the death & resurrection of Jesus as the fulcrum [of the ages]...the [cosmic] powers of evil have, in one sense, already been defeated through the Christ event and thereby ‘disarmed’ [Col.

2:15] of their full power, but in another sense [they] endure in the present age with residual... power against the people of God.” [Derek R. Brown, *God of this Age: Satan*, p. 66]

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

- “Death is an intruder, a violator of God’s good world. The Creator’s answer to death can’t be... compromise. Death must be, & in the Messiah has been & will be defeated. (1 Cor. 15:26).” [N. T. Wright, *Resurrection of the Son of God*, p. 314]
- “Then comes the end, when [Christ] hands over the kingdom to God the Father, when he *abolishes all rule & all authority & power.* ²⁵ For he must reign until he puts all his enemies under his feet. ²⁶ *The last enemy to be abolished is death.* ...²⁸ Then the Son himself will also be subject to [God the Father] so that God may be all in all.” (1 Cor. 15:24-28)
- “The most explicit treatment comes in 1 Cor. 15, with its anticipation of ‘the end, when [Jesus] hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has *destroyed every ruler & every authority & power.* For he must reign ‘til he has put *all his enemies under his feet.* The last enemy to be destroyed *is death*’ (1 Cor. 15:24-26). Here there is no ambiguity: God has enemies with real power, chief among them Death itself... In 1 Cor. 15... Death takes the leading role among God’s enemies. Yet Sin also makes an appearance here, once again linked with Death, in 1 Cor. 15:56 [‘*The sting of death is sin...*’]” [Beverly R. Gaventa, “*Cosmic Power of Sin in...Romans,*” Interpretation V. 58, #3 p. 237]
- Note: 1 Cor. 15 contradicts Walter Wink’s view that “understands these ‘powers’—including Satan & the demonic—as *ultimately destined for reconciliation with God.*” [James K. Bielby, *Understanding Spiritual Warfare: 4 Views*, pp.] Paul here talks of the “abolition,”/“destruction” of “all rule & all authority & power” (1 Cor. 15:24). Hence the powers’ “ultimate destiny” is neither rehabilitation nor ‘reconciliation with God,’ but rather, destruction &/or abolition. Plus, ‘Death’ is neither reconciled, nor rehabilitated; it is “destroyed” (1 Cor. 15:26).

QUESTIONS: Eph. 6:12 says “our struggle [wrestling] is not against flesh & blood, but against the rulers...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
 - a. 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?
 - b. 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.
 - c. What (if anything) is the difference between “sins” (i.e., trespasses, etc.) and (personified) “Sin” (Rom. 5:12...)?
 - How should we deal with “sins”? How should we deal with “Sin”?
 - What has Christ done about our “sins”? What has Christ done about “Sin”? How do we apply each?

- d. Eph. 6:10-18 focuses on 'spiritual warfare'; it talks about 'the armor of God' (Eph. 6:11, 13), it mentions 'wresting, struggling &/or resisting' (alternate translations). These are 'militaristic terms.' Yet, consider the following...
- 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.
 - If Jesus 'won the victory' on the cross/resurrection why are Satan, demons, 'cosmic powers' still active in the world?