



MESSAGE

STUDY GUIDE

GROUP MATERIAL

SONGS

Examining the text & our hearts:

Bible Reading: Ephesians 6:10-13

1. Heaven & Earth are not Divorced from one another

“The author of Ephesians would not have seen these [heavenly and earthly] as alternative categories, but as diverse manifestations of a seamless web of reality hostile to God. After all...we...see...the church participated...in this mix of human & the divine, the earthly & the heavenly.” [T.Y. Neufeld, Put on the Armor of God, p. 124]

 - a. For Paul, reality was seen from a cosmic perspective
 - a. “We know that we are of God, & the whole world [Gk. cosmos] is under the sway of the Evil One.” (1 John 5:19)
 - b. In “Paul’s conception...the church is set within a cosmically-contested situation. There’s more wrong with the world... than the mere fact that humans are sinners...All of reality is far more messed up than most modern Christians realize. There’s God’s arch-enemy Satan who’s at work in the world. There are cosmic ruler[s]—the ‘principalities & powers’ [Eph. 1:21]— who sow within human cultures perverted ideologies along with...enslaving ways of life. And Paul sees other cosmic actors at work, personifying mysterious entities as having wills, aims, and intentions: Sin, Death, & Flesh (scheming against humanity to divide & destroy). All these figures...we...call the ‘[cosmic] power alliance’...a collection of cosmic entities [who] conspire to weave a brilliantly-intricate matrix [i.e., the present] corrupted world. These actors...scheme [so] that humanity does not experience God’s...flourishing in this world.” [Timothy G. Gombis, Power in Weakness, p. 7]
 - c. “The human drama of daily life [is] directly related to activity in the heavens, and all of reality was cosmically contested space.” [Timothy G. Gombis, Power in Weakness, p. 66]
 - d. “For Paul, the world was held in the enslaving grip of evil cosmic powers, whose oppressive rule over creation was displayed in the orientation of human imaginations and behaviors toward sinful practices that kept them from enjoying the life of God.” [T. Gombis, Power in Weakness, p. 66]
 - b. Evidence in Ephesians (Eph. 1:20-21; 2:1-2; 3:10; 4:8-11; 5:16; 6:10-12)
 - a. Humanity following the ‘ruler of the air’ (Eph. 2:1-2)
 - a. “You were dead in your trespasses & sins 2 in which you previously walked...according to the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit now working in the disobedient.” (Eph. 2:1-2)
 - b. Christ’s victory seated him above the cosmic powers (Eph. 1:20-21)
 - a. God “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...in this age [&] also the one to come” (Eph 1:20-21)

- c. Through Christ's death, descent to Hades, & ascent He led a host of released captives (Eph. 4:8-11)
 - a. "When he ascended on high, he took the captives captive; he gave gifts to people. 9 But what does 'he ascended' mean except that he also descended to the lower parts of the earth?..." (Eph. 4:8-9)
- d. The church displays God's wisdom to the cosmic powers (Eph. 3:10)
 - a. "God's multi-faceted wisdom may now be made known thro' the church to the rulers & authorities in the heavens." (3:10)
- e. Believers live wisely, redeeming the time, because the 'days are evil' (Eph. 5:16, cf. 6:13)
 - a. "Walk...wisely— 16 making the most of the time, because the days are evil." (Eph. 5:15b-16)
- f. Our struggle is against the cosmic powers (Eph. 6:11b-12)
 - a. "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)
- c. Ephesians' Cosmic Warfare is Not an 'Irrelevant Appendix' or mere Parenthesis
 - a. "This passage has regularly been taken as a kind of specialist appendix on how to deal with the evil powers, [but] it is much more convincingly understood as a fitting summary & conclusion to the whole letter." [Max Turner, "Ephesians," in K. J. Vanhoozer (ed.) Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible, p. 190]
 - b. "The paragraph...serves as a climax to the letter as a whole...[It] is neither 'an irrelevant appendix' to Ephesians nor 'a parenthetical aside' ...but a crucial element to which the rest of the epistle has been pointing." [P. O'Brien, Eph., p. 457]
 - c. "One of the most cited [of] Paul's passages [in the early Church] is...its [warfare] imagery. Excerpts for Eph. 6:10-17 are used...450+ times by at least 40 different pre-Nicene authors...Early Christian focus on images of weapons, wrestling, and warfare from Eph 6 is not insignificant..." [Jennifer R. Strawbridge, Pauline Effect, p. 59]

2. A Dangerous Disbelief

- a. "If our goal is to understand the NT concept of the Powers...we must...attend carefully to the unique vocabulary & concept of the first century, to grasp what they meant by the vocabulary of 'power' within their own language & worldview. It is a virtue to disbelieve in something that does not exist. But it is dangerous and arrogant to disbelieve in something simply because it exists outside our current, limited categories." [Walter Wink, Naming the Powers, p. 4]
- b. "Just because something is ancient does not mean it's primitive. This mindset is a product of living in an advanced technological age where we assume that progress in technology means progress in understanding, or progress in wisdom, or insight into the meaning of life & how things really operate." [Tim Mackie, Ephesians Classroom]
- c. A "biblical understanding of spiritual warfare requires, as a central component, a belief in angels, Satan & demons as real, autonomous, free agents, as well as a belief that the activity of these beings intersects with human affairs, for better or for worse...However...many modern people, including many Christian theists, find this belief inherently implausible." [Martyn J. Smith, Divine Violence & Christus Victor, Middlesex University/London School of Theology, p. 189]
- d. "How are we to make sense of the 'principalities & powers'? ... Biblical language about 'principalities & powers' can't be dismissed as 1st-century, pre-scientific superstition. The world of spirits & the supernatural is real & it has impact on the [Christian] mission...We in the West are ill-equipped to think [about this] with clarity and depth because our dominant Enlightenment paradigm has no space for this level of reality. [In this paradigm,] 'principalities & powers,' witch-doctors & shamans, demons & household gods are merely 'superstition.'" [Bryant L. Myers in Tom McAlpine, Facing the Powers, p. 2]

3. Humanity Held in an Evil Enslaving Grip (Eph. 2:1-2; 2 Cor. 4:4)

- a. "You were dead in your trespasses & sins 2 in which you previously walked according to the ways of this world, according to the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit now working in the disobedient." (Eph. 2:1-2)
- b. "The god of this age blinded the unbelievers' minds to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of... Christ" (2 Cor. 4:4)
- c. The Central Problem: Not 'sins & trespasses;' but Satan (the Devil) & his Evil Cosmic Powers
 - a. "The NT [asserts] 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'...[There's a] vast...reservoir of evil...from which we cannot deliver ourselves."—Eugene Boring
 - b. "Evil is real and powerful...[It's] more than the sum total of all evil impulses & actions."—N. T. Wright
 - c. "There's more wrong with the world... than the mere fact that humans are sinners..."—Tim Gombis

- d. "When Paul spoke of principalities, authorities, powers, world-rulers, and elemental spirits, he's using mythological language to describe spiritual realities..." [George Caird, *Principalities & Powers: A Study in Pauline Theology*, p. x]
 - e. "Satan, the Powers, and Sin, Death, & Flesh – the '[cosmic] power alliance' – conspire to ensure that human experience in this world is enslaving, and people are trapped in spiritual death." [Tim Gombis, *Power in Weakness*, p. 72]
- d. Ephesians foregrounds the Cosmic Conflict
- a. "Modern Christians are well aware of...human sinfulness & rebellion against God's purposes, [but]...less acquainted – or perhaps not at all –with Paul's view of our cosmically-enslaved world. Having hijacked God's good world, these cosmic entities exploit human sinfulness, dominating humanity & holding all of creation in their enslaving grip." [Gombis, p. 72]
 - b. "In order to understand how we are to fight the Devil today, we need to realize that our fight is directly related to Christ's own victory over the Evil One. If we push into the background God's warfare with the rebel Lucifer [Satan, the Devil], we are liable to underestimate its importance in our own spiritual lives. Some theories of the atonement do precisely this [e.g. Penal Substitutionary Atonement]." [Andrew Walker, *Enemy Territory: Christian Struggle for the Modern World*, p. 40]
- e. What does that look like?
4. God Broke the Powers' Enslaving Grip (Col. 2:15; Heb. 2:14-15)
- a. On "the cross [God] disarmed the rulers & authorities & disgraced them publicly; he triumphed over them in him." (C 2:15)
 - b. "Jesus...shared in [flesh & blood], so that through his death he might destroy the one holding the power of death—that is, the devil— & free those who were held in slavery all their lives by the fear of death." (Heb. 2:14-15)
 - c. "Paul came to see that the enslaving grip of the present evil age would not be broken by any human effort... God came in Christ, who, as a human, became a full participant in the cosmically-enslaved situation (Rom. 8:3; Gal. 4:4-5), And whose death dealt cosmically-powerful mortal blow to the powers that had seized God's good World. His death broke loose their enslaving grip..." [T. Gombis, *Power in Weakness*, pp. 76-77]
 - d. "Paul understands the death of Christ as a triumph over the...evil cosmic powers. In Christ, God has broken their enslaving grip over creation & has begun to free his world from their malignant influence. At the future 'day of Christ,' [Phil. 1:6, 10] God will complete this work & fully restore creation, but the church is the initial phase...[Meanwhile,] these communities of God's resurrection-powered presence exist...in cosmically-hostile territory. The 'present evil age' [Gal. 1:4] persists... These evil powers –already defeated but not yet completely destroyed –attempt...to ruin...God's good world as they can before God 3 annihilates them...In [the present] cosmic situation...two ages are up & running...the 'new age' has been initiated...the death & resurrection of Christ, but the 'old age' persists." [Tim Gombis, *Power in Weakness*, pp. 7-8]
5. The Church is the Sign of God's Victory (Eph. 3:10)
- a. A. Church called to participate in God's Cosmic War (Eph. 6:10-12)
 - b. "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)
 - c. Note: "This list of spiritual rulers, authorities, & cosmic powers gives a sobering glimpse into the devil's allies, the spiritual forces of evil who are exceedingly powerful in their exercise of cosmic powers over this present darkness. And yet Scripture makes clear that the enemy host is no match for the Lord, who has 'disarmed the rulers & authorities & put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him' (Col. 2:15)." [ESV Study Bible]
 - d. "The church in [the book of] Ephesians is a Spirit-filled cosmic community that's involved in an [end-time] battle with spiritual forces." [Curt Niccum, "Heaven Can't Wait: Church in Ephesians...", in J. P. Harrison (ed.) *NT Church*, p. xviii]
 - e. "Eph. 6:10-18...is commonly read as an exhortation to individual Christians to...engage in the daily battle of the Christian life...[But,] Paul is not merely addressing individuals but the entire gathered church...The Church now battles against the powers & authorities arrayed against God's purposes in the world." [Tim. G. Gombis, *Drama Of Ephesians*, pp. 156-157]
- f. The Church the Sign of God's Victory (Eph. 3:10)
- a. "So that God's multi-faceted wisdom may now be made known through the church to the rulers & authorities" (Eph. 3:10)
 - b. "The church in the world is the sign of God's victory over the [cosmic] power alliance...God has already struck a fatal blow to his cosmic enemies & has shaken loose the grip of the present evil age over creation, but he has not yet

accomplished his final Victory. This world remains, therefore, enemy territory, still held in the grip of the 'god of this age' & the evil powers. But God has invaded enemy territory & has begun establishing & growing communities of Jesus-followers... These communities [churches]... are locations of resurrection life & power, spaces... liberated from the dominating influence of the powers & that bring renewal, redemption, restoration & life." [T. Gombis, Power in Weakness, pp. 77]

g. Final Victory is assured, yet Cosmic Conflict continues

- a. "Ephesians boldly asserts that, [despite] the supreme victory of God in Christ, 'the heavenly places remain contested space'. N. T. Wright explains this as de facto and de jure power, where the authorities of the present evil age have been defeated by the cross but there is still a 'time-lag'—as in the well-known gap between D-day and V-day. Ephesians... proclaims the grand victory of Christ over all sovereigns..." [Nijay K. Gupta; F. J. Long, "Politics of Eph.," JGRChJ, V. 7 (2010) pp. 125-6]
- b. God chooses to liberate the cosmos over time rather than all at once (T. Gombis, Power in Weakness, p. 77)