

Opening Words

Christ defeated the powers on the cross. Their greatest weapon has been taken away – our guilty status before God.

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At last we get to it – something Paul has been hinting at throughout his book spiritual warfare. In Ephesians 1:20-22 he said that Christ was enthroned far above all rule and power and authority and dominion and every name that is named in this age and in the age to come. In chapter 2 he talked about how people who are still lost in their sin live according to the prince of the power of the air. In Chapter 3 he explained how God was showing his matchless wisdom through the church to the rulers and authorities in these heavenly places. In Chapter 4 he talked about the darkness of the pagan world and exhorted believers not to give even so much as a foothold to the evil one. Now, these brief references give way, in chapter six, to Paul's most thorough exposition of spiritual warfare in his writings.

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. ¹³ Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. ¹⁴ Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵ and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; ¹⁶ in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

¹⁸ With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints,

Let's take a moment and review what Paul means by heavenly places. I have shared that when we hear the word "heavenly places" we normally think of heaven, a place of peace and comfort where the spirits of those in Christ reside and rest until the great day of the resurrection and the restoration of all things on earth. I have loved ones there, and I am sure you do as well, and if Christ does not return before we die we know that that is where we are headed as well if we have salvation in Christ.

But "heaven," when we talk about it this way is only one part of "heavenly places" and when Paul and other writers speak of these heavenly places they are referring to the realm that Christ created that is invisible to us, but very real. This invisible realm was originally part of God's good creation and it was made to interact with and reinforce the visible realm in which we live. It was created with rulers and powers, but they have rebelled against God by enticing humanity to turn away from Him. There is now war in these heavenly places which is why it is so significant that Christ has been

enthroned there. Again, this was the emphasis of chapter 1 where Paul prayed that we would know the power of God directed towards us and for us, the same power that raised Christ and enthroned him in these heavenly places at his right hand. And this is why Ephesians 1:3 is so significant where Paul says you and I have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in these heavenly places in Christ. You see, the powers that are in these heavenly places were originally created to serve God by serving mankind. But instead, they deceived mankind to bring us into slavery. Rather than serving us, we serve them. Rather than serving and helping us to have dominion on earth and make it a paradise of praise for God, they have enslaved us and turned the world into a realm of rebellion to God's authority.

But Jesus Christ conquered the principalities and powers in his ministry and at the cross. After he was baptized, the chief power in this invisible realm, the one we know as the Devil or Satan, faced Christ and tempted him in the wilderness. And Christ overcame. Throughout his ministry the devil made things difficult for Christ and Christ continued to overcome. When Christ was on the cross, the devil tempted him to come down from the cross, but Christ overcame. Christ obeyed and humbled himself all the way to the cross, and when he died, he paid the full price for our sins which is what defeated the powers in these heavenly places. Then, God raised Christ from the dead three days later and enthroned him as Lord over these powers. Now that we have been freed from guilt and condemnation, God can justly come back to us, live in us, and restore us to our rightful place as the rulers of the world.

We are now called to engage these powers in spiritual combat to enforce the victory of Christ on the cross by preaching the Gospel and creating communities of light for the world that we normally call churches. These communities of light live according to the values and priorities of the kingdom of God and spread his reign throughout the earth.

Yes, Christ defeated the powers on the cross. Their greatest weapon has been taken away – our guilty status before God. But that does not mean they are going down without a fight. They have revised their strategy. Because they could not overcome Christ, now they do everything they can to keep the message of Christ from going to the world. They target us because Christ has commissioned us to enforce his victory at the cross. He has commissioned us to storm the gates of Hell.

Remember that time in the ministry of Christ when he was with his disciples and they were talking about the identity of Jesus? Peter confessed Jesus as the Christ and Christ conferred a blessing upon him and all the apostles and then he told them that the gates of Hell would not be able to stand against them. For a long time, I had the wrong picture in my mind when I read that verse. For some reason, I thought of the gates of Hell battering down upon God's people and God's people bravely standing against the onslaughts of the evil one. But gates are not an offensive weapon. Gates are a defensive structure. The picture is one of siege warfare where an army circles a city and brings down its walls. The weakest part of a city with fortified walls is its gates, and Christ presents a picture of the Church attacking the gates of Hell and breaking them down.

When Jesus appeared to Paul and saved him, he commissioned him to go to the Gentiles and said these words, “I want you to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God.” This is spiritual warfare language. It sounds like language where someone is held hostage and a specialized team of soldiers goes in to rescue the hostages. This is the language of spiritual warfare.

And so here, at the close of his great letter, where Paul has talked about so many important topics, he gives marching orders to the church. He exhorts the church to engage in spiritual warfare and by doing so he puts everything that he has said so far into the context of spiritual warfare.

Has Christ blessed us with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Christ, choosing us, predestining us, redeeming us, giving us grace, granting us an inheritance, and giving the Spirit as a down payment of our inheritance? Yes, he has, but he has not given these to us just for our enjoyment. He has given them to us that we might know our identity as his children, live obediently as his children, and defeat the powers.

Has Christ reconciled us to himself and to one another and brought us into a new community, a new family that worships God? Yes, he has, but he has not done this only for our enjoyment, he has done this that we might show the world a picture of what the coming world will be like when it will be populated by his new community and worships him. As we live in reconciliation with one another, we defeat the powers who want to alienate and fracture the world.

Has Christ united us in one body? Has he delivered us from the darkness of paganism and brought us into a new kind of life? He has! He has united us in His church, he has given us gifts, he has empowered us to use our gifts to build up the Church and to make the Church mature. He has put aside our old man, our old status in Adam and given us a new man, a new status in Adam and is now renewing us at the deepest levels of our humanity. He has done this to empower us to live in a new way, not according to the darkness of the old pagan lifestyle but a new way that honors God. When we experience this kind of unity and this new kind of life we defeat the powers in heavenly places.

We can even defeat them in our homes. When we fill ourselves with the Spirit of God we fill our mouths and hearts with praise, we edify one another, and we live in mutual submission and service at home in our family relationships. Why do we do these things? We do them to glorify God, to bear fruit, to build up one another, and to enjoy the fruit of serving Christ, but we also do it to engage and defeat the enemy of mankind – Satan and his forces who are called principalities and powers.

In our final broadcasts of this great book, we are going to examine these great words on this greatest of battles. We are going to learn more about our enemy and learn more about how we can defeat him. I hope you will be here for every one of them.