

# EPHESIANS PART VI; THE POWERS ACCORDING TO PAUL

We are now into our sixth part of our study of Ephesians. We will take a break from the verse by verse part of it as we will tackle a major subject of Paul's letter – "the Powers." I can remember reading that term, "powers" years ago and not even stopping to consider what was meant. However, Paul uses this term and others (with the underlying Greek terms) a great deal in his letters. One might then ask why he uses these terms so often. Well, the answer is that the powers are a major part of Paul's rationale for why the world was/ is in the shape it is. And that is why I believe we need to address this subject.

Too often, people do what I did and just read over things, not necessarily understanding what they are reading in the bible. They just keep going until they find a verse that seems to resonate with them and draw their conclusions from a mere fragment of what is written. I don't want that to happen.

As we have been going through Ephesians, we have seen that the major theme is that of unity between Jewish and Gentile believers. I believe that is quite apparent. We have talked about what it was that caused such disunity – namely the difference in cultures between the two groups due to how different the Torah was from the practices of the surrounding peoples. Our culture affects everything. But Paul goes a step further in his explanation of the differences between people groups and their cultures. He states in many places that there are malevolent powers behind these nations, peoples and their cultures. He refers to them as the powers.

Do you remember when we were defining the term, "apocalypse" at the beginning of our study? We said that the apocalypse, meaning to reveal something, was often shown as a revealing of the overlap between the heavenly realm and that of the earthly realm. That shows us that there is more to what is going on than we can see. Paul continually tries to make that point as he writes to the early church.

## **Ephesians 1:19-21**

**<sup>19</sup> and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, "according to the working of 'his great might <sup>20</sup> that he worked in Christ "when he raised him from the dead and <sup>x</sup>seated him at his right hand <sup>y</sup>in the heavenly places, <sup>21</sup> <sup>z</sup>far above <sup>a</sup>all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above <sup>b</sup>every name that is named, not only in 'this age but also in the one to come.**

There is a great deal being said here that might have gone unnoticed had we not set the table for what we are studying today. Paul says that Jesus has been seated at the right hand of the

Father in the heavenly places, far above all rule, authority, power and dominion and above every name not only in this age, but in the age to come. That's quite a mouthful. What he is doing is making sure that everyone knows that Jesus has been given power over everything and everyone – not only then/ now, in our age, but also in the coming age. He says it this way so that there is no mistaking what he means.

But what or who are these powers? Are they JUST secular rulers here on earth? Are they JUST spiritual powers in the heavenlies? Are they linked in some way? Are they real? Just exactly what and/ or who are these powers?

As has been our habit, let's let Paul define what he means by these terms. As the scholar, Walter Wink put it:

**"If our goal is to understand the New Testament's conception of the powers ... we must attend carefully to the unique vocabulary and concepts of the first century to grasp what they meant by the vocabulary of 'power' within their own language and worldview. It is a virtue to disbelieve in something that does not exist. But it is dangerous and arrogant to disbelieve in something that exists outside our current limited categories."**

The terms Paul uses:

**Rule - 746. ἀρχή arche, *ar-khay'*; from 756; (properly abstract) a commencement, or (concretely) chief (in various applications of order, time, place, or rank): — beginning, corner, (at the, the) first (estate), magistrate, power, principality, principle, rule.**

**Authority - 1849. ἐξουσία exousia, *ex-oo-see'-ah*; from 1832 (in the sense of ability); privilege, i.e. (subjectively) force, capacity, competency, freedom, or (objectively) mastery (concretely, magistrate, superhuman, potentate, token of control), delegated influence: — authority, jurisdiction, liberty, power, right, strength.**

**Power - 1411. δύναμις dunamis, *doo'-nam-is*; from 1410; force (literally or figuratively); specially, miraculous power (usually by implication, a miracle itself): — ability, abundance, meaning, might(-ily, -y, -y deed), (worker of) miracle(-s), power, strength, violence, mighty (wonderful) work.**

**Dominion - 2963. κυριότης kuriotes, *koo-ree-ot'-ace*; from 2962; mastery, i.e. (concretely and collectively) rulers: — dominion, government.**

The way Paul thinks of these powers is more complex than one might think. Let's look at other places he uses these terms.

**Eph. 2:1** <sup>j</sup>And you were <sup>k</sup>dead in the trespasses and sins <sup>2</sup><sup>i</sup>in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following <sup>m</sup>the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in <sup>n</sup>the sons of disobedience— <sup>3</sup> among whom we all once lived in <sup>o</sup>the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body<sup>1</sup> and the mind, and <sup>p</sup>were by nature <sup>q</sup>children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

Here we have mention of the “prince of the power of the air.” It is used in the singular and is personified. Most people refer to this prince as the Devil or Satan – the enemy.

### **Eph. 3:8-10**

<sup>8</sup> To me, <sup>e</sup>though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, <sup>f</sup>to preach to the Gentiles the <sup>g</sup>unsearchable <sup>h</sup>riches of Christ, <sup>9</sup> and <sup>i</sup>to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery <sup>j</sup>hidden for ages in<sup>2</sup> God, <sup>k</sup>who created all things, <sup>10</sup> so that through the church the manifold <sup>l</sup>wisdom of God <sup>m</sup>might now be made known to <sup>n</sup>the rulers and authorities <sup>o</sup>in the heavenly places.

The very existence of the church proclaims God's plan that was from the beginning to the powers, rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. Keep that in mind. What was the plan? It was to unite Jewish and Gentile believers into one family – the family of God. Now, if the plan of God is to unite, in Christ, in truth, not through compromise, the Jewish and Gentile believers into one family, then what is the plan/ reaction of the powers? It is to separate us, to bring disunity.

### **Eph. 6:10-12**

<sup>11</sup> <sup>g</sup>Put on <sup>h</sup>the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against <sup>i</sup>the schemes of the devil. <sup>12</sup> For <sup>j</sup>we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against <sup>k</sup>the rulers, against the authorities, against <sup>l</sup>the cosmic powers over <sup>m</sup>this present darkness, against <sup>n</sup>the spiritual forces of evil <sup>o</sup>in the heavenly places.

In these verses we have Paul speaking of the armor of God which is necessary for standing against the schemes of the “slanderer.” This is a title not a proper name.

I want us to see the specificity of the plan of the enemy. It is to separate us in order to foil God's plan. The purpose and plan of the powers is not JUST an over-arching defiance or a general rebellion. It is a focused effort against the family and not just a more personal attack on each of us trying to make our lives miserable. We need to see the plan of the powers more corporately than we normally do.

This also shows us, (Paul will get to this later) that ultimately, the enemy isn't the person who is giving us problems or is protesting against God. They are captives to the powers ... they may be

willing captives, but they are captives none the less. That should affect the way we deal with them. The powers are the real enemy. So, the whole thing is more complex than just a demon running around causing mischief.

Lest we think this is the only place Paul speaks of the powers, let's look at some of his other letters and see just how much the powers figure into his theology.

### **Col. 1:16**

<sup>16</sup> **For by<sup>6</sup> him all things were created, <sup>i</sup>in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether <sup>m</sup>thrones or <sup>n</sup>dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created <sup>o</sup>through him and for him.**

Notice the comparisons here: heaven and earth, visible and invisible. This verse begs the question, “Does Paul use “powers” in reference to non-physical entities? Well, according to this, he does. And that is important as we go deeper into this. As we go through this we can see how the powers work.

**Col. 2:8 See to it that no one takes you captive by <sup>n</sup>philosophy and <sup>o</sup>empty deceit, according to <sup>p</sup>human tradition, according to the <sup>q</sup>elemental spirits<sup>1</sup> of the world, and not according to Christ.**

The powers can carry us away by philosophy and deceit. I think it's important that we realize that we aren't any more “zapped” by the powers than we are by the Holy Spirit. The powers, at least in the context Paul is speaking of here, are working through humans with bogus philosophy so-called knowledge. Let's go further into Colossians.

### **Col. 2:15**

<sup>15</sup> **<sup>w</sup>He disarmed the rulers and authorities<sup>2</sup> and <sup>e</sup>put them to open shame, by <sup>f</sup>triumphing over them in him.<sup>3</sup>**

In the past we've talked about how God does things backwards from the way mankind does them. He uses the destitute and the poor to confound those who would normally be considered as the ones qualified for the job of carrying the gospel. Now, let's be honest. When we read the gospels, it was Jesus who was crucified. It was Jesus who died. So, how did He win? How did He shame them?

### **1 Cor. 2:7-10**

<sup>7</sup> **But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, <sup>h</sup>which God decreed before the ages for our glory. <sup>8</sup> None of <sup>i</sup>the rulers of this age understood this, for <sup>j</sup>if they had, they would not have crucified <sup>k</sup>the Lord of glory. <sup>9</sup> But, as it is written,**

**<sup>l</sup>“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,  
nor the heart of man imagined,  
what God has <sup>m</sup>prepared <sup>n</sup>for those who love him”—**

**1Cor. 2:10** these things <sup>o</sup>God has revealed to us through the Spirit.

This is how He shamed them. They (the powers) fell right into His trap. They thought they had won, but they had actually sealed their fate.

**Gal. 1:3** <sup>g</sup>Grace to you and peace <sup>h</sup>from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>4</sup> <sup>i</sup>who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present <sup>j</sup>evil age, according to the will of <sup>k</sup>our God and Father, <sup>5</sup> to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

It is by the cross, the very instrument of Jesus' death that we are rescued from the enslaving powers.

**Gal. 4:3**

<sup>3</sup> In the same way we also, when we were children, <sup>c</sup>were enslaved to the elementary principles<sup>2</sup> of the world.

**Gal. 4:8** Formerly, when you <sup>i</sup>did not know God, you <sup>m</sup>were enslaved to those that by nature <sup>n</sup>are not gods. <sup>9</sup> But now that you have come to know God, or rather <sup>o</sup>to be known by God, <sup>p</sup>how can you turn back again to <sup>q</sup>the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more?

Keep this verse in mind. It is really important for what Paul is trying to get across here. But Paul isn't the only one who thinks this way concerning the powers. Paul didn't invent this. This is not exclusively "Pauline theology." John and Luke also refer to the overlap of spiritual and earthly powers. They also believe that evil is both spiritual or moving in the heavenlies and also at work in the physical realm of earth. There is an overlap, which is what an apocalypse is at one level.

**John 12:31**

<sup>31</sup> <sup>z</sup>Now is the judgment of this world; now will <sup>a</sup>the ruler of this world <sup>b</sup>be cast out.

**John 12:42**

<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, <sup>v</sup>many even of the authorities believed in him, but <sup>w</sup>for fear of the Pharisees they did not <sup>x</sup>confess it, so that they would not be <sup>x</sup>put out of the synagogue;

In verse 31, John is talking about a spiritual entity/ ruler. The word translated "ruler" is archon. We saw that earlier in the lesson. John uses it again in verse 42 where it's translated, "authorities". Here the same Greek term is used for local rulers or authorities of the synagogue. The term is used fluidly for evil rulers whether of earthly origin or heavenly. Once again, this shows us how they are linked and that the powers are more than a demon flying around bothering people. Luke also does this.

### **Luke 22:52,53**

<sup>52</sup> Then Jesus said to the chief priests and <sup>e</sup>officers of the temple and elders, who had come out against him, “Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs? <sup>53</sup> When <sup>f</sup>I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is <sup>g</sup>your hour, and <sup>h</sup>the power of darkness.”

Here Jesus is speaking to representatives of the temple, ruling priests, and tells them that this is their hour, the hour, (exousia) of darkness. We know how large a part of the story this is. This is Jesus’ arrest. And Jesus is using the same terms for the guys as John and Paul use for the powers. The locals are playing their part in the plan. They are the earthly arm of the powers.

This begs a question. Are the powers ALWAYS evil? Some would think so. But they aren’t. Remember that Colossians 1:16 states that all things were created by God. Therefore, the powers were created by God. So, did God create them in this way? The answer is no. The powers are created entities with free will, whether they are earthly or heavenly. But they went wrong. Let’s look at an instance of the powers in a good light.

**Rom. 13:1 Let every person <sup>p</sup>be subject to the governing authorities. For <sup>q</sup>there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. <sup>2</sup> Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. <sup>3</sup> For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you <sup>r</sup>will receive his approval, <sup>4</sup> for <sup>s</sup>he is God’s servant for your good.**

Rome specifically, and governing authorities in general are spoken of here in a positive way as doing God’s will, even though they are ruling over Israel. So, the powers are two sides of the same coin – good and bad. And we need to remember that under the rule of Rome was the best setting for the gospel to spread, (explain).

If we look at all this carefully, (and we’re still not through with the subject of the powers) we can see the wisdom in the plan of God. And it isn’t as simple as some might think. God uses earthly powers for good as we saw in Romans 13, even though Rome is ruling over Israel in their own land. He used the electric chair of the day in order to bring about victory over the powers, shaming them for their ignorance when they were outsmarted. He uses the weak and beggarly elements of this world. Remember the sermon on the mount? Who did Jesus first invite into His kingdom? It was the dregs of humanity. When we went through the “Thread of the Firstborn” we saw how God continually went against the culture in order to put his man in place.

So, where did Paul and John and Luke, even Jesus get this idea about the powers and how they work? And can any more light be shed on the subject? Your homework is to figure out where they got these ideas. Any idea where we should start?

We are tasked with being imagers of God, wearing His armor to defeat an already defeated enemy. How does that work? We can see all the unrest and evil in the world. Just turn on the news. Yet, we wrestle not against flesh and blood. Then again, we have seen that people are/ can be a part of the powers. How does all that work? Tune in next week.