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EPHESIANS AND THE POWERS

## **Conclusion: Ephesians and the Powers**

*Joshua M. Greever*

## Conclusion: Ephesians and the Powers

JOSHUA M. GREEVER

*Joshua M. Greever (Ph.D.) is Assistant Professor of New Testament at Grand Canyon University and Grand Canyon Theological Seminary in Phoenix, AZ*

There is little doubt that Paul's letter to the Ephesians holds a central place in our biblical understanding of the Powers. With this in mind, in this volume we tried to analyze closely the presentation of the Powers in Ephesians, and to use our analysis of the Powers as a window into exploring some of Paul's other major themes in the letter. Specifically, analyzing the Powers in Ephesians contributed to our understanding of the letter's theology, soteriology, ecclesiology, discipleship, and missions.

With regard to theology, the letter's doctrine of God is discerned more clearly in relation to the Powers in Ephesians. Eric Covington showed that Thomas Aquinas used the treatment of the Powers as an opportunity to reflect on God's power, which is infinite and thus incomparably greater than that of the Powers, who are created and whose power is derivative and finite. Additionally, Christ's exalted status—"far above the heavens/above every name" (Eph 1:21)—demonstrates that his status at the right hand of God is linked with God's own status, and his power is incomparably greater than theirs. Whether or not Aquinas was right in his angelic hierarchical classification, his lectures are a salient reminder that a study of the Powers in Ephesians enables us to grasp more clearly the incomparably great power of God.

Further, in the chapters by Dan Darko and Luke Hoselton, analyzing the Powers in Ephesians elucidates the letter's soteriology. Darko reminded us that salvation in Ephesians includes the notion of being saved from the tyranny of the Powers, and that God's accomplishment of our salvation included his defeat of the selfsame Powers (Eph 2:1–3). Hoselton also reminded us that salvation in Ephesians is inextricably bound up with God's act of new creation, a theme that pervades anthropology, ecclesiology, eschatology, and cosmology in the letter. God's act to save in Christ is therefore summarized by the notion of resurrection (Eph 2:4–6). This new creative act is done in union with Christ, such that believers are exalted in the heavenly places with Christ and share in his victory over the Powers.

Similarly, the three chapters on Ephesians 6:10–20 cast light on the intersection between soteriology, ecclesiology, discipleship, and missions in the letter. Mark and Nancy Kreitzer reminded us that the armor is God's own armor, and that the power to live the Christian life is found in Christ. Christians should recognize the ongoing reality of spiritual warfare and stand strong against the devil's schemes in reliance on the Spirit's power through the word and prayer. Even though Christians belong to Christ, they still need to fight temptation lest they give a foothold to the devil (Eph

4:26–27; 6:16). And though conversion marks the beginning of the Christian life, Christians need to mature and grow in their faith (Eph 4:13–14). Joshua Greever reminded us of the climactic role Ephesians 6:10–20 plays in the letter as a whole, and that the call to put on God’s armor entails the call to rest in and appropriate the victory over the Powers that Christ already accomplished. John Frederick’s treatment of the same passage, on the other hand, urged that the armor of God is corporate, and that the call to stand against the Powers therefore is the church’s missional mandate for social engagement against the Powers who are manifest in systems or ideologies. These three chapters on Ephesians 6:10–20 highlight not only the significance of the passage in the letter but also the complexity of applying its directive to the Christian life and the church.

Analyzing the Powers in Ephesians also clarifies the task and nature of missions as well as the kinds of schemes the devil uses against the church. Simon Gomersall and Vicky Balabanski reminded us that missionaries from the West have sometimes failed to reckon with not only the worldview of the indigenous peoples to whom they share the gospel but also the worldview of the biblical authors themselves. In order to bring the gospel effectively to a people, we must grasp and uphold the biblical witness concerning the nature of the Powers and how Christ’s victory over them affects and enables evangelism and church planting. Moreover, non-Western indigenous peoples often have a clearer belief in or grasp of the reality of spiritual beings invisible to our eyes. Because of the supernatural worldview of the biblical authors as well as that of non-Western indigenous peoples, missiological training should incorporate preparation to engage a people’s supernatural worldview with the biblical worldview. As we undertake such cultural engagement, Jonathan Sharpe and Jerry Pillay reminded us of the danger of false doctrine that the devil uses to hinder the church’s unified faith in Christ. They suggested that the “Death of God” theology avowed by Peter Rollins and others is, in contrast with the approach of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, exactly the kind of *methodeia* the devil concocts against the body of Christ (Eph 4:14; 6:11).

Thus, this volume’s analysis of the Powers in Ephesians opens further vistas into theology, soteriology, ecclesiology, discipleship, and missions. Even though some Christians can have an unhealthy fascination with angels and demons that draws away their worship from God, gratitude for the gospel, and vigilance in the Christian life, this volume reminds that a biblical angelology should serve orthodoxy and orthopraxy. It should recalibrate and refocus our attention on an orthodox doctrine of God, a renewed appreciation for the gospel, a balanced expectation for the Christian life, and a clear sense of the church’s true enemy and mission. Conversely, a right discernment of orthodoxy will protect the Christian and the church from fearing the Powers or being discouraged by their persistent reality in the present evil age.

We conclude with a final word about hermeneutical approaches to Ephesians and its supernatural worldview. Not only did Balabanski rightly note that the Christians

in Ephesus believed in supernatural Powers, but Darko also rightly affirmed that Paul himself, along with the early Christians, believed in the existence of a spiritual and hostile being known as the devil. While many modern scholars have a hard time accepting the reality of the devil or the existence of such supernatural spiritual beings, finding it much easier to demythologize the Powers as merely evil institutions on earth, Paul and the early Christians did not have such a hard time conceiving of such beings. This reminds us that Christianity, and Ephesians in particular, possesses a supernatural worldview that holds to the existence of supernatural beings who either serve God or are antagonistic towards him. We do an injustice to the worldview of the early Christians and Paul's letter to the Ephesians when we fail to interact with them on their own terms. Our hermeneutical approach must be to resist the urge to make the biblical text say what is most palatable to our modern ears or mindset. Rather, faithful biblical interpretation seeks to read the text of Scripture on its own terms and according to its own worldview.

Towards that end, we hope that this volume is a salient contribution to the field of Ephesians scholarship and, more broadly, to Pauline scholarship and biblical studies. We hope that this volume will spur further reflection on the biblical presentation of the Powers, and that this in turn would clarify and enable greater theological reflection and doxological joy.

*Soli Deo Gloria,*

*John Frederick and Joshua M. Greever (editors)*