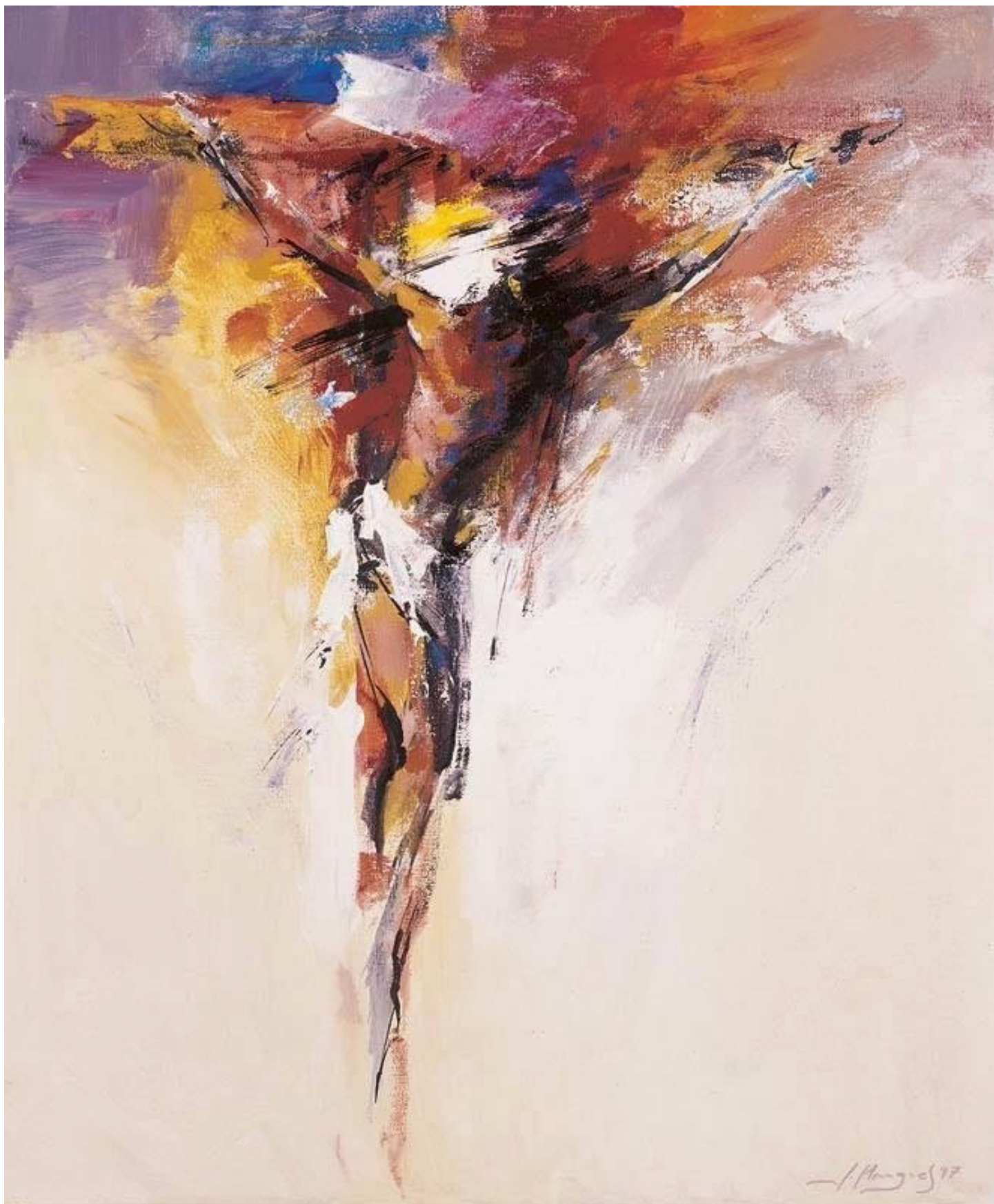




The Cross & The Powers of Darkness



“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.” Ephesians 6:12



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1 Corinthians 2:13

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The Cross & The Powers of Darkness

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INTRODUCTION

To understand the powers of darkness one must be willing to enter into a perspective that is:

- Cosmic – not only of this World
- Eternal – not only here and now
- God-centered – not man-centered, and most particularly not self-centered.

Jesus told us that in this world we would have tribulation, but that He has OVERCOME the world.¹ To each of the seven churches in Asia Minor, Jesus gave a promise to those who would OVERCOME.² Through Him, we can OVERCOME the World, as well as, the Flesh and the Devil. We will see that Satan and his cohorts, our enemies, are at work in all three of these areas of life – the World, the Flesh and the Devil.

In this message, I will spend some time identifying the powers of darkness, but more time making a few salient points I believe the Spirit has to say to the Church. I will forego much that is speculative regarding the Enemy's organization, the waging of the warfare and the exercise of the weapons;³ and try to focus on an application which I believe the Lord has purposed for the Church.

¹ John 16:33. Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the *New American Standard Bible*

² Revelation 2 & 3

³ See APPENDIX p.42

THE FATHER OF DARKNESS

There is the “Father of Lights”⁴ and the “Father of Darkness”. The one whom we could call the “father” of the powers of darkness is Satan, The Adversary - the Enemy of both God and Humanity, the Devil, the Serpent in the Garden.⁵

“Isaiah 54:16 reads:

“Behold, I Myself have created the smith who blows the fire of coals and brings out a weapon for its work; and I have created the destroyer to ruin.”

From this verse, we can infer a number of things regarding Satan, which are borne out by other Scriptures. Firstly, God has created Satan, and that he has been created for specific purposes in God’s dealings with Humankind - that is, God uses him for the work of testing and purging, and for adversity, chastening and judgment. This is borne out in the Book of Job, the earliest book in the Bible, where we see God allowing Satan to afflict and test Job resulting in God’s desired goal for good in Job’s character and life.⁶ There is a recurring statement by the Lord in the Book of Job which I believe is significant:

“Then the LORD said to Satan, “Behold, all that he has is in your power, only do not put forth your hand on him.”⁷ And again: “So the LORD said to

⁴ James 1:17-18

⁵ Revelation 20:2-5

⁶ Job 42; James 5:11

⁷ Job 1:12

Satan, “Behold, he is in your power, only spare his life.”⁸ From these statements we can see that it is God Who has allowed Satan the power to afflict Humankind; but it is significant to note that firstly, God has given Satan only limited power; and secondly, the power to afflict evil is in Satan’s hand, not God’s. God is all good. “(God) Himself does not tempt anyone.”⁹ Satan is in Rebellion against God, and his purposes which are adverse to both God and us. But God works for good even within Satan’s evil purposes.¹⁰ Even in the midst of Satan’s work, God is testing, refining, chastening and maturing His children. There are many Scriptures which bear out this thought.¹¹

Jesus referred to the Devil as “a murderer” and “the Father of lies”.¹² In addressing unbelievers, Jesus revealed the following regarding Satan: “You are of *your* father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *nature*, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”¹³

⁸ Job 2:6

⁹ James 1:12-17

¹⁰ Romans 8:28

¹¹ Psalm 119:75; Proverbs 3:11-12; Job 5:17; Deuteronomy 8:5; 2 Samuel 7:14; Luke 22:31; Hebrews 2;10, 12:5-11; Revelation 3:19

¹² John 8:44

¹³ John 8:44

The apostle Paul referred to Satan as both “the prince of the power of the air”¹⁴ and “the god of this world” who “has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ”.¹⁵

Also, in reference to Satan, the apostle John tells us that “the whole world lies under the power of the Evil One”.¹⁶ The literal meaning of the Greek phrase translated “lies under the power of” speaks of a trance-like power being exerted over peoples’ minds and lives.

There are passages in both Isaiah and Ezekiel that hint at a plausible speculation as to the origin and fall of Satan.¹⁷ But what is definitely communicated in the Scriptures¹⁸ is not so much a clear scenario of what happened but a clear situation of what is with regards to the Devil, the Flesh and the World:

Firstly, Satan and his angels are created beings i.e. created by God.¹⁹ At some point before the creation of Humanity, Satan and his angels fell away from God, becoming estranged and antagonistic, so that now there was

¹⁴ Ephesians 2:2

¹⁵ 2 Corinthians 4:4

¹⁶ 1 John 5:19

¹⁷ Isaiah 14:12-15; Ezekiel 28:11-19

¹⁸ Matthew 25:41; 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6; Revelation 12:9

¹⁹ Colossians 1:16; John 1:3; Romans 8:38

need that Christ should “disarm them, make a public spectacle of them and triumph over them through His cross.”²⁰

Secondly, after the material creation, the Serpent tempted Adam and Eve, and through their disobedience they fell into sin - the state of willful independence from God and the resulting separation from God. They abdicated the dominion over the earth given to them by God and forfeited it over to Satan, who was now the god of this world. The consequence was that all Humanity, while maintaining a vestige of the image of God, essentially traded the nature of God for the nature of Satan.²¹

Thirdly, human society and culture, which is the creation of Humanity under the power of the Evil One, developed an ongoing system which governs the affairs of Humanity according to the nature of Satan, “the god of this world”, “the prince of the power of the air”, “the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience”. This world system, which is alienated and estranged from God, oppresses its populace. Humanity is spiritual fodder for the powers and principalities which live parasitically off the sin of those under their power. We now need to look more closely at these Powers of Darkness and how they work “behind the scenes”, in and through the rulers of this world.



²⁰ Colossians 2:14-15

²¹ Genesis 3

THE SONS OF DISOBEDIENCE & THE RULERS OF THIS WORLD

Something which needs our comprehensive consideration, but goes beyond the scope of this essay to deal with fully is the fact that in Psalm 82 we see that “God takes His stand in *His own congregation*; He judges in the midst of *the rulers*”.²² Other translations have the verse reading this way: “God stands in *the congregation of the mighty*; He judges among *the gods*.”²³ And, “God stands in *the divine assembly*; He administers judgment in the midst of *the gods*.”²⁴ Also, “God has taken his place in *the divine council*; in the midst of the gods he holds judgment.”²⁵ The Hebrew word *elohim* appears twice – firstly in reference to **The Triune God**, and then again in reference to *the rulers* who are also *gods*.²⁶ In his book, “*The Unseen Realm*”: *Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible*,²⁷ Michael S. Heiser deals comprehensively with the idea that there is a *divine assembly* – a *divine counsel* – which God intended to be “under-rulers” of His creation in accordance with His will – a “power sharing” situation, if you will. But some

²² Psalm 82:1 *New American Standard Version*

²³ *New King James Version*

²⁴ *Lexham English Bible*

²⁵ *English Standard Version*

²⁶ Also v. 6

²⁷ This article was written before the publishing of Heiser’s book in 2015. (I added this paragraph at a later date.) I would strongly recommend reading *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible* or a shortened version entitled, *Supernatural: What the Bible Teaches about the Unseen World and Why It Matters*.

of these spirit beings sinned and rebelled, resulting in their Fall, and expulsion from God's presence. These are those whom are identified in the New Testament as "the Father of Darkness" and "the Powers of Darkness".

The apostle Paul explains that our Lord has "rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son"²⁸, revealing that there are two spiritual domains - the "kingdoms of this world" and "the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ".²⁹ These two domains are populated by either the "sons of light"³⁰ or the "sons of disobedience".³¹ In distinguishing the two groups, Paul wrote this: "You formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest."³²

Paul explains that there is a "spirit" - i.e. Satan's - that "is at work in the sons of disobedience" which governs this present world system through exerting spiritual influences on the minds and lives of Humanity.³³

²⁸ Colossians 1:13

²⁹ Revelation 11:15

³⁰ Luke 16:8; John 12:36; 1 Thessalonians 5:5; Ephesians 5:8

³¹ Ephesians 2:2, 5:6 & 8; Colossians 3:6

³² Ephesians 2:2-3

³³ Ephesians 2:2-3

This means that even “the kingdoms of this world” are influenced by spiritual forces. More specifically, the rulers and governments of the earth are “under the sway of” these spiritual forces. As John had said, “The whole world lies under the power of the Evil One.”³⁴ We can see an example of this in reading the opening verses of Psalm 2: “Why do the nations conspire, and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One.” Paul explained that there are “heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion”.³⁵ And that “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.”³⁶ The powers of darkness are at work “behind the scenes”, in and through the rulers and governments of this world.

In the Scriptures, we often see the powers of darkness being identified with – merged together with - the rulers of the earth, and vice versa. There are passages of Scripture, which some speculate to be referring to Satan himself, that are, at the very least, making reference to evil spirit beings – angelic beings, while at the same time, are addressing earthly kings.³⁷

³⁴ 1 John 5:19

³⁵ Ephesians 1:20-21

³⁶ Ephesians 6:12

³⁷ Isaiah 14:4-23; Ezekiel 28:11-19

One example is in Isaiah:

“Isaiah 14:4-23 take up this taunt against the king of Babylon.... How you have fallen from heaven, O morning star, son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations! You said in your heart, “I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.”³⁸

And in Ezekiel:

“Son of man, take up a lamentation over the king of Tyre and say to him, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “You had the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering And the gold, the workmanship of your settings and sockets, was in you. On the day that you were created they were prepared. You were the anointed cherub (angel) who covers, and I placed you there. You were on the holy mountain of God; you walked in the midst of the stones of fire. You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created until unrighteousness was found in you. By the abundance of your trade you were internally filled with violence, and you sinned; therefore, I have cast you as profane from the mountain of God. And I have destroyed you, O covering cherub (angel), from the midst of the stones of fire. Your

³⁸ Isaiah 14:4-23

heart was lifted up because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom by reason of your splendor.”³⁹

Also in Daniel:⁴⁰

“He said to me, “O Daniel, man of high esteem, understand the words that I am about to tell you and stand upright, for I have now been sent to you.” And when he had spoken this word to me, I stood up trembling. Then he said to me, “Do not be afraid, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart on understanding this and on humbling yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to your words. But the prince of the kingdom of Persia was withstanding me for twenty-one days; then behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left there with the kings of Persia. Now I have come to give you an understanding of what will happen to your people in the latter days, for the vision pertains to the days yet future.”

This familiar passage from the Book of Daniel⁴¹ clearly shows the involvement of angelic beings in the affairs of the governments of worldly kingdoms. Daniel, a Hebrew taken captive as a teenager when Babylon defeated Israel, had over the years become very prominent in the court of Cyrus the king of Babylon because God had given him the ability to interpret

³⁹ Ezekiel 28:11-19

⁴⁰ Daniel 10:11-14

⁴¹ Daniel 10

dreams and prophecy for king Cyrus. In this passage, Daniel is receiving an angelic visitation in response to his prayers concerning when the Babylonian captivity would end for the Hebrews. What is significant for our study is that on his way to visit Daniel, the angel was resisted by a being which is called “the Prince of the kingdom of Persia” – obviously another angelic being – and Michael, the archangel, was sent to help him in the struggle. (Notice that Daniel was not directly involved on this heavenly battlefield. There was no “identifying” or “binding” of spirits being done in the human sphere.)⁴² Three years earlier, Babylon had been conquered by Persia. This angelic being who was resisting the angel and Michael, the archangel, was exercising resistance because of his concern about what might be taking place in Babylon. For, since Persia had defeated Babylon, this territory was now under his domain.



⁴² See APPENDIX p.42

THE POWERS OF DARKNESS & THEIR WEAPONS

The Powers of Darkness

Ephesians 6

“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.”

Verses 11 and 12 tell us that the warfare is not against human beings, but against spiritual forces – The Powers of Darkness: **“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.”

Various theological works have attempted to identify exactly what the apostle Paul was referring to when he wrote of the “powers”. The various views run the gamut of interpreting these “powers” to be solely spiritual, to “demythologizing” them to be solely human. I personally hold a median view, and understand these “powers” to be spiritual entities which influence and work through human entities – specifically the ideologies of cultures of the world, including the politics and governments of the nations of the world. Colossians 1:16 illustrates this view by explicitly combining the categories of “in the heavens” and “on the earth” and “visible” and “invisible”.⁴³

The Nature of the Warfare

Next, I’d like to concisely identify the nature of the warfare. Paul spoke about “our struggle”. There are a couple contexts in which one could place that phrase. As some have pointed out,⁴⁴ Paul is referring to the warfare which he and his apostolic co-workers encounter.⁴⁵ I believe that the whole

⁴³ This view is widely held by many others including Marva Dawn, Thomas R. Yoder Neufeld, William Stringfellow, and Robert E. Webber.

⁴⁴ John Gill, Exposition of the New Testament, 2 Corinthians 10

⁴⁵ Revelation 18:19-21 indicates that the apostolic ministers encountered spiritual warfare with the Powers of Darkness.

of the apostolic church was keenly aware of the realities of the Powers of Darkness. If the Church is to regain its apostolicity, it will need to recover this awareness in her mission and ministries. Suffice to say that those who desire to be involved in the Lord's eternal purpose of "the manifold wisdom of God now be(ing) made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places",⁴⁶ will certainly need to be aware of these realities. Therefore, the apostolic struggle becomes truly "our struggle".

Paul explains that "our struggle is not against flesh and blood". It is a spiritual warfare "against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places." Bearing in mind that these powers influence and work through human agencies, ultimately, or at the source, "our struggle" is of a spiritual nature.

Paul gets more specific in 2 Corinthians 10:4-5:

"4 for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses (or strongholds). 5 We are destroying **speculations** and **every pretention**⁴⁷ raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every **thought** captive to the obedience of Christ." "Thoughts", "speculations" and "pretentions". In other epistles Paul referred

⁴⁶ Ephesians 3:10-11

⁴⁷ NIV, "every lofty opinion" (ESV)

to them as “the elementary principles of the world”⁴⁸, by which he meant human philosophic and religious systems influenced by “deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons”⁴⁹ which serve to bring people under bondage.

“There is nothing new under the sun.” Throughout human history, the nature of the spiritual warfare remains the same. The enemies may have different faces and the weapons may have different names, but the nature of the warfare remains the same: Deception against truth, darkness against light, fear and bondage against faith and freedom.

What are the Enemy’s Weapons?

The apostle Paul’s answer is this: “The Elementary Principles of the World”⁵⁰. Again, a study of Paul’s epistles would show these to be human philosophic and religious systems influenced by “deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons”⁵¹ which serve to bring people under bondage.

Paul would also identify the enemy’s weapons as “thoughts” – “speculations” and “pretensions”⁵² – things that are purported to be true but are unrealities. The Creator, not science, not society, not academia, not the

⁴⁸ Galatians 4:3, 8-9; Colossians 2:8, 14-15, 20

⁴⁹ 1 Timothy 4:1-3

⁵⁰ Galatians 4:3, 8-9; Colossians 2:8, 14-15, 20

⁵¹ 1 Timothy 4:1-3

⁵² 2 Corinthians 10:3-6

government, but the Creator alone, defines realities, and He does that through His Spirit and His Word.

There is another strategic weapon which the writer to the Hebrews identifies: Intimidation – fear of death. This is the enemy’s “trump card”, and our overcoming this weapon is absolutely key to fulfilling God’s purpose for the Church. I am now getting to the heart of the matter. This is what will lead the Church into the wisdom and the power of God in this warfare.

Look at this powerful truth in Hebrews 2: 14-16: “Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives. For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham.”

Satan “had” the power of death. He no longer has it. By virtue of His resurrection from the dead, Jesus now “holds the keys of death and Hades”.⁵³ As with Job, Satan can’t kill you unless God allows him to. Now, not every death is an overt attack of Satan – we live in a fallen world; the consequence of Humanity’s sin is death;⁵⁴ we are all appointed to die.⁵⁵ My

⁵³ Revelation 1:18

⁵⁴ Romans 6:23

⁵⁵ Hebrews 9:27

point is this: Only Jesus decides when we die. And when we do die, we enter into His eternal resurrection life. It's a win-win situation. We can't lose. As Paul said, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain."⁵⁶ Therefore Satan can only intimidate. He intimidates us with the "fear of death". If we buy into the intimidation, we are put in bondage, and prevented from fulfilling God's purpose for the Church.

There is a familiar story in The Book of Daniel⁵⁷ which perfectly illustrates overcoming the fear of death. The story about Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego is an Old Testament type of the New Testament Church in the Last Days. The king of Babylon had made an image which represents the Beast that is being worshipped in the Book of Revelation.⁵⁸ All the rulers in the kingdom worshipped the image, and told the people that when the music started, they needed to "dance to their tune" and worship the Beast, or they would be thrown into a fiery furnace – there is the intimidation. And because of the "fear of death" all the people – the Scripture says people of every nation – "danced to the tune" and worshipped the Beast. It was reported that "certain ones" of God's people – administrators of the province of Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, were not going with the program – they would not bow down to the world's idols. The king threatened them again with the prospect of death by furnace; and their

⁵⁶ Philippians 1:21

⁵⁷ Daniel 3

⁵⁸ Revelation 13

response thrills the angels of God and threatens the powers of darkness: “Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to give you an answer concerning this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But even if He does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.”⁵⁹ They weren’t afraid of death – the enemy had no further recourse. And we know how the story ends: They get thrown into the furnace, but there’s a 4th One in there that says, “No, they’re not going to die now.”! The angels of God celebrated, and the powers of darkness were thrown down.

⁵⁹ Daniel 3:16-18

THE WEAPONS OF OUR WARFARE

“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, 19 and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel.”

Ephesians 6:10-19

There is a plethora of expository commentaries on this familiar passage of Scripture. I hope that here it will suffice to point out that what Paul is communicating in this passage has not so much to do with “getting the victory” as it does with “standing in the victory” of Christ. The encouragement to “stand” is given three times. This foundational Scripture reference for spiritual warfare does not once mention anything like “identifying” and “binding” evil spirits;⁶⁰ but rather things which are spiritual, legal, and moral: truth, righteousness, the Gospel, faith, salvation, the word of God and prayer.

⁶⁰ See APPENDIX p.42

Overcoming Fear of Death

I would like you to consider that one of our most powerful weapons in this spiritual warfare is that we “don’t love our lives even when faced with death”.

Alternatively, the fear of death is probably Satan’s single-most effective weapon used against us. This is because the fear of death is foundational to the psyche and existence of fallen humanity. Just two Scriptures references should be able to explain why this is so:

Genesis 2:16-17

“¹⁶ The LORD God commanded the man, saying, "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; ¹⁷ but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die."

Romans 6:23

“For the wages of sin is death.”

But the end of God’s Book tells us how powerful it is to overcome fear of death. It’s written: “Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, he who accuses them before our God day and night. And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and

because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death.”⁶¹

Obedience & Self-denial

While our obedience to God is obviously prerequisite for an arsenal of weapons in our warfare, there is much more to simple obedience than meets the eye. To obey God often, if not always, requires self-denial, that is doing what God wants instead of what we want, and/or having to deny ourselves in some way or of some thing in order to obey God. What does it cost to obey God? It could cost time, effort, money, comfort, safety, privacy – it could cost us a relationship, and sometimes it could cost us our life. The self-denial factor in obedience is actually the most powerful thing we can use in our warfare against our spiritual enemies. I say this because, essentially, it was self-denial which God used in Christ to defeat Satan. Jesus defeated Satan with self-denying love for God the Father and Humanity. This is the theme of this message. Hopefully, this powerful truth will unfold and become clear through the next few Scripture references.

Paul wrote this to the Church in Corinth: “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are

⁶¹ Revelation 12:11

destroying speculations and every pretension raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, and we are ready to punish all disobedience, whenever your obedience is complete.”⁶² So Paul says that the weapons to be used against the enemy are not physical, but spiritual, because that’s the nature of the warfare. And again, he identifies the enemy’s weapons as “thoughts” – “speculations” and “pretensions”. Then he brings up this matter of “obedience”, which we are not yet quite clear on just how that might be threatening to the enemy. But then he goes even further to say that when our obedience is complete⁶³, we will actually be able to punish all disobedience. What could that possibly mean? Well, Jesus said, “If you love Me, you will obey”⁶⁴ If we love the Lord with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength,⁶⁵ we would be “complete” in our obedience. Obedience accomplishes what pleases the Lord, but how would obedience “punish” disobedience?

The Cross

Do you remember the obedience issue that Jesus worked through in the Garden of Gethsemane where in the end, He said, “Not what I will, but what

⁶² 2 Corinthians 10:3-6

⁶³ Greek: *pleroo* (Strong’s #4137)

⁶⁴ John 14:15

⁶⁵ Deuteronomy 6:5; Mark 12:30

You will.”? ⁶⁶ What was it that He denied Himself to obey? THE CROSS. We are about to see, not only how overcoming fear of death, obedience and self-denial all come together in the cross, but also the absolute wisdom and power⁶⁷ of the cross. We are going to see that God’s “weapon of choice” for dealing with the World, the Flesh and the Devil – His weapon of choice” for dealing with Sin, Satan, and the powers of darkness - was and is THE CROSS. We will also see that, not only does “the cross of Christ” have wisdom and power in this spiritual warfare, so does “your cross” when you “take it up daily, deny your self and follow Him”. We will also see that God has “An Even Greater Commission” than the Great Commission which He has purposed for the Church to fulfill.

Let’s “set the stage” with a quote from “The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe” by C.S. Lewis. *The Witch had bound and killed Aslan on the Stone Table where He lay overnight. But, as the sun rose in the morning, the Stone Table cracked, and Aslan appears to Susan and Lucy. They asked Him, “What does this mean?”*

“It means”, said Aslan, “that though the Witch knew the Deep Magic, there is a magic deeper still which she did not know. Her knowledge goes back only to the dawn of time. But if she could have looked a little further back, into the stillness and the darkness before Time dawned, she would have read there a different incantation. She would have known that when a willing victim who had committed no treachery was killed in a traitor’s stead, the Table would crack and Death itself would start working backward.”

⁶⁶ Mark 14:32-36

⁶⁷ 1 Corinthians 1:18-24; 2:1-8

A passage of Scripture which communicates the truth reflected here in C.S. Lewis's novel is what the apostle Paul wrote to the Church in Corinth: "We preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ (i.e. a crucified Christ) (is) the power of God and the wisdom of God.... Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory; the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory."⁶⁸

The apostle James describes the wisdom of the world as "self-centered and demonic".⁶⁹ Wisdom is commonly defined as applied knowledge. But applied to what? The wisdom of the world is based on self-serving pragmatism, which ignoring eternity, is solely concerned with the affairs of this life on earth. A shining example of the wisdom of this world is the Declaration of Independence with its pursuit of happiness as an inalienable right. The problem is, through fear and intimidation, the powers of darkness manipulate human beings to be motivated towards their own self-interest. The power of self-interest started with the fall of Humanity – it is inherent in

⁶⁸ 1 Corinthians 1:23-24; 2:6-8

⁶⁹ James 3:15 God's Word Translation

our fallen human nature. Because of this, fallen Humanity “lies under the trance” of the Evil One.

God is building a Church that will be free from this self-interest – a Church that will be willing to serve the purpose of God rather than self – a Church that will demonstrate God’s wisdom to the powers of darkness. The wisdom of God is the morality of God – His nature and His ways. The wisdom of God is based on self-denying sacrifice. The wisdom of God is THE CROSS.

The Cross is that “deeper magic” that goes back “before Time dawned”. The apostle Peter said that God chose Christ, the Lamb of God, “as your ransom long before the world began”.⁷⁰ The apostle John referred to Christ as “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world”.⁷¹ The apostle Paul explains that THE CROSS existed as the wisdom and the power of God⁷² in eternity past, “to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.”⁷³ That is a significant aspect of the Grande Finale in the Lord’s eternal purposes for the Church. Ultimately, the Church does not

⁷⁰ 1 Peter 1:19-20

⁷¹ Revelation 13:8

⁷² 1 Corinthians 1:18-24; 2:1-8

⁷³ Ephesians 3:9-11 (NKJV)

exist merely for the meeting of human needs. The Church ultimately exists for God – to be involved in His eternal and cosmic purposes.

But before we go there, we need to be convinced that THE CROSS is indeed God’s “weapon of choice” against the powers of darkness. There is a verse in Paul’s epistle to the Colossians that is very convincing. He wrote: “Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.”⁷⁴ The “it” at the end of this sentence refers to the “CROSS”, which was the last word in the previous sentence. It was indeed through THE CROSS – through His self-denying obedience to the Father - that Jesus Christ “disarmed, made a public spectacle of, and triumphed over” the powers of darkness. It was through His self-denying obedience of THE CROSS that He “punished” the disobedience of the powers of darkness.

Just as it was a “stumbling block” to the Jews, it has always been very difficult for human beings to understand how the suffering and death of someone has the power to overcome sin and evil. Also, we may wonder: “How does THE CROSS “punish” the disobedience of the powers of darkness? Since this is the wisdom of God we are dealing with here, it is indeed difficult to understand. But here are a few thoughts that might give some insight into this mystery: This battle between God and Satan is a spiritual battle – it is a legal battle – it is a moral battle.

⁷⁴ Colossians 2:14-15 (NKJV)

For many of us, the term “legal” almost automatically translates into “legalistic” or “legalism” with accompanying negative connotations. But, I have slowly become more aware of the purely legal aspects of God’s redemptive plan, and specifically how they counter Satan, “the accuser of the brethren”.⁷⁵ Satan, the Adversary, is simultaneously both the ultimate transgressor and legalist, who uses God’s very law as the basis for his accusations against God’s people. We see Satan accusing Job⁷⁶ and Joshua the high priest.⁷⁷ But, Colossians 2:14 clearly explains how God dealt legally with this situation: He “... canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.” Yes, the cross of Christ is also a legal weapon. And the nature of the warfare and the power of the weapons are moral. Good overcomes Evil,⁷⁸ Light overcomes Darkness,⁷⁹ Truth wins out over Lies, Righteousness over Unrighteousness, Faith over Fear, self-denial over self-aggrandizement. Moral virtues have spiritual power. We human beings tend to think of power in terms of physical might, violence and destruction. The spiritual realm is a dimension which human beings cannot fully grasp; but God and His angels and Satan and his angles battle in the spiritual dimension of morality. That may sound strange; but are we to imagine their warfare actually consists of stabbing each other with

⁷⁵ Revelation 12:10 (cf. Luke 22:31; 1 Peter 5:8)

⁷⁶ Job 1:11, 2:5

⁷⁷ Zechariah 3:1

⁷⁸ Romans 12:21

⁷⁹ John 1:5

swords, firing AK47s at each other, throwing grenades at each other, utilizing laser technology to destroy one another's "body" parts? No, by nature of the case, their warfare is not material, but spiritual, as well as, legal and moral.

And here is the amazing thing – not only does the Lord want for us to rise above being used as pawns here on the earth by the powers of darkness, He has actually invited us onto this spiritual battlefield. That is actually a very anemic way of putting it, for God has purposed for us to be involved in this warfare – it is one of His "eternal purposes" for the Church. He has commissioned us into this battle. I call it "The Even Greater Commission".

THE EVEN GREATER COMMISSION FOR THE CHURCH⁸⁰

We are all familiar with what is called the Great Commission - to preach the gospel and make disciples. In his epistle to the Church in Ephesus, I believe Paul is explaining what could be called the “Even Greater Commission”.⁸¹ Paul wrote: “... the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.”⁸²

This passage tells us that since eternity past, God has had a purpose for the Church. It tells us that He created all things with an intention, and that intention was to create a Church which would now demonstrate His wisdom to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places. Many might respond to this commission with “binding and loosing”⁸³ and “reviling angelic

⁸⁰ In no way do I wish to diminish “The Great Commission” to make disciples of all peoples. (Matthew 28:18-20) What I have in mind is Jesus’ statement, “... will do even GREATER works ...” (John 14:12)

⁸¹ John 14:12

⁸² Ephesians 3:9-11 (NKJV). The tense of the Greek verb, *gnorizo*, is passive tense. i.e. The subject of the sentence, “the manifold wisdom of God”, receives the action, “to make known”, (Greek) *dia*, “by”, of “through” (the agency of) “the Church”, “to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places”. The issues at hand are: What is “the manifold wisdom of God”, and how is the Church to “make (it) known”?

⁸³ Matthew 18:15-18

majesties”⁸⁴, which all sounds quite courageous;⁸⁵ but the real power is in surrender.

⁸⁴ Jude 8-10

⁸⁵ See APPENDIX p.39

THE WAY OF THE CROSS

In considering how the Church is to fulfill this commission, we need to realize that all God's eternal purposes are accomplished in Christ. The Church, therefore, as the Body of Christ, should be in His image. The apostle Peter points out that Jesus gave us "an example for us to follow in His steps".⁸⁶ Jesus set an example for us by denying His will for the sake of the Father.⁸⁷ We need to consider how Jesus accomplished this commission. The Scripture is very clear that it was accomplished through THE WAY OF THE CROSS – self-denying obedience for God's sake.

Jesus, in fact, commissioned us to walk the same way - The Way of the Cross. It's recorded a number of times in the Gospels: "Deny your self, take up your cross daily, and follow Me."⁸⁸ The commission, which will disarm the powers of darkness, make a public spectacle of the powers of darkness, triumph over the powers of darkness – punish the disobedience of the powers of darkness - is that the Church make known – that is, demonstrate - the self-denying obedience of THE CROSS. The Way of the Cross, as defined by Jesus Himself, is to deny your self for God's sake. Every act of self-denying obedience for the sake of God is a reiteration of the Cross of Christ. When THE CROSS is reiterated in this way, a spiritual, legal and

⁸⁶ 1 Peter 2:21

⁸⁷ Matthew 26:39; Matthew 16:21-23

⁸⁸ Matthew 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23

moral power is released, and the powers of darkness must bow the knee to the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.⁸⁹ This may be the meaning of Paul's enigmatic phrase: "...filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions."⁹⁰ In any case, THE CROSS is a demonstration of the self-denying love nature of God Himself. Christ demonstrated this on His cross at Calvary. When the Body of Christ, the Church, rises above self-preservation to a self-denying obedience in demonstration of THE CROSS, God will be finished with the powers of darkness and they will be condemned to their eternal punishment.

For us to rise up to this commission, we must free ourselves from the mold of the powers of darkness. We must, by growing in faith, be set free of intimidation and fear regarding the security of our physical lives and finances – be set free of manipulation and seduction regarding our personal comfort and happiness.

To be free of the powers of darkness, we will need to grow in our faith – dependency on God. But we will also need to be free of sin. While the warfare involves the World, the Flesh, and the Devil, the specific battlefield for which we are responsible is the battlefield of our own Flesh. The various New Age - type philosophies and religions speak in terms of "positive and negative energy", recognizing neither God nor the powers of darkness of the Scriptures. But, the Scriptures speak in terms of sin and righteousness.

⁸⁹ Acts 5:30-31

⁹⁰ Colossians 1:24

The powers of darkness feed off the sins of human beings – we empower them with our sin. When we act with righteousness – when we obey God, denying ourselves for His sake, like Christ, we disarm the powers of darkness, we make a public spectacle of the powers of darkness, we triumph over the powers of darkness. I want to point out that this spiritual power is not human – it is not ours. But our self-denying obedience releases the wisdom and power of the Cross of Christ. The power that is exercised is something legal – it is moral power. These words are inadequate; but, the power that is released is something of the very nature of God Himself which overcomes all evil by the purity of its goodness.

So, how we can deny our selves for God’s sake on the battlefield of the Flesh in ways that will overcome the powers of darkness? By overcoming temptation. By overcoming sin. By overcoming self-centeredness. By overcoming “the deeds of the flesh”. All sinful deeds spring from self-centeredness, in contrast to “the righteous deeds of saints”⁹¹ which are God-centered. Jesus laid down His life for a Bride who will love Him more than herself. The Lord purposed to have a Church that would demonstrate the wisdom and power of self-denying obedience in order to put to shame the powers of darkness.

⁹¹ Revelation 19:8

There is a partial list of the “deeds of the flesh” in Paul’s epistle to the Church in Galatia.⁹² On the battlefield of the Flesh, when tempted with sins of self-indulgence - like the various types of sexual sin, drunkenness, drug abuse, partying - instead of indulging self, we can choose to deny self for the sake of God and overcome the powers of darkness. When tempted with sins of self-exaltation - like hatred, strife, jealousy, anger, conflict, factions, and envy, we can choose to deny self for the sake of God and overcome the powers of darkness. When tempted with sins of self-preservation - like idolatry and selfish ambition, we can choose to deny self for the sake of God and overcome the powers of darkness.

So, in response to the Lord’s “Even Greater Commission”, let us purpose to overcome these sins of self-centeredness. Let us become that God-centered Bride who loves Jesus more than herself. Let us become the Church that makes known THE CROSS – demonstrating the wisdom and power of self-denying obedience, putting to shame the powers of darkness.



⁹² Galatians 5:19-21 (NASB & GWT)

APPENDIX

As I stated in the Introduction, in this message I have chosen to forego much that is speculative regarding the Enemy's organization, the waging of the warfare, and the exercise of the weapons. There is much speculation associated with these areas, and I chose to deal with only that which is clearly based upon Scripture.

In his book, *Powers of Darkness: Principalities & Powers in Paul's Letters*, Clinton E. Arnold list what Paul specifically does not say about the Powers of Darkness (pp. 98-99):

1. Paul does not discuss the origin of the demons;
2. Paul does not reconstruct spirit hierarchies;
3. Paul does not affirm territorial jurisdiction;
4. Paul does not name the powers;
5. Paul does not list the functions of various spirits;
6. Paul does not teach techniques for thwarting demons.

These are areas in which the Scriptures are relatively silent, but areas also in which some ministries embrace practices based on extra-biblical speculations. This is true particularly with regards to the issue of "how" the Church is to relate to or engage the Powers of Darkness. In this APPENDIX I submit the following brief notes to address some extra-biblical practices

based on unscriptural concepts with a view to hopefully bringing some clarification and rectification on “how” the Church is to relate to or engage the Powers of Darkness and “make known the manifold wisdom of God”.

“Binding and Loosing”

William Hendriksen

The Gospel of Matthew, William Hendriksen, Baker Books

Re: Matthew 16:19

"The very wording - note `whatever,' not `whoever' - shows that the passage refers to things, in this case beliefs and actions, not directly to people. Binding and loosing are rabbinical terms, meaning forbidding and permitting."

Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, under the entry "doe" (to bind), states, "...by a Chaldean and rabbinic idiom to forbid, prohibit, declare illicit: Matthew 16:19; 18:18."

Theological Dictionary of the New Testament states under the entries for "doe" and "luo" (the Greek words for binding and loosing used in Matthew 16:19 and elsewhere), "Jesus does not give to Peter and the other disciples any power to enchant or to free by magic. The customary meaning of the Rabbinic expressions is equally incontestable, namely, to declare forbidden or permitted, and thus to impose or remove an obligation, by a doctrinal decision."

Marvin Vincent

New Testament Word Studies, Marvin Vincent, Hendrickson Publishers

Re: Matthew 16:19

“In a sense common among the Jews, of *forbidding* or *allowing*. No other terms were in more constant use in Rabbinic canon-law than those of *binding* and *loosing*. They represented the *legislative* and *judicial* powers of the Rabbinic office. These powers Christ now transferred, and that not in their pretension, but in their reality, to his apostles; the first, here, to Peter, as their representative, the second, after his resurrection, to the church (Joh_20:23, Edersheim). This legislative authority conferred upon Peter can only wear an offensive aspect when it is conceived of as possessing an arbitrary character, and as being in no way determined by the ethical influences of the Holy Spirit, and when it is regarded as being of an absolute nature, as independent of any connection with the rest of the apostles. Since the power of binding and loosing, which is here conferred upon Peter, is ascribed (Mat_18:18) to the apostles generally, the power conferred upon the former is set in its proper light, and shown to be of necessity a power of a collegiate nature, so that Peter is not to be regarded as exclusively endowed with it, either in whole or in part, but is simply to be looked upon as first among his equals” (Meyer on Mat_16:19; Mat_18:18).”

A.T. Robertson

Word Pictures in the New Testament, A. T. Robertson, Baker Books

Re: Matthew 16:19

“To “bind” (*dēsēis*) in rabbinical language is to forbid, to “loose” (*lusēis*) is to permit. Peter would be like a rabbi who passes on many points. Rabbis of the school of Hillel “loosed” many things that the school of Schammai “bound.” The teaching of Jesus is the standard for Peter and for all preachers of Christ. Note the future perfect indicative (*estai dedemenon, estai lelumenon*), a state of completion. All this assumes, of course, that Peter’s use of the keys will be in accord with the teaching and mind of Christ. The binding and loosing is repeated by Jesus to all the disciples (Mat_18:18). Later after the Resurrection Christ will use this same language to all the disciples (Joh_20:23), showing that it was not a special prerogative of Peter. He is simply first among equals, *primus inter pares*, because on this occasion he was spokesman for the faith of all. It is a violent leap in logic to claim power to forgive sins, to pronounce absolution, by reason of the technical rabbinical language that Jesus employed about binding and loosing. Every preacher uses the keys of the kingdom when he proclaims the terms of salvation in Christ. The proclamation of these terms when accepted by faith in Christ has the sanction and approval of God the Father.”

"We can see how Peter and the others understood Jesus' teaching on binding and loosing by examining their actions as recorded in the Book of Acts. Acts 15 records a dispute that arose about the behavior of Gentiles who were recently becoming part of the church. Their customs were far different from the Jews, who then made up most of the church. Should the new Gentile converts be required to be circumcised and to keep other requirements of the Law of Moses? After "much debate" (Acts 15:7), Peter stood up and asked, "...why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?" (Verse 10). After James agrees with Peter, quoting Scripture as proof, they reached the decision that the Gentiles should abstain from idols, fornication, and what is strangled. No further burden was to be placed upon the Gentile Christians. The apostles herein exercised the power of binding and loosing, as given by Jesus." "The authority to bind and loose is the authority to declare what is God's mind on a matter of doctrine or practice. This is what the early church did in Acts 15. To "bind" is to obligate, to "loose" is to remove obligation. The future perfect tense ("shall having been bound") shows that this authority is only valid when used in submission to Christ's word or teaching. It does not give the church the authority to make up new teachings later in church history. Binding in this context has nothing to do with speaking words to Satan or demons."

“Binding the Strong Man”

George E. Ladd

The Presence of the Future, George E. Ladd, Eerdmans

Re: Matthew 12:28-29

"Satan is a strong man. His palace or house is `this present evil age' (Galatians 1:4), and his `goods' are men and women under his evil influence. However, he has not been left in peace to manage his affairs. A stronger, Jesus, has assailed and overcome him."

Luke 11:21-22 records the same illustration. Luke does not use the term "bind," but says the stronger man "overcomes" ("conquers": Greek: nikao) the strong man.

Jesus, not us, is the "stronger man". Jesus overcame (conquered) Satan through the cross: Hebrews 2:14-15 + Colossians 2:13-15. (The margin of the NASB, as quoted here, has a note indicating that the last "Him" could be "it" i.e., the cross.)

Bob DeWaay

Critical Issues Commentary: "Binding and Loosing"

“Christ's victorious encounters with demons before the cross were demonstrations of His Messianic mission and His power over evil. However, they were not an end in themselves. Had Jesus not gone on to die for our sins, the "houses" (Matthew 12:43-45) that had been "swept" clean would have remained empty, inviting places for evil spirits to return. Those delivered from particular spirits during the public ministry of Jesus were still spiritually dead sinners like everyone else. They were still needing to have the penalty for their sins to be paid, so that if they responded in faith to the gospel, they would be born of the Spirit and their "houses" thus filled. These were delivered from certain demons, but still needed to be transferred as individuals from the house of Satan into the Kingdom of God (Colossians 1:13). John 12:31,32 also show importance of the cross in the defeat of Satan and the deliverance of people from his domination. These words of Jesus came during the week immediately preceding His crucifixion. He said "Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world shall be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself." The next verse tells us explicitly that Jesus was speaking of His death on the cross. The casting out of Satan, and the drawing of men (previously "bound" by the Evil One) to Christ is accomplished through the cross!”

“Strategic-Level Spiritual Warfare”

A technology has been manufactured from extra-Biblical concepts which offer various techniques of spiritual warfare popularized by C. Peter Wagner and others such as:

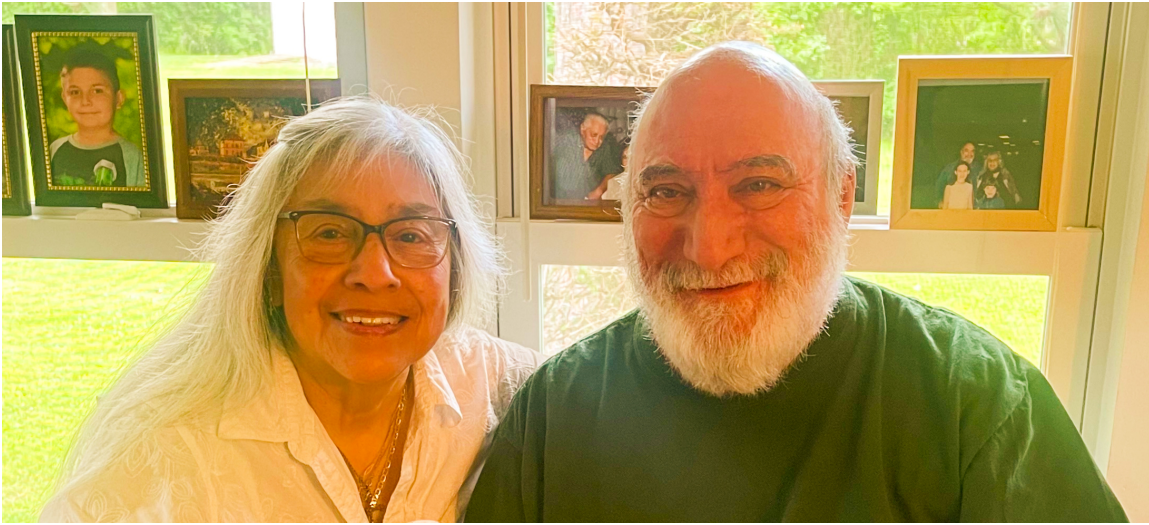
1. “Identificational Repentance”
2. “Reconciliation Walk”
3. “Levels” of Spiritual Warfare
4. “Prayer Journeys”
5. “Spiritual Mapping”
6. Confronting the “Queen of Heaven”

An article I would recommend which I believe brings objective and Biblical responses to these popularized trends is *Gaining Perspective on Territorial Spirits* by A. Scott Moreau:

<https://www.lausanne.org/content/territorial-spirits>



Bill & Frances Furioso
~ At Christ's Table ~



Bill Furioso and his wife, Frances, have been married for more than 40 years, and have two children, four grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.

Bill and Frances served as missionaries in South Africa for thirteen years making disciples, establishing churches, and training church leaders. Over a span of 40 years, they also traveled extensively in an itinerant Bible teaching ministry which took them to hundreds of gatherings on four continents ministering in churches, conferences, spiritual formation seminars, and home gatherings. They have shepherded several churches, disciplined many to Christ, and mentored church leaders in the USA and abroad.

Being an avid student by nature, Bill has done both formal and informal study in various fields including Education, Music, Philosophy and Theology. As a writer, he has authored many publications which are distributed worldwide. Because of Bill's disabilities resulting from a spinal cord injury, he can no longer travel, so their ministries of writing, recording, distributing, mentoring, and correspondence are now shared primarily via the Internet... www.AtChristsTable.org

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The Cross & The Powers of Darkness

W.D. Furioso ~ ACTpublications (2013) ~ www.AtChristsTable.org