Ephesians

Let’s go ahead and get started.

What we’ll do today is I want to finish up what we began last class. Talking about the book of Ephesians, there's a number of other things I want to say about Ephesians. We’ll look at that today, although again I remind you the material on Ephesians is not going to appear on Monday’s exam; it will be on exam #3. But I do want to finish up our discussion on Ephesians and I want to, give you the last 5 minutes or so of class to ask any questions about the exam. I’ll just say a couple of very brief things about it. There's really not much I need to say but some of you may have questions from the review session last night, or something missing in your notes, or something you're not clear on or whatever, so I’ll give you the chance to do that towards the end of class. Let’s open with prayer and then we'll look at Ephesians.

Father, we thank you for sustaining us physically and intellectually, and giving us the ability to think about and analyze your communication to us in the form of the New Testament. Lord, I pray that we’ll become more aware of the distance that separates us from the original readers in the original context so that we may better understand how that text continues to speak to us today as your continuing revelation to us as your people. I pray that we’ll have a greater appreciation for and understanding of the book of Ephesians and, in light of that, what it means to live as your people today in this world. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

Alright, we began talking about the book of Ephesians last class period, in terms of, its structure, the fact that Ephesians could naturally be divided into two basically equal segments: the first three chapters corresponding to the indicative, that is, a heavily theological section that portrays what we have in Christ and who we are by virtue of being united with Christ; the second section, chapters four through six, articulating the ethical ramifications of that, that is, the imperative for what should be true as a result of
chapters one through three, as a result of the indicative. The imperative then should naturally follow the indicative.

We also began to look a little bit at what may have been the occasion that prompted Paul to write the book of Ephesians. We said one of the difficulties is that most New Testament students are unsure as to precisely why Paul wrote the book of Ephesians and unsure as to whether there was a precise crisis or difficulty or some kind of a deviant teaching as we saw in the book of Galatians, where it's a lot easier to figure out what the issue may have been. In Ephesians there has not been a consensus; even those that agree or think that there is some kind of problem are not agreed as to precisely what that is. Because of that, a number of people think that Ephesians actually was not written directly to the city of Ephesus but it was meant to be a circular letter, that is, a letter that was meant to be circulated around different churches in Asia Minor. That’s maybe why Ephesians doesn't appear to have a specific problem or issue that it’s addressing.

We said one exception to that was a New Testament scholar named Clinton Arnold who I said teaches at Talbot Theological Seminary in California. He suggests that Ephesians was addressing a specific issue or crisis, and that was the issue or problem associated with magic. We looked at magic which I'm convinced in the first century would've been seen in a religious context, not the way we treat it today. Even in the first century, some aspects of magic were viewed negatively, even in the Greco-Roman world. But Arnold suggests that magic, starts with the understanding that behind the empirical world lies a spiritual world dominated by spiritual beings, both positive and negative, and so that what magic did, it was as a way of controlling or manipulating or supplicating the spiritual beings to act on one's behalf, or to harm your enemies, those that you didn’t get along with. So by the proper spells and incantations and uttering the divine names and things like that, one could manipulate the spiritual world or hope to control it for your benefit, and again, sometimes even harm one's enemies.

So Arnold suggests that magic was actually very prevalent and widespread in the first century Greco-Roman world, especially in this area of Asia Minor or modern-day
Turkey, and he suggested that Paul was addressing readers who were infatuated with or who perhaps lived in fear of these evil powers that controlled and dominated the world. What Arnold is doing then is writing to assure the readers that they do not need to fear these spiritual powers, these inimical rulers and spiritual beings, and they do not need to resort to magic to conquer that, but that Jesus Christ has conquered these powers of evil. So we looked at all the power language in Ephesians, the emphasis on rulers, authorities and powers which Arnold would say were these inimical powers and rulers that magic tried to control and manipulate. These powers and spiritual beings that lie behind the world, Paul said that there's no need for the Ephesian readers to resort to magic or to fear these things, but instead Jesus Christ has conquered them. So references to Jesus Christ as seated far above the rulers and authorities and powers is, Arnold suggests, Paul's way of combating this tendency towards magic,--this preoccupation with the spiritual world.

Now, while that has become very common, in fact, a number of books I've read on Ephesians have been persuaded by Arnold's approach that Paul is addressing the Ephesian Christians with a very specific problem, that is, the problem of magic. I want to suggest to you a different way of reading Ephesians and it starts with a likely scenario, being that Ephesians lacks a very specific situation for a reason. The reason I think that a lot of the students of Ephesians and New Testament scholars have not been able to find a specific purpose, that is, specific problem or issue behind Ephesians, such as a false teaching, is probably because there wasn't one. There wasn’t any real specific crisis or teaching such as one finds in the book of Galatians.

In fact, the lack of a specific situation can probably be seen in the very first verse of the book of Ephesians or the first couple of verses, where it begins. It actually begins like any of Paul's other typical letters,. Paul begins by identifying himself: “Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus, by the will of God to the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful to Christ Jesus: grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.” Now you might wonder, “Well, didn’t that just identify the readers as the Saints in Ephesus?” What is interesting is---and this goes back to our discussion back towards
the beginning of the semester on how the New Testament has been passed down to us. As you know, we don't possess any of the original documents that the New Testament authors wrote. We, for example, don't have the original text of Ephesians, the original letter that Paul wrote. Instead, we have copies of those letters that were preserved throughout the early centuries of the early church as they copied them, before the advent of the printing press and now computers, where it’s easier than ever to electronically communicate or pass information on. In the early centuries of the church they simply copied---which was a rather laborious process in many respects---they copied the New Testament documents as they were transmitted and passed on and it began to be spread around the early church. Now what is interesting is a number of the earliest and what are considered better manuscripts lacked that little phrase “in Ephesus,” and I am inclined to follow those manuscripts.

So I am convinced that Paul originally did not write “in Ephesus” and probably due to the importance of the city of Ephesus, most likely that would have been added by a later scribe at some point, as the book of Ephesians was being copied and spread around. So I'm convinced that Paul was not writing to the church in Ephesus specifically. In fact, I think that Paul was intentionally writing this letter that we call Ephesians as a general letter to be spread around and read as widely as possible. In other words, I think he was just addressing Christians generally living in the Greco-Roman empire, living in this part of Asia Minor, and Ephesus would've been one of the cities that this letter would've reached, but it wasn't the only city. Again, Paul was writing a very general letter, not addressing any specific problem or crisis or false teaching, which is in my opinion a suggestion that Paul's writing a general letter to Christians, encouraging them to live out their faith in the context of the Roman Empire, in the context of Imperial Rome. So Paul is writing a general letter of exhortation to Christians to encourage them in their faith as they attempt to live out their faith in the context of the Greco-Roman empire.

[Student question]
I'm not sure of what the manuscripts that didn't have “in Ephesus” and the ones that did, I'm not sure geographically where they came from. That’d interesting to find out. I know there are a couple that do not have “in Ephesus” that do not originate around the region of Ephesus and some that contain it that don't originate there either, so I don't know. That’d be interesting to figure out, but I'm not sure if there's any correlation between the manuscripts that have “in Ephesus” and those that don't and the region that they come from. You’re right, that would be interesting to track that down if possible.

[Student question]

As far as I know with Paul's letters, all the rest of them, except Romans where you have a couple interesting things going on in it as well as far as that phrase “in Rome,” and Romans is interestingly like Ephesians. Romans is another letter that's very difficult to tell exactly why Paul ‘s writing it as it doesn't seem to be addressing some specific crisis or problem, as he is in Galatia. So interestingly, the other letter that does have some question about whether “in Rome” is included is the book of Romans. Most of the other letters that Paul wrote, I don’t think there's any discrepancy or question over whether the identification of the readers in our Bibles is was what Paul actually wrote or not. Most of them, I think everyone agrees that they’re accurate descriptions. But Ephesians and Romans as far as I know, especially Ephesians, are the only ones that have manuscripts that are divided as to whether the name of the recipient was what Paul actually wrote.

And so with Ephesians, I think you could you could make a good case that the phrase “in Ephesus” was not there. So in other words, technically this is not the letter to the Ephesians. It's a general letter that Paul wrote to a number of churches and Christians in cities in Asia minor, of which Ephesus, no doubt, would've been one of the cities. So again, what that means is that Ephesians is one of the books where Paul---and I’ve changed my mind on this over the last three years---but Ephesians, then, I think, is one of the letters that Paul was not addressing any particular crisis, but again, he’s simply aware of the struggles that Christians in general face as they try to live out their lives in the
hostile environment of pagan Rome and the Roman Empire, and so he writes a very general letter of encouragement to those Christians to help establish their identity, to help them cope with living under the pressure of living in pagan Rome, and probably nothing more specific than that. In my opinion, that would account for why a lot of scholars have found it difficult to figure out the specific purpose for Ephesians, unlike Galatians, where we can easily determine one, I think.

So what that means, then, is we probably need to find a different reason for why all this emphasis on power, strength and authority, and why this emphasis on Jesus’ rulership over all the authorities, rulers, powers and these spiritual beings in the air, if it is not mainly magic. What's Paul doing? Why does he talk like that? One interesting thing is the Christology of Ephesians or what Ephesians says about Jesus Christ is in many respects different from what you find in Paul's other letters, where you don't find as much emphasis on Jesus as Messiah, as Savior, who has given up his life as an atonement for the sins of humanity, and justifies them. You don’t find the language of justification or that kind of language that you find here, or Jesus as son of David, Messiah. You don’t find that language as much in Ephesians.

Instead, Christ is portrayed more as the ruler, as the cosmic ruler of the entire universe, again which is a little bit different than he’s portrayed, for example, back in the four Gospels, where Jesus was portrayed as son of David, son of Abraham, as the suffering servant in Mark, etc. Here, Jesus is portrayed as the ruler over the entire universe, as the Lord of the entire cosmos, and so we have to ask why did Paul portray Jesus that way. If it wasn't magic that caused Paul to portray Jesus as the ruler over all the universe, over these powers and authorities, these spiritual beings, then where did Paul get that idea? What is he trying to do?

Let’s go back to this idea of cosmic reconciliation. I said to you that the primary theme of Ephesians, I think, is cosmic reconciliation, that is, all things are reconciled, all things in the entire universe are reconciled to Christ Jesus, seems to be the primary theme. For example, that theme, I think, begins in chapter 1, verses 9 and 10. Now again
I read this last class period, but listen closely to what Paul says, “He (God) has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan, (in other words, his will, and here's his will, his will is) a plan for the fullness of time to gather up (or sum up, or reconcile) all things in him (that is, Christ), the things in heaven and things on earth.” In my opinion, that could be seen as summarizing the entire theme of Ephesians, that is, that God's will, his intent, is ultimately everything will find its rightful place in Jesus Christ. All things will be summed up, all things in the cosmos, things on earth and the heavens, and find their rightful place in Jesus Christ, the rightful relationship to Christ.

Now, what is interesting though, later on in chapter 1, Paul is convinced that that plan has already been put into effect. Now again, this is going to be Paul's version. Remember we talked about the “already but not yet” that Jesus said. “The kingdom was already here, but it has not yet come.” This is kind of Paul's version of that. Paul is convinced that that day in the future when God would reconcile all things to Christ, that the entire cosmos would be reconciled and put in a right relationship with Christ. Paul is convinced that that has already been set in motion. Because here's what he says: I just read for you chapter 1 verses 9 and 10; here's a few verses later. This is starting with chapter 1, verses 19, and the next section, 19 through 21 in your notes. And he wants his readers to understand “what is the immeasurable greatness of his power (there's that power language again) of his power for us who believe according to the working of his great power (that is, referring to God). God put this power to work in Christ when he raised Christ from the dead (and I want you to listen this carefully) and seated him at the right hand in the heavenly places, far above every rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but in the age to come.”

So what has Paul just said? He said with the death and the resurrection of Christ, and now in his exaltation in heaven, this cosmic reconciliation has already begun. That is because Jesus is now, by virtue of being exalted to heaven at the right hand of God
(notice Paul said he's been exalted far above every ruler and authority and dominion), so this reconciliation that Paul mentioned back in verses 9 and 10, that God’s will is to affect the plan where one day all things will be reconciled to Christ. Paul is convinced that has already taken place through the death and resurrection of Christ and seated him in heaven as the Lord over the entire universe.

So where does Paul get this language then, this power language about Jesus being the Lord of the universe and all these powers and rulers and dominions and authorities being subject to Jesus Christ? Where does he get that? And by the way, let me just say I'm convinced all through Ephesians, when Paul talks about rulers and dominion and authorities, he's not referring to physical authorities and rulers, such as the Roman Empire; I think he's always referring to the spiritual powers in beings that, in a sense, rule the universe. So where does he get this language? Paul is actually going all the way back to the Old Testament and drawing on the Psalms to demonstrate that Jesus is the cosmic ruler of the universe. Notice that Paul has just said, in those verses I just read, that Jesus has been exalted and seated at the right hand of God. Where does he get that idea, of being seated at the right hand of God?

It comes from Psalm 110, which is a Psalm that actually refers to the King, the son of David, who would rule eventually over the entire world. So Psalm 110 says, “The Lord said to my Lord (that is, God addressed the Lord, the Messiah) sit at my right hand until I make your enemies my footstool.” Well isn’t that exactly what Paul said? He said Jesus Christ has been seated at the right and far above every ruler and dominion. The enemies that are now his footstool are the spiritual rulers and authorities and powers in the heavenly realms. I think where Paul's getting this notion of rulers and authorities and powers, and this idea of Jesus is the cosmic ruler of the universe, is not from magic; I think he's going back to the Old Testament and drawing in a text like Psalm 110 that portrays the Messiah, the King that God would appoint, as sitting at God’s right hand, which is a symbol of power and authority, and ruling over his enemies. Paul identifies these as spiritual rulers and powers and authorities, that are hostile to God's people.
So you’ll need to know that text just in case, it occurred on an exam or something like that. You need to know Psalm 110 as the background for Paul's understanding of Christ's Lordship. Another text, Psalm 8, you probably realize this one, but this is a Psalm that actually goes back to creation and the “O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth. You have made them (that is, Adam and Eve, humanity, it's referring to Genesis 1 and 2, (humanity) a little lower than the angels. You have crowned them with glory and honor; you have given them dominion over the works of your hands, and you have put all things under their feet.”

Interestingly, the author of Hebrews applies this Psalm to Jesus Christ, and I think Paul is doing the same thing. What is Paul saying is basically, in fulfillment of the Old Testament, Jesus has now entered into his cosmic rule. He's entered into his rule as the Lord over the entire universe; he's already defeated his enemies, which is not Rome, but the powers and the rulers and the spiritual powers that lie behind Rome. Jesus has now defeated them; he's now been raised to heaven, seated at the right hand, and rules over the entire universe, including the spiritual powers.

Now, you might ask, “Well, what does that have to do with the Christians living out their lives in the Roman Empire?” I mean, let me ask you, why didn't Paul come right out and say Jesus is the Lord over Caesar and over the Roman Empire? Why didn’t he say that? Why instead does he say, “Jesus is the ruler of the universe, and his enemies that he has defeated that now are under his feet (being under the feet was a sign of subduing and conquering); now these enemies are the spiritual rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms. Why didn't Paul say that Jesus has now placed Rome and Caesar under his feet? Paul is addressing Christians, who he's trying to encourage as they live out their lives in the hostile environment of Roman rule and Roman authority, if Paul is addressing those Christians, what good is it going to do for him to talk in terms of Jesus having been exalted to heaven and he rules over his enemies which are these spiritual rulers and authorities and powers? Why doesn’t Paul say that Jesus rules over Rome and now the Caesar now is under his feet?
[Student makes comment]

You’re suggesting then, what Paul is trying to focus on a much bigger picture than just what, you know, they look out on the world and they see Caesar on the throne.

[Student makes comment]

Any other ideas? Why might Paul talk this way? Again, you would think Paul would come out and say, “Christians, don't be upset, don't worry but be encouraged because Jesus has defeated Caesar and defeated the Roman Empire. Jesus is seated far above Rome; he has subjected them under his feet, and now Jesus rules over all things. Anything else on why Paul might talk that way? Why instead does Paul say, “Jesus Christ has been exalted far above the spiritual rulers and authorities?” Again, whenever he talks in Ephesians about rulers and authorities and powers, I think he's talking about these evil spiritual beings that rule the universe.

It goes back to the idea that since the Fall, when Satan tempted Adam and Eve in the garden, the world became the kingdom of Satan; he is now its king, its ruler. You see that idea in the New Testament in several places. So Satan and his evil beings rule the universe. It’s interesting; in Ephesians, Paul talks about Jesus being exalted and defeating these evil spiritual beings. Why doesn't he talk about Jesus ruling over Rome? I mean, certainly if I'm a Christian living in Rome in the Roman Empire and struggling to live out my faith in this hostile environment where Rome rules, wondering whether I should give allegiance to the Roman Empire or to Jesus, why would Paul talk like this?

[student makes comment]

You’ve drawn a very important point. If you heard what she said, she suggested, remember the Gospel of Mark where Jesus did not go about proclaiming that he was the king, the Messiah, because people might misunderstand him and think that he came to
wipe out Rome and unseat Caesar. But interestingly too, when you look at Jesus’ life and what Jesus did as he came to, it's interesting, the enemy that he comes to defeat in the Gospels are the casting out of demons. In other words, he seems to go after the spiritual powers that lie behind the physical powers on earth, and I wonder if that's what he's doing in Ephesians as well. As you said, he doesn't want the readers that think that he's come to unseat Rome, and that as the Messiah he’s defeated Rome. In fact, they can look around and see that's not true, but that doesn't mean that Jesus has not won the victory. It’s because what Paul is saying, Jesus has won the victory. In other words, as they look out on the empirical world and see Roman control, what Paul has said is it doesn't matter because Jesus has already won the victory by defeating the powers that lie behind Rome, that is, these inimical spiritual rulers.

In fact, that idea was, you might say, “That sounds a lot like Clinton Arnold's proposal for magic, these spiritual powers,” but that idea was present in books like Revelation. When we get to Revelation, we’ll see that what it was doing showing that the Roman world had already been defeated. Jesus had already won the victory; but he did so by defeating the powers of evil. Or another way of putting it is, often in a book like Revelation the Roman Empire is portrayed as the spiritual demonic beings that lie behind it. So I think what Paul is doing is trying to demonstrate to his readers, “Look, when you look out in the world and you see Rome in control and Caesar still on the throne, that doesn't mean that Jesus has been defeated or you’ve been defeated. In fact, Jesus has won the victory, he has ascended to heaven and is seated on his throne ruling over the cosmos, and he has defeated his enemies, but the enemies he's defeated are these spiritual rulers and authorities that lie behind the physical powers. So, in other words, yes, Rome is still in control and Caesar's on the throne, but their days are numbered because Jesus has already defeated the powers of evil.

So what this assumes is behind the physical world that one sees, Paul is saying, is a spiritual world that somehow determines what goes on, and Jesus has already won the victory in the spiritual world and has already defeated those enemies, in fulfillment of
Psalm 8 and Psalm 110. So what have they to fear as they try to live out their lives in the Roman Empire? They do not need to shrink back from the claims of Rome; they can live their lives as God's people and with boldness, because they know that Christ has already won the victory in the spiritual world, and the physical will soon follow.

Now, two other important passages in relationship to cosmic reconciliation: chapter 2:11-21, Paul wants to also say though that not only has Jesus won a victory in the spiritual world, in other words, not only has the spiritual world begun to be reconciled, but the physical world as well. Remember back in Ephesians 1:10, Paul said the plan is to reconcile all things in heaven and on earth. Well, he’s already told us, Jesus has already defeated the spiritual rulers and authorities so heaven has begun to be reconciled, but what about earth? In chapter 2 verses 11-22 Paul narrates this rather lengthy section that shows that through the death of Jesus Christ---and here we return to a theme we've seen several times in Paul's letters and in Acts---Jew and Gentile have been reconciled---and Paul uses that language, “reconciled”---to each other in one new person, in one new humanity, in one body. So why does he say that? He’s simply demonstrating this process of reconciliation has already taken place in the earthly realm by God reconciling two contrasting or previous peoples that were previously at enmity with each other, Jew and Gentile; he's now reconciled them and brought them together in the earthly realm as a sign that this reconciliation has already taken place.

So again, what Ephesians is showing is that this day---back in chapter 1---this day that God promised that according to his will, all things in heaven and on earth would be reconciled to God or to Jesus Christ---has already begun by Jesus being raised above these rulers and authorities and also by creating one new humanity, by reconciling humanity into one body. This process of cosmic reconciliation has already started. So this is Paul's version of the “already but not yet.” Now obviously, it has not yet reached its climax and its pinnacle, which it will do so in the future but it's already started, in the same way the kingdom was already advancing in a work in Jesus’ ministry, although if it had not yet arrived in its perfection and its fullness. In the same way, Paul is convinced
this reconciling of all things to Christ in heaven and earth has already begun through Christ defeating these powers, cosmic spiritual powers, and by Christ reconciling humanity in this church, this one body, the process of reconciling all things had already started and been set in motion.

This helps us understand another interesting verse: chapter 3, verse 10, where Paul is describing the reconciling of Jew and Gentile into one body and he says to make everyone see what the plan of God, the plan of the mystery hidden for ages, in God who created all things, so that through the church---this is interesting---through the church which Paul has just told us consisting of Jews and Gentiles reconciled to each other in one body, “so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might be made known to the rulers and authorities and powers in the heavenly places.” Why does Paul say that? What’s he saying? To summarize, he’s saying, “Through this church that God has created by bringing Jew and Gentile, by reconciling them to each other into body, through the church, God's wisdom now, is shown to these rulers in authorities and the heavenlies. Again, I take, whenever Paul in Ephesians mentions rulers, powers, authorities, he's speaking of the spiritual evil beings that lie behind the world, like we read about in books like Revelation.

What’s Paul saying when he says the church, consisting of Jew and Gentile, are reconciled to each other; through the church, the spiritual powers can see God's wisdom? Why does Paul say that? Why would that be of interest? Why would the church, which is a reconciled humanity, part of this process of reconciliation, why would that be of any interest to these rulers, authorities and powers in the heavenly realms, the spiritual evil beings that are inimical to God's people that Christ is now seated far above? Why would the church be of any interest to them? What are they supposed to see? Yes, this is God's wisdom but I mean, are they just supposed to say, “Oh, look how wise God is by putting these Jews and Gentiles into this one church”? What’s this supposed to do these evil powers when they see this new humanity, this church consisting of reconciled Jews and Gentiles into this one new humanity into this one body? What does that do for these evil,
inimical, hostile powers in the spiritual world?

[Student makes comment]

That’s right, it’s a demonstration that their time is up. God has defeated them. This process of cosmic reconciliation, which for these evil powers means their defeat, when they see the church consisting of Jew and Gentile reconciled into one body, it's a sign that their defeat has already taken place and their time is up.

So to summarize, what is going on in Ephesians in this theme of cosmic reconciliation is first, the assumption—you see hints of this in Ephesians but Paul doesn't come right out and say it is that the entire universe, physical and spiritual, that physical and heavenly part of the universe, the entire universe which God has created, has suffered a dislocation or a disruption because of sin. Therefore, because of sin, the entire universe is now under the control of these evil hostile powers, which is why Jesus came and cast out demons. That was a sign that the rule of these hostile powers over the world was now being broken and God's kingdom was now invading. But Paul's assumption is that the entire world has suffered a dislocation because of sin, and because of this sin, the entire universe, physical and nonphysical, is under the rule of these evil spiritual powers. Satan and his demons would be another way we might say it.

So then, God's intention, is that ultimately the entire universe must be put back to right. Problem number one must be fixed, that the entire cosmos, the entire universe, must be rescued from its bondage to sin and the powers of evil and must be restored. So God's intention is this will happen through Jesus Christ. Again, back to chapter 1 verse 10, God's plan is that all things will be reconciled to Christ, all things be summed up in Christ.

Paul is likewise convinced that through the death of Christ on the cross, and through his resurrection and being exalted to heaven Christ has already begun and inaugurated this process of reconciling all things in heaven and earth in the entire cosmos to himself. Jesus has already defeated these evil powers; he's already been raised to the
right hand of God, far above these rulers, authorities and powers, that is, he's already begun the process of reconciling the whole cosmos, the whole universe, to himself.

But Paul also says the church, this new humanity, this new entity, this body consisting of Jew and Gentile that have been reconciled together; is the first installment of and the means by which this reconciliation will take place on earth. So again, not only has Christ begun to reconcile the heavens to himself by defeating the powers of evil, but by uniting humanity, by rescuing humanity from the powers of evil and uniting them into one body of the church, he's also begun the process of reconciling all things on earth. Again, this is the “already” part, “it's already begun.” Obviously, it has yet to take place in its perfection and its fullness in the same way in which in the coming of Jesus Christ the kingdom was already present. Men and women could enter the kingdom, experience its rule and its power in advance of its full manifestation in the future, in the same way Paul is convinced that this process of reconciling all things to Christ has already begun in heaven and earth, in advance of its final working out someday in the future.

And again, why Paul talks like this is he wants his readers to place the Roman Empire in their situation in this context. Now they can see that they have nothing to fear and they do not need to shrink back from Rome. They can have courage to live out their lives in this hostile Roman environment, Roman world, because they know that behind the scenes, what they see empirically, there's a whole different picture. There's a process of reconciliation where Christ has already defeated the powers that lie behind any physical authority or any power that they will have to face on earth in the Roman Empire.

Personally, that’s where I think Paul gets the notion of all this power language and the notion of Jesus defeating these spiritual rulers and authorities. I don't think it comes from magic; I think it comes from the Old Testament and Paul's understanding, such as one finds in the book of Revelation, that behind the physical world lies a spiritual world that affects it determines it, and he wants to demonstrate Jesus was already conquered that spiritual world. All that is left to do is work that out on earth, which is already begun with Jesus reconciling Jew and Gentile into one body as his agent of creating, and
bringing about reconciliation in the world.

Any questions about that? I want to look very briefly at the very last chapter of Ephesians, which if you know anything about Ephesians, this is probably the text that your mind automatically skips to. The other one would be in chapter 2, right about the middle of chapter 2 where Paul says, “By grace we are saved through faith, and this is not yourself; it's a gift of will God, not of works so that no one can boast.” A lot of us are familiar with that text, which interestingly comes in the context of God rescuing us from bondage to sin and the powers of evil. Any questions so far about Ephesians?

What about Ephesians chapter 6, the so-called spiritual warfare passage, where, towards the end of the book and chapter 6, Paul now describes the Christian life using battle or warfare imagery, and even depicts Christians as needing to put on metaphorically certain parts or pieces of armor so he begins starting in verse 10, “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. (There's that power language again.) Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers and authorities and cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil.” There’s that idea again that you find in Revelation, of the fact that behind the physical world lies this spiritual world ruled by these evil powers. In other words, he goes back to number one: because of sin, the entire universe is now subject to and under the rulership of the powers of evil. And now Paul says, “Therefore you need to be prepared to stand against that.” Then he goes on and says, “Therefore take up the full armor of God, so you may be withstand on the evil day…Stand therefore and fasten your belt of truth (so that's the first piece of armor) the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. As shoes for your feet, put on whatever makes you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. With all of these, take up the shield of faith, so you can quench the flaming arrows of the evil one, and take up the helmet of salvation.”

Now, one of the questions--there's actually two questions—is: Where does Paul get this armor language and this warfare language? Again, Paul does this quite a bit in his
letters. He'll compare the Christian life to different metaphors. He will compare it to athletic events at times, he’ll compare it to farming and building. Here he uses warfare language to describe and depict the Christian life. He describes Christians as needing, as they live in this kind of the situation, in a world dominated by these spiritual powers, Paul now describes Christians as needing to put on these different pieces of armor that metaphorically he identifies as truth, faith, righteousness, peace and salvation. Now what are we to make of this?

The second is the question of how is chapter 6 functions in the book? Is this just an appendix or, in other words, does Paul get to chapter 6 and decide, “Well, you know, I haven't said anything about spiritual warfare, so I think I'll talk about it. I’ve said everything else I need to say about Christians living righteous lives, living holy lives and following Jesus Christ, and now I should say something about spiritual warfare, because I really haven't addressed that.” How should we understand chapter 6?

First of all, where does Paul get this armor imagery from? At least, when I was growing up I was always taught this, and I have this picture in my mind that Paul was somewhere imprisoned (it is one of the prison epistles, so that would make sense). Paul was imprisoned and he was chained to a Roman soldier, and as he was writing this, he would look up and see the helmet and write “the helmet of salvation;” look up, see his breastplate, “breastplate of righteousness.” So he’s basically describing this Roman soldier that was perhaps standing by him or that he had observed, and that’s where he gets his armor imagery. That would make sense; no doubt, and Paul was very well aware of the garb and the battle attire of a Roman soldier, but I'm not convinced that's where Paul gets it.

Instead, I am once again convinced that Paul is drawing on the Old Testament. Isaiah chapter 59, the author describes God interestingly, and this becomes important, and this is a description of God, who does battle with Israel's enemies, and the author says, “He (God) put on righteousness like a breastplate, and the helmet of salvation on his head; he put on garments of vengeance for clothing.” Here’s another one, one Isaiah 52:7:
“How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace.”

Didn't Paul just say to prepare your feet with the gospel of peace? So what I think Paul is doing is drawing on the Old Testament, and now what he does, especially in light of this verse is basically saying the same armor that God has used to defeat his enemies is now the same armor that Paul calls upon Christians to take up. It's almost as if he saying, “This armor is available to you, and by the way, it works. It's already been tried out in Isaiah chapter 59 and it works.” So again, I think Paul is not so much dependent on Roman soldier, but once again he's demonstrating that the very means by which God defeats his enemies is the means by which the people of God will now conquer these evil spirits and authorities in the heavenly world.

Notice the “already but not yet” tension is---back in chapter 1; Jesus Christ has already defeated these enemies. Remember back in chapter 1, by being raised and exalted to heaven, he has already defeated the spiritual rulers and powers, but because of the “not yet,” we are now commanded to defeat the powers of evil and bring about this cosmic reconciliation. So this is the “already but not yet” or the indicative and the imperative. The indicative is it's already been inaugurated, this cosmic reconciliation, this defeat of the powers, has already taken place through Christ's death and resurrection, but now, because of the “not yet,” the imperative is we still need to put that into practice. So because of that, I do not think the chapter 6 is different---this is not a separate chapter. It's not as if Paul says everything he wants to say by chapter 6, verse 9, and then, “Oh, let's talk about spiritual warfare.” Instead, this is the conclusion to the book. This is Paul's way of saying everything he’s already said in the first five chapters. In fact, all of those pieces of armor, the faith, peace, righteousness, truth and the gospel, they've already been discussed numerous times throughout Ephesians. So chapter 6 is basically a summary of the entire book. It simply looks at chapters 1 through 5 through a different lens, the lens of the cosmic warfare that now Christians are part of. But again, the only reason they can be part of that is because Christ is already, in chapter 1, begun this universal reconciliation by defeating the powers of evil; now were supposed to do that as well.
The other interesting thing about this though is when we ask, “What does it mean to do spiritual warfare?” I don't want to say that it doesn't involve things like casting out demons and binding the powers of darkness that are hostile to us and, things that we often think of when we think of spiritual warfare. We think of Satanic assaults on us spiritually and we think of things like demon possession and demon influence and the need to break through various means. But it's interesting; if what I said is correct, Paul ties chapter 6 back into Ephesians chapters 1-5, so that at least for Paul in Ephesians, the primary way that we do spiritual warfare is by living lives characterized, instead of by dissension and division, by living lives that promote peace, instead of lying, we tell the truth, instead of living impurely and immorally, we live lives characterized by righteousness. When we do that, we deal a blow of defeat to these powers of darkness that Christ has already defeated.

So I find it interesting that all those pieces of armor are things that Paul's actually mentioned, so early on in Ephesians. Another way of putting it is the way we do spiritual warfare is living out the kind of lifestyle that Paul articulates in the first five chapters of Ephesians. When we do that, we actually join in, Paul says, we’re part of this cosmic battle that Christ had already in the heavenly realms, but that we continue to wage until the “not yet” arrives in the future, when all things are eventually perfectly and completely reconciled to Christ.

Alright, any questions? We have a couple minutes left. Any questions about the exam? Let me say the exam will look just like the previous one as far as its length and the type of exam; it’s just on different material. It’s not on the Gospels or the historical material we talked about at the beginning the semester; It's on Acts through Galatians, and everyone should have a study guide. It’s on Blackboard, but I e-mailed it to you as well, so please look at the study guide. If you have any questions, please ask me before Monday.