

# The Seven Spirits of God

by Ron Kangas

None of the historic creeds and confessions and none of today's theologies stress adequately five critical points concerning the Spirit of God: the Spirit who was "not yet" before the Lord Jesus was glorified (John 7:39); the last Adam (the incarnate Christ) becoming a life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45b); the compound Spirit typified by the anointing ointment (Exo. 30:23-25); the Spirit of life, the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ, Christ Himself, and the indwelling Spirit as all referring to the compound Spirit who gives life (Rom. 8:2, 9-11; 2 Cor. 3:17-18); and the seven Spirits of God. This inadequacy has serious ramifications for our Christian experience of and participation in the Triune God and His move on earth. If we neglect these aspects, perhaps out of a defective theology, we are, in many respects, neglecting some crucial items of Christian faith and experience.

With this in mind, we need to consider the seven Spirits of God, paying careful attention to the following verses from the book of Revelation:

John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is coming, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful Witness, the Firstborn of the dead, and the Ruler of the kings of the earth. (1:4-5)

To the messenger of the church in Sardis write: These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God. (3:1a)

There were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God. (4:5b)

I saw in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures and in the midst of the elders a Lamb standing as having just been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth. (5:6)

Implied in these verses are matters of great theological interest, none more important than the meaning of the enigmatic phrase *the seven Spirits*. A thoughtful reader of the New Testament will doubtless wonder why, in an obvious departure from the sequence of the Divine Trinity in Matthew 28:19, the seven Spirits are mentioned before Christ in Revelation 1:4-5. Also, it surely is significant that Christ identifies Himself to the church in Sardis as the One who has the seven Spirits of God. In Revelation 4 the seven Spirits of God are symbolized by seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, but in Revelation 22 the Spirit is portrayed as a river of water of life proceeding out of the throne. How should we account for this change in symbolic reference to the divine Spirit? A matter of particular theological importance, especially for Christology and pneumatology, is the remarkable statement in Revelation 5:6 that the seven eyes of Christ the Lamb are the seven Spirits of God. Other issues of concern are the relationship of the seven Spirits to the seven churches and to the New Jerusalem; the connection between the seven Spirits and Christ's sevenfold call for overcomers to be raised up in the seven churches; and the function of the seven Spirits in the experience of believers today. This essay is an attempt to address these questions by focusing on some crucial matters related to knowing and experiencing the seven Spirits of God.

Such a study is needed for a variety of reasons, the most prominent of which is the neglect of the seven Spirits by theological writers. Can any of our readers direct our attention to a book that deals adequately with the seven Spirits of God? Thus far we have been unsuccessful in our efforts to locate a volume that cannot be accused either of neglecting this subject or of covering it merely in a cursory or superficial manner. The following are examples of books on the Spirit that make absolutely no mention of the seven Spirits of God: G. Campbell Morgan, *The Spirit of God*; W. H. Griffith-Thomas, *The Holy Spirit of God*; Hendrikus Berkhof, *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*; A. J. Gordon, *The Ministry of the Spirit*; James H. McConkey, *The Three-fold Secret of*

*the Holy Spirit*; A. M. Stibbs and J. I. Packer, *The Spirit within You*; Benny Hinn, *Welcome, Holy Spirit*; John MacNeil, *The Spirit-filled Life*; and J. E. Fison, *The Blessing of the Holy Spirit*. Not even Andrew Murray's classic work *The Spirit of Christ* pays any attention to the seven Spirits of God. We suspect that this neglect is widespread, even universal.

To their credit, various commentators have attempted to elucidate this mysterious matter of the seven Spirits. There is profit in consulting the works of Alford, Barnes, Barclay, Bauckham, Bruce, Coates, Darby, Ellicott, Grant, Hort, Ironside, Kelly, Lenski, Poole, Robertson, Scott, Swete, Thomas, Trench, and Vincent. However, our research has found that the writings of even the most astute theologians and the most erudite of scholars display numerous shortcomings. Perhaps the most easily discernible defects are insufficient emphasis and incomplete understanding. Some (e.g., Alford) speak of the seven Spirits of God, but the proper emphasis is lacking. Others (e.g., Barclay, Lenski) write at length on the seven Spirits, but their spiritual understanding is far from complete. The writings of still others (e.g., Ironside, Thomas) are defective in that they fail to note the application of the seven Spirits to the church in its various stages and conditions. Furthermore, apart from the works of Watchman Nee and Witness Lee, we do not know of any writings that treat the seven Spirits of God in relation to God's building, show the connection between the seven Spirits and God's move for the carrying out of His eternal economy, point out how the seven Spirits can be experienced by believers in Christ for their growth and transformation for the building up of the organic Body of Christ, and demonstrate that the seven Spirits are necessary for producing the overcomers, who overcome the degradation of the church and fulfill God's purpose concerning the church. A thorough study of the seven Spirits of God should include not only an interpretation of the term *the seven Spirits of God* and an examination of the relevant texts in Revelation but also a consideration of the relation of the seven Spirits to God's building and of the application of the seven Spirits to the seeking believers in their spiritual experience and in their aspiration, prompted by the Spirit's speaking (Rev. 2:7), to be overcomers who "follow the Lamb wherever He may go" (14:4).

This article will first examine differing interpretations of the expression *the seven Spirits*, contending that this term refers not to angels nor simply to the Spirit of God in a general way but to the Spirit of God as the sevenfold intensified Spirit in God's move for His economy. Following this, we

will look at the passages in Revelation which mention the seven Spirits and then consider the seven Spirits in relation to God's building, the overcomers, and the believers' spiritual experience.

### Unacceptable Interpretations

Some interpretations of the expression *the seven Spirits*—such as the one propounded by Robert H. Mounce—are just plain wrong. Mounce claims that from

the perspective of a fully developed trinitarian theology [which in his view is not to be found in Revelation] it is tempting to interpret the seven spirits as the one Holy Spirit represented under the symbolism of a sevenfold or complete manifestation of his being. (69)

He resists this temptation and is unmoved by the argument that "it would be improper to bracket anyone less than deity with the Father (vs. 4a) and the Son (vs. 5), especially since in this context all three are given as the source of grace and peace" (69). In Mounce's opinion the use of this argument

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as a basis for concluding that *the seven Spirits* refers to the Holy Spirit loses its force in view of verses such as Luke 9:26 (which speaks of the Son returning in His glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels) and 1 Timothy 5:21 (where Paul speaks of obedience in the presence of God, Christ Jesus, and the elect angels). After examining Revelation 3:1, 4:5, and 5:6, Mounce offers the conjecture that the seven Spirits are "part of a heavenly entourage that has a special ministry in connection with the Lamb" (70). His conjecture is untenable. A "heavenly entourage"—a group of celestial associates, a holy retinue—could hardly be ranked with the Father and Son, serve as a source of grace and peace, or be regarded as the very eyes of Christ in His executing of the divine economy. Furthermore, it is highly unlikely that Christ would present Himself to the church in Sardis as "He who has a heavenly entourage"! A dead church needs the intrinsic and subjective vitalizing of the life-giving Spirit, not the visitation of an angelic retinue.

**A**nother mistaken interpretation is that the seven Spirits are seven principal angels. According to this view *the seven Spirits* refers to "seven attending and ministering presence-angels—angels

represented as standing before the throne of God, or in his presence" (Barnes 41). This is the position of E. W. Bullinger: "The Apocalypse is full of references to the doings of these same 'seven angels'; who, as the 'servants' of God find their proper place 'before' the throne" (201). A note on Revelation 1:4 in the Harper Collins Study Bible, New Revised Standard Version says, with no lack of aplomb, "The *seven spirits* are the seven archangels who stand before God." Significantly, the Jerusalem Bible does not have a note on "the seven spirits in his presence" in 1:4 or on the seven Spirits of God in 5:6, but it does contain notes on 3:1 and 4:5. The note on 3:1 says, "These seven spirits of God are seven angels." The note on 4:5 says, "Not the sevenfold Spirit of mediaeval tradition but the seven 'angels of the presence.'" This interpretation has little to commend it. Remarking on the suggestion that the seven Spirits are "the seven archangels of Jewish tradition," Mounce observes that "this would represent a strange intrusion of Jewish tradition into Christian thought" (69). Barclay is helpful at this juncture: "They [the seven archangels] had the care of the elements of the world" and "were the most illustrious and the most intimate servants of God. Some think that they are the seven Spirits mentioned here [Rev. 1:4]. But that cannot be; great as the angels were, they were still created beings" (*Revelation* 31). Thus, they could not be ranked with the Father and the Son. In Alford's words, "Mere creatures, however exalted, would not be equalized with the Father and the Son as fountains of grace" (1783). Hort comments, "Nothing suggests seven angels or anything of that sort. Evidently the seven spirits are spoken of as in the strictest sense Divine" (11). Arguing against the position that the seven Spirits should be understood as referring to created spirits and not to the Spirit of God, Swete claims, "The position of these seven spirits between the Eternal Father and the glorified Christ is unsuitable even for the highest of created spirits in a salutation which is in fact a benediction" (273). In objecting to those who understand the seven Spirits to be seven angels, Trench raises provocative questions:

How is it possible to conceive the Apostle desiring '*grace and peace*' to the Church from the Angels, let them be the chiefest Angels which are, or from any but from God alone, who is the God of *all* grace? Or how can we imagine Angels, created beings, interposed here between the Father and the Son, and thus set as upon an equal level with Them; the Holy Ghost meanwhile being passed by, as according to this interpretation He must be, in this solemn salutation to the Churches? (9)

Trench is echoed by Vincent, who claims that the seven principal angels "could not be properly spoken of as the source of grace and peace; nor be associated with the Father and the Son; nor take precedence of the Son, as is the case here [1:4]. Besides, angels are never called *spirits* in this book" (413).

Perhaps the most thorough refutation of this interpretation is that presented by Albert Barnes, and it is worthy of full citation:

(1) That the same rank should be given to them as to God, as the source of blessings. According to the view which represents this expression as referring to angels, they are placed on the same level, so far as the matter before us is concerned, with "him who was, and is, and is to come," and with the Lord Jesus Christ—a doctrine which does not elsewhere occur in the Scriptures, and which we cannot suppose the writer designed to teach. (2) That blessings should be *invoked* from angels—as if they could impart "grace and peace." It is evident that, whoever is referred to here by the phrase "the seven Spirits," he is placed on the same level with the others mentioned as the source of "grace and peace." But it cannot be supposed that an inspired writer would invoke grace and peace from any but a divine being. (3) That as two persons of the Trinity are here mentioned, it is to be presumed that the third would not be omitted; or to put this argument in a stronger form, it cannot be supposed that an inspired writer would mention two of the persons of the Trinity in this connection, and then not only *not* mention the third, but refer to *angels*—to creatures—as bestowing that which would be appropriately sought from the Holy Spirit. The incongruity would be not merely in omitting all reference to the Spirit—which might indeed occur, as it often does in the Scriptures—but in putting in the place which that Spirit would naturally occupy an allusion to angels as conferring blessings. (4) If this refer to angels, it is impossible to avoid the inference that angel-worship, or invocation of angels, is proper. To all intents and purposes, this is an act of worship; for it is an act of solemn invocation. It is an acknowledgment of the "seven Spirits" as the source of "grace and peace." It would be impossible to resist this impression on the popular mind; it would not be possible to meet it if urged as an argument in favour of the propriety of angel-invocation, or angel-worship. And yet, if there is anything clear in the Scriptures, it is that God alone is to be worshipped. For these reasons, it seems to me that this interpretation cannot be well founded. (41-42)

Yet another highly improbable interpretation regards the seven Spirits as a personification of the multiform providence of God. "Others therefore understand by them, the seven workings of Divine Providence in his management of the affairs of the world, with relation to the church" (Poole 949). As we will point out later, in one of their functions, the seven Spirits are related to God's providence, that is, to God's governmental administration of the world and everyone and everything therein. However, the seven Spirits are a real subsistence, not a mere personification of divine attributes. "It cannot be supposed," Barnes remarks, "that John meant to personify the attributes of the Deity, and then to unite them with God himself, and with the Lord Jesus

Christ, and to represent them as real subsistences from which important blessings descend to men" (41).

### Acceptable but Insufficient Interpretations

The most common and widely held interpretation regards the expression *the seven Spirits* as referring not to an entourage nor to angels nor to personified divine attributes but to the Spirit of God Himself. Many who take this view, however, provide an insufficient explanation of the implications of this truth. Alford assures us that the "common view is doubtless right, which regards the seven as *the energies of the Holy Spirit*" or perhaps as "expressing His plenitude and perfection" (1783). Poole observes, "The sense seems to be, and from the Holy Ghost, who, though but one spiritual Being, yet exerteth his influence many ways, and by various manifestations, called here *seven Spirits*, because all flow from the same Spirit" (949). "In the context of trinitarian orthodoxy," Bruce informs us, "the accepted interpretation has seen in the seven spirits a reference to the personal Spirit of God in his sevenfold plenitude of grace" (334). He agrees with I. T. Beckwith that by the seven Spirits "we are to understand the one Spirit symbolized by the seven torches (Rev. 4:5) and by the seven eyes (Rev. 5:6)" (336). Swete remarks, "It is best to regard the seven Spirits of God as answering to the operations or aspects of the One Spirit of God" (274). Darby claims that the seven Spirits in Revelation signify the Holy Spirit "being noticed as the direct agent of power in the sevenfold perfection in which it is exercised" (*Synopsis* 372). F. W. Grant agrees: "The seven spirits are but the sevenfold energy of the One, the Holy Spirit, acting in accordance with the mind of Him who is upon the throne, and in the energy implied by that throne itself" (310). Coates concurs: "The Spirit is not seen here as the one Spirit in relation to the one body, but as 'seven spirits'; that is, He is presented in the diversity and completeness of His actings for the effectuation of God's sovereign will" (6). Scott explains: "The Holy Spirit is named, but not here regarded [1:4] in the unity of His Being as 'one Spirit' (Eph. 4:4). The plenitude of His power and diversified activity are expressed in the term 'seven Spirits,' the fulness of spiritual activity" (24). Robertson considers *from the seven Spirits* "a difficult symbolic representation of the Holy Spirit here on a par with God and Christ, a conclusion borne out by the symbolic use of the seven spirits in 3:1; 4:5; 5:6" (286). Bauckham says, "The seven Spirits should be understood as a symbol for the divine Spirit, which John has chosen on the basis of his exegesis of Zechariah 4:1-14, a passage which lies behind...the four references to the seven Spirits" (110). Lenski argues,

"These seven spirits before the throne are *God*...The seven spirits denote the Third Person, the Holy Spirit" (40). Further, Lenski maintains that the "seven *lamps of fire* burning before the throne symbolize the Holy Spirit through whom God and Christ rule" (40). Thomas also sees the seven Spirits as "a reference to the Holy Spirit, and thus as an additional *divine* source for the greeting of v. 4" (67). We may conclude with Vincent:

Hence, the Holy Spirit is called *the seven Spirits*; the perfect, mystical number seven indicating unity through diversity (1 Cor. xii.4). Not the sevenfold *gifts* of the Spirit are meant, but the divine Personality who imparts them; the one Spirit under the diverse manifestations. (413-414)

### The Significance of the Number Seven

Vincent's word about "the perfect, mystical number seven" raises the issue of why Revelation speaks of *seven* Spirits. Several explanations have been advanced. Some expositors, especially among the Brethren and those influenced by them (e.g., Grant 310), try to trace the notion of the seven

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Spirits to what is alleged to be the sevenfold character of the Spirit in Isaiah 11:2: "The Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him, / The spirit of wisdom and understanding, / The spirit of counsel and strength, / The spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord." Ironside is convinced that here we have an explanation of how the one, eternal Holy Spirit can be pictured as seven Spirits. From his perspective, in Isaiah 11:2 we see "the seven Spirits who rest upon the Branch of Jehovah, our Lord Jesus Christ" (15). Ironside then notes the order given: the Spirit of the Lord, the Spirit of Wisdom, the Spirit of Understanding, the Spirit of Counsel, the Spirit of Might, the Spirit of Knowledge, and the Spirit of Fear of the Lord (15-16). "There," he is assured, "you have the one Spirit in the seven-fold plenitude of His power" (16). However, critics of this interpretation (e.g., Thomas 68) hasten to point out that in Isaiah 11:2 there are only six designations of the Spirit. "The reference to Isa. xi. 2 is but lamely made out, there being there but *six* energies of the Spirit mentioned" (Alford 1783). The objection is fatal, and we must agree with Lenski: "In our opinion this 'seven,' then, does not refer to Isa. 11:2: the spirit of wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge, fear of the Lord—which also are only six designations and not seven" (42).

Alford (1783) argues, correctly, that the seven Spirits should be traced not to Isaiah 11:2 but to Zechariah 4, “the key Old Testament passage for John’s understanding of the role of the Spirit in the divine activity in the world” (Bauckham 110). Thomas asserts that the “most satisfactory explanation for the title ‘the seven spirits’ traces its origin to Zech. 4:1-10” (68). Verses 2 and 10 speak of the seven lamps which are “the eyes of the Lord which range to and fro throughout the earth.” Verse 6 stresses the prominence of the Spirit: “‘Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ says the Lord.” “In deriving the title [*the seven Spirits*], John identifies the seven eyes of Zechariah with the seven spirits that belong to the Lord (Zech. 4:10; cf. Rev. 5:6). The seven lamps of Zechariah (Zech. 4:2) are also synonymous with the seven spirits (Rev. 4:5)” (68). Although this is surely correct, Thomas’s appeal to Zechariah 4 helps to explain the provenance of the term *the seven Spirits* but not its significance. It partially accounts for the *origin* of the number seven with respect to the seven Spirits, but it contributes little to our understanding of the *meaning* of this number.

Barclay connects the idea of the seven Spirits with the fact of the seven churches in Revelation 1:4. Central to Barclay’s interpretation is the concept that the seven Spirits are related to the seven churches insofar as the churches participate in the life and power of the Spirit. Barclay argues that in Hebrews 2:4 the Greek word translated “gifts” (*merismos*) in some versions really means “shares” and should be so rendered, “as if the idea was that God gives a share of his Spirit to every man” (*Revelation* 32). From this he infers that in Revelation 1:4 the idea “would be that the seven Spirits stand for the share of the Spirit which God gave to each of the seven Churches” (32). Barclay rightly connects the Spirit to the churches, but his understanding of this relationship is exceedingly superficial, for he fails to grasp the intrinsic and organic relationship between the seven Spirits and the seven churches, a relationship of vital importance for the outworking of God’s economy unveiled in Revelation.

Lenski proposes a rather mystical interpretation of the number seven used with both the seven Spirits and the seven churches, basing his understanding on the symbolic significance of the numbers three and four:

When in Revelation the Spirit is named as “the seven Spirits of God,” this is the same symbolic seven that is found in the seven churches; seven = three, the number of God, plus four, the number of the earth, the world, and men—God, through the Spirit, dealing with men. In the case of the churches seven indicates the union of God through the Spirit with the church which is filled with the Spirit while the rest of men who close their hearts against God and his Spirit are left to the conviction of judgment (John 16:8-11). (41-42)

According to Lenski the appellation *the seven Spirits*, especially in Revelation 1:4, which speaks also of the seven churches, unveils God’s longing to enter into a spiritual union with the believers as components of the seven churches. Lenski offers this succinct summary of his view: “This ‘seven’ points to the Spirit’s commission to proceed from the throne and to make God and men one” (43). This interpretation has merit and should not be casually dismissed. In the Scriptures three is the number of the Triune God, and four is the number of humankind as God’s creature. When seven is composed of three added to four, the number seven may then convey the spiritual significance of the Triune God added to humanity, that is, the union of the Triune God with the believers in Christ.

**H**owever, in our efforts to understand the term *the seven Spirits*, this mystical interpretation of the number seven should be subordinated to what can more accurately be said to be the primary significance of this number in the Bible—completion. Although diverse commentators (e.g., Alford 1783; Bauckham 114; Trench 9) recognize that seven is the number of completion, not many recognize that seven is the number not merely of completion but of completion in God’s move, completion in God’s operation. Consider the “sevens” in the Bible which are for God’s move. In Genesis we have the first seven—the seven days for creation with its rest (1:31—2:3). As the entirety of the Bible reveals, in God’s move with humankind there are seven dispensations: innocence, conscience, human government, promise, law, grace, and kingdom. The land of Israel was in desolation for seventy years (seven times ten), “until the land had enjoyed its sabbaths. All the days of its desolation it kept sabbath until seventy years were complete” (2 Chron. 36:21; cf. Jer. 25:11; Dan. 9:2). In Daniel 9:24-27 seventy weeks (each week signifying seven years) were decreed for God’s economy with Israel and were divided into three sections: the first section of seven weeks, the second section of sixty-two weeks, and the final section of one week. The prophecy concerning the last of the seventy weeks is the first of the four “sevens” prophesied in Revelation; the others are the prophecy of the seven seals for the destiny of the earth (4:2-3; 5:1-7; 6:1-17; 8:1-2), the prophecy of the seven trumpets for tribulation upon the earth (8:1—9:21; 10:7; 11:15-18), the prophecy of the seven bowls for the wrath of God upon the earth (15:7; 16:1; 17:1; 21:9). The seven lampstands as the seven churches (1:12, 20) and other “sevens” in Revelation—the seven stars (1:16, 20; 3:1), the seven lamps (4:5), the seven horns and the seven eyes (5:6), and the seven angels (8:2, 6)—are also for the completion in God’s move. The principle is the same with the seven Spirits: The seven Spirits are for completion in God’s move, even the completion of God’s move.

There is, however, another aspect of the meaning of the

number seven which refers to completion, and even makes completion possible, and that is the aspect of intensification. Two instances of sevenfold intensification can be seen in Daniel 3 and in Isaiah 30. When Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego refused to worship the golden image which Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up, he threatened to cast them into a furnace of blazing fire (Dan. 3:13-18). After they persisted in their refusal, he “answered by giving orders to heat the furnace seven times more than it was usually heated” (v. 19). This was an intensification, even a sevenfold intensification, of the heat. Isaiah 30:26 says, “The light of the moon will be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun will be seven times brighter, like the light of seven days.” Here we have another intensification—the sevenfold intensification of the light of the sun. These two instances indicate that in the Bible the number seven may signify not only completion but also intensification. Therefore, with respect to the seven Spirits, the number seven signifies both completion in God’s move and intensification for God’s move. As the book of Revelation makes evident, there are times and situations when completion in God’s move depends on intensification for God’s move. As we will see when we come to the matter of the seven Spirits and the Lord’s call for overcomers in Revelation 2 and 3, unless some overcomers among God’s people are intensified by His Spirit, God’s dispensational move, His move in this age to build up the organic Body of Christ, cannot be completed.

### **The Seven Spirits Being the Sevenfold Intensified Spirit for God’s Move**

It is erroneous to argue that the seven Spirits are seven angels, and it is insufficient to claim that the title *the seven Spirits* refers to the Spirit of God merely in a general way. It is not even adequate to assert that the seven Spirits are the Spirit of God in the fullness or completeness of His energies or operation. The title *the seven Spirits*, like all appellations of the Spirit, unveils something very particular concerning the divine Spirit.

At this juncture it is worthwhile to note that the New Testament, in its revelation of the person of the Spirit, ascribes to the Spirit at least twenty titles: the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35), the Spirit of God (Matt. 12:28), the Spirit of the Father (10:20), the Spirit of the Lord (Luke 4:18), the Spirit of the Son of God (Gal. 4:6), the Spirit of Christ (Rom. 8:9), the Spirit of Jesus (Acts 16:7), the Spirit of Jesus Christ (Phil. 1:19), the Lord

Spirit (2 Cor. 3:18), the Spirit of the living God (v. 3), the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45b), the Spirit of life (Rom. 8:2), the Spirit of grace (Heb. 10:29), the Spirit of reality (John 14:17; cf. Acts 1:8), the Comforter (v. 16), the Spirit of power (Luke 24:49), the Spirit of glory and of God (1 Pet. 4:14), the eternal Spirit (Heb. 9:14), the seven Spirits (Rev. 1:4), and the Spirit (John 7:39). Although every title refers to and is a designation of the one, unique, divine Spirit, each title nevertheless bears its own significance and unveils a particular aspect of the Spirit.

What, then, is the meaning of the expression *the seven Spirits*? The title *the seven Spirits* denotes the Spirit of God as the sevenfold intensified Spirit for God’s move. The Bible clearly and emphatically reveals that there is “one Spirit” (Eph. 4:4), yet in Revelation this unique Spirit, in His sevenfold intensification, is called the seven Spirits. Essentially, in His existence the Spirit of God is one—the one Spirit; economically, in His function the Spirit of God is seven or sevenfold—the seven Spirits. “In God’s existence, the Spirit of God is one, but in God’s economy

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the Spirit of God is seven in function” (Lee, *Economy* 222). The book of Revelation unveils the fact that the one Spirit of God has been intensified sevenfold to fulfill His function in carrying out God’s economy.

Failure to realize this can lead to gross error, as in the case of Bullinger, who first insists that since there is only one Spirit, neither the number seven nor any other number can be used of the Holy Spirit and then alleges that there is “no warrant for such a polytheistic interpretation” (201-202). Contrary to Bullinger but in keeping with the divine revelation, we assert that the eternal Spirit is one in His essence and also seven in His intensified economical function. “In substance and existence God’s Spirit is one; in the intensified function and work of God’s operation God’s Spirit is sevenfold. It is like the Lampstand in Zechariah 4:2. In existence it is one lampstand, but in function it is seven lamps” (Lee, *Economy* 221). For the carrying out of God’s economy in a time of darkness and degradation, the Spirit of God has been intensified sevenfold and is therefore operating now as the seven Spirits in the churches and in the lives of believers. The remainder of this article develops, elaborates, and applies this thesis.

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## The Seven Spirits in God's Economy

The first mention of the seven Spirits is in Revelation 1:4-5a:

John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is coming, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful Witness, the Firstborn of the dead, and the Ruler of the kings of the earth.

In approaching these verses we regard as indisputable the claim that the seven Spirits are not seven angels but are the one, unique Spirit of God, the third of the Divine Trinity. Angels cannot be ranked with the Father and Son; angels cannot be a source for the dispensing of grace and peace; and as Revelation itself makes abundantly clear (19:10; 22:8-9), angels cannot be regarded as objects of worship. The seven Spirits are the eternal Spirit of God, the third person of the triune Godhead.

In 1:4-5 we see that the seven churches—seven actual local assemblies which also signify prophetically the church in its historical development—are the recipients of grace and peace from the economical Trinity. Although the Triune God—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit—is wonderfully unveiled in Revelation, the revelation of God in this book is concerned not with the essential Trinity but with the economical Trinity. “In God’s existence, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit coexist and coinhere from eternity to eternity....The book of Revelation, however, does not touch the existence of the Trinity but the economy of the Trinity” (Lee, *Economy* 222). The designations of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit in these verses indicate this. “Him who is and who was and who is coming”: this is God the Father not in His eternal being, as in Exodus 3 (“I Am Who I Am”), but in His economical activity in time. “The seven Spirits”: This is God the Spirit not in His eternal existence (as in Heb. 9:14) but in His economical operation. “Jesus Christ, the faithful Witness, the Firstborn of the dead, and the Ruler of the kings of the earth”: This is God the Son not in His eternal coexistence with the Father (as in John 17:5) but in His economical function in God’s administration. From such a Triune God grace and peace are supplied to the churches.

In Revelation 1:4 there are two other indicators that the seven Spirits are the divine Spirit in economical operation. The first is the rather surprising change in the sequence of the three of the Divine Trinity. In Matthew 28:19 the sequence is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, but in Revelation 1:4-5 the sequence is the Father, the seven Spirits, and then Jesus Christ the Son. The reason for this difference is that “the Trinity in Matthew 28 is the Trinity of God’s existence, the essential Trinity, and the Trinity in Revelation is the Trinity in God’s economy, the economical Trinity” (Lee, *Economy* 223). In the economical sequence in

Revelation 1:4-5, the seven Spirits are listed in the second place instead of the third, revealing the importance of the function of the sevenfold intensified Spirit of God. For this reason the book of Revelation repeatedly emphasizes the speaking of the Spirit (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; 14:13; 22:17). “At the time the book of Revelation was written, the church had become degraded and the age had become dark. Therefore, the sevenfold intensified Spirit of God was needed for God’s move and work on the earth” (Lee, *Revelation* 41).

Another indicator that the seven Spirits are for God’s economical operation is the clause “who are before His throne.” The seven Spirits of God are before the throne of God. Lenski is helpful here:

When the Holy Spirit is said to be “before” the throne we understand this preposition as symbolizing the Spirit’s going forth (5:6) on his mission to effect the triumph of the kingdom....“The throne” itself is not a chair but the symbol of God’s infinite majesty, power, and dominion....“Before” expresses the relation of the Spirit to God’s majesty, power, and dominion, the relation which reaches out into all the world. (41)

**I**n a very real sense, Revelation is a book of the throne; the throne of God is mentioned at least forty times. In this book the throne is the center of God’s universal governmental administration, an administration that is altogether for the carrying out of God’s economy. Here the Spirit of God is “viewed according to the governmental character that the book as a whole unfolds to us,” and therefore is “designated as being before His throne” (Kelly 311, 312). Scott agrees, informing us that the seven Spirits are before the throne “because the primal thought in the Apocalypse is the public government of the earth” and then remarks that the “governmental character of the book [also] accounts for the mention of the Spirit before Christ” (24, 25). For the seven Spirits to be before God’s throne means that they function to carry out the decisions and judgments of the divine administration, a function which is surely an economical operation.

### The Seven Spirits as Seven Lamps of Fire

Further attestation to the role of the seven Spirits in carrying out God’s administration is given in 4:5: “Out of the throne come forth lightnings and voices and thunders. And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.” Here we must concentrate on three words: *lamps*, *fire*, and *throne*.

The seven Spirits are seven *lamps*. These lamps, as various commentators have noted (Bauckham 111; Grant 375; Lee, *Revelation* 215; Mounce 69; Thomas 68), correspond to the seven lamps of the lampstand in Exodus 25:37 and the seven lamps of the lampstand in Zechariah 4:2. These

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lamps signify the enlightening and searching of the sevenfold intensified Spirit.

**T**he seven lamps are lamps of *fire*. In the Scriptures fire first implies judgment (Gen. 19:24). In the book of Revelation in particular, fire symbolizes judgment, and the seven lamps of fire are no exception (Thomas 351). Alford objects to any viewpoint that confines “the interpretation of the lamps of fire to the consuming power of the Spirit in judgment,” believing that the seven Spirits as seven lamps of fire are also for cheering and that in Revelation 4 “comfort is mingled with terror, the fire of love with the fire of judgment” (1818). Alford is mistaken. The judgment by fire may be motivated by love, as with the judgment upon the house of God (1 Pet. 4:17), but the fire in Revelation 4:5 certainly is not the fire of love, much less a cheering fire. The seven lamps enlighten and the seven lamps search, and this enlightening and searching are for God’s judgment. Scott recognizes this: “Everything inconsistent with the absolute purity of the throne must be judged; hence the Spirit is here viewed in connection with the righteous character of the throne” (124). The seven Spirits as seven lamps of fire search out, expose, and burn all that is contrary to the righteous character, holy nature, and glorious expression of the Triune God.

The seven lamps of fire also judge and consume all that is contrary to the will of God. Revelation 4:11 is a remarkable verse concerning the will of God. Here the twenty-four elders—the elders of the angels, the elders of the whole creation of God—declare, “You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive the glory and the honor and the power, for You have created all things, and because of Your will they were, and were created.” The universe with everything in it came into existence because of God’s will and for the fulfillment of God’s will. The word *will* in this verse shows the connection between God’s creation and God’s purpose:

God is a God of purpose, having a will of His own pleasure. He created all things for His will that He might accomplish and fulfill His purpose. This book, unveiling God’s universal administration, shows us the purpose of God. Hence, in the praise of the twenty-four elders concerning His creation, His creation is related to His will. (Lee, *Revelation* 222)

The will of God in Revelation 4:11 is the will, the intention, of God mentioned in Ephesians 1, where Paul speaks of the good pleasure of God’s will—the desire of His heart; the mystery of God’s will—the mystery hidden in Himself but now made known to us through His revelation in

Christ; and the counsel of God’s will—His consideration of the way to accomplish His will. All things were created for God’s will, which, according to Ephesians 1 and Romans 12, is to have a corporate expression of Himself in Christ, initially through the organic Body of Christ and consummately through the eternal New Jerusalem in the new heaven and new earth.

Whereas the elders in Revelation 4 submit to God’s will and praise Him for it, throughout the course of the events recorded in Revelation, a great number of other beings, human and angelic, do not. Both human beings and angelic beings are in a state of rebellion against God and His will. Some passively resist and others actively oppose, but in either case the will of the Father is not done on earth as it is in heaven (Matt. 6:10). Eventually, all rebellion will be subdued, and the entire universe will be headed up in Christ through His Body, the church. This is Paul’s thought in Ephesians 1:10: “Unto the economy of the fullness of the times, to head up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens and the things on the earth, in Him.” Part of the process of heading up all things in Christ according to the

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will of God is the judgment, by the seven lamps of fire, upon all that is opposed to the will of God. Therefore, to know the seven Spirits as the seven lamps of fire is to experience God’s judgment upon all that is contrary to His righteousness, holiness, glory, and will.

These seven lamps of fire are burning before the *throne*. The fact that the word *throne* occurs eleven times in Revelation 4 indicates that the center of this chapter is the throne—the throne of God’s governmental administration and the center of His universal administration. Since God’s throne is altogether a matter of His economy, for the seven Spirits to be the seven lamps of fire burning before the throne means that the sevenfold intensified Spirit is for the carrying out of God’s economy through the application of God’s administration to everyone and everything on earth.

If we see the connection in Revelation 4 between God’s will and the seven lamps of fire burning before God’s throne, we will realize that the seven lamps do not burn without a goal, without an intent. The fire serves a purpose. In the Bible fire implies not only judging, purifying, and refining but also bringing forth or producing. Ultimately, the aim of the

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burning of the seven Spirits is not to consume but to produce, to bring forth, something that is according to the good pleasure of God's will. This means that the goal of the lamps' burning is the fulfillment of God's will, for which the universe and the billions of things in it have been created. The New Testament reveals that God's will is to have a corporate expression of the Triune God in Christ through the Body of Christ, which consummates in the New Jerusalem. Today, the Body of Christ should be expressed in the churches as the golden lampstands (Rev. 1:20). On the one hand, the burning of the seven Spirits of God serves a negative purpose—to consume all that is contrary to God and His will. On the other hand, the burning of the seven Spirits serves a positive purpose—to bring forth the corporate expression of the Triune God as the fulfillment of God's will. Therefore, the “burning of the seven Spirits of God before God's administrative throne has a purpose to bring forth the golden lampstands, the churches, for the fulfillment of God's New Testament economy” (Lee, *Economy* 249-250).

### The Seven Spirits as the Seven Eyes of the Lamb

Another key passage concerning the seven Spirits is Revelation 5:6:

I saw in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures and in the midst of the elders a Lamb standing as having just been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.

This verse speaks of two persons of the Divine Trinity—Christ the Son of God (the Lamb) and the Spirit (the seven Spirits of God)—in a most striking and mysterious way, a way that raises questions about the traditional understanding of the relationship of the Holy Spirit to Christ. It is explicitly stated that the seven eyes of the Lamb are the seven Spirits of God. This clearly reveals that the seven Spirits, the third of the Triune God, are the eyes of Christ, the second of the Triune God. Are the seven Spirits and the Lamb one person or two? Most orthodox Christians insist that the Spirit and the Son are distinct persons in the Godhead. We agree. However, we should not sidestep Revelation 5:6, dismissing it as symbolic language devoid of theological significance. The seven Spirits being the seven eyes of Christ the Lamb indicates that, in a very real sense, the seven Spirits and Christ are economically one person.

Thomas attempts to address the issue:

This symbolic representation of the Holy Spirit arises from the relationship of the third Person of the Trinity to the second Person. The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Son just as He does from the Father (cf. John 15:26). He is Christ's agent for keeping in touch with the affairs of the world, as the participial phrase...“sent into all the earth” suggests. (393)

Thomas's twofold explanation is inadequate. We do not object to his remark that the Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Son and the Father, but we must take issue with his claim that the Holy Spirit is Christ's “agent.” An agent is one empowered to act for or to represent another and as such is a person separate from the one who has empowered and commissioned that agent to act. Thomas's claim that the Holy Spirit is Christ's agent, or representative, and that through this agent Christ keeps in touch with the affairs of the world is inaccurate for at least three reasons.

First, this claim implies a separation of the three of the Divine Trinity and thus embodies an incipient, perhaps unconscious and unintentional, tritheism. In brief, Thomas's opinion has tritheistic implications.

Second, Thomas's interpretation fails to take into account the New Testament revelation of the oneness of the Divine Trinity in God's economical operation. Central to this oneness is the fact that none of the Trinity ever acts independently of or apart from the others. The Bible does not divide God into thirds. On the contrary, the Triune God always functions as a whole. This means that whenever one acts, the others also act. For example, when the Word, who is God, became flesh (John 1:1, 14), the entire Triune God, not only the Son, was involved in the incarnation and manifestation of God in the flesh in the man Jesus (1 Tim. 3:16; Col. 2:9). When the Lord Jesus, the Son of God, was baptized in the Jordan, both the Father and the Spirit were involved (Matt. 3:16-17). When the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ is imparted to us, we also partake of the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 13:14). When Christ makes His home in our hearts, He does this through the Father's strengthening us with power through His Spirit into our inner man (Eph. 3:14-17). In Revelation 1:4-5 all three of the Triune God are involved in dispensing grace and peace to the seven churches.

Third, Thomas does not recognize the oneness implied by the revelation in 5:6 that the Spirit is the eyes of Christ. The eyes of a person are not merely the agent of the person but are a part of the person.

**A**ccording to 5:6 the third of the Trinity, the Spirit, is the eyes of the second, the Son. This demonstrates that the Spirit cannot be separate from Christ. We surely do not regard our eyes as separate from ourselves. When our eyes look at something, we, the persons, are looking at that thing. For our eyes to behold a particular scene means that we behold that scene. We would never say, “Please do not think that I am looking at you. It is only my eyes that are looking. I myself am not looking.” Neither would we say, “My eyes are my agent to look and observe. I myself do not actually look at or observe anything.” Just as our eyes are not separate from ourselves as persons, so Christ's eyes are not

separate from Himself as a person. As a person and the person's eyes are one, so Christ and His eyes, the Spirit, are one. When Christ looks at us, His eyes, the seven Spirits look at us. When the Spirit looks at us, Christ Himself is looking at us. The seven Spirits are the eyes of Christ looking at us.

When some read this, they may protest, saying, "You are confusing the persons of the Trinity! In the essential Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are distinct persons. All three are God, but the Father is neither the Son nor the Spirit, the Son is neither the Father nor the Spirit, and the Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son." Those who argue in this way often make the mistake of using the biblical truth concerning the essential Trinity—that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit coexist and coinhere eternally as distinct persons within the Godhead—to dispute the biblical truth concerning the economical Trinity—that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are involved in a complicated process for the carrying out of God's economy. The book of Revelation in general and 5:6 in particular unveil the economical Trinity, not the essential Trinity. The seven Spirits being the eyes of Christ the Lamb is therefore a matter not of the essential Trinity but of the economical Trinity. Witness Lee has spoken with admirable clarity regarding this:

This view [in 5:6] is economical because this is not a matter of the Triune God's existence, but something related to His move. Economically speaking, the seven Spirits are the eyes of the Son. Essentially speaking, the Father is the Father, the Son is the Son, and the Spirit is the Spirit for existence. Functionally speaking, however, the essential Spirit becomes the functional eyes of the Son. *The key to define the divine Trinity is to see both the essential and the economical Trinity.* Revelation touches God's administration and the entire divine administration is a matter of God's economy. Therefore, whatever this book reveals to us concerning the divine Trinity is economical not essential. The traditional teaching of the divine Trinity stresses that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are three *separate* Persons. The last book of the Bible, however, shows us that the Spirit has become the eyes of the Son. We cannot say that the eyes of a person are another person. This shows us that the traditional teaching of the divine Trinity is short of the adequate and full knowledge of the Bible. Economically speaking, the Spirit of God in God's administration is the eyes of the administering Son. This is for function, not for existence. In order for us to do anything we need our eyes. This shows us that, in the divine administration, Christ needs the Spirit to be His eyes. (*Economy* 251, emphasis added)

Concerning the significance of the Lamb's seven eyes, commentators have made various observations. Grant notes that the seven eyes are "perfect in omniscience and executive ability" (380). Vincent says, "The eyes represent the discerning Spirit of God in its operation upon all created things" (489). Thomas interprets the eyes as "representing sight, intelligence, and wisdom in their fullness, in other words, omniscience" (392). Alford believes that the seven eyes "represent the watchful active operation of God's Spirit poured forth through the Death and by the victory of the Lamb, upon all flesh and all creation" (1826).

The seven Spirits as the seven eyes of Christ have a manifold function. Since seven is the number of completion in God's dispensational move, the seven eyes are for God's move. That a person's eyes are for the person's move is true even in our human life. Our eyes are for us to move. If we were blind, it would be difficult for us to move. Likewise, the seven eyes of the Lamb, having been sent forth into all the earth, are for God's move. "The eyes of the Lord move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely

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His" (2 Chron. 16:9). The seven eyes are also for watching, observing, and searching. The eyes of the Lord are everywhere: "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, / Watching the evil and the good" (Prov. 15:3). The eyes of the Lord are upon His people, for He is the One "who searches the inward parts and the hearts" (Rev. 2:23), and "all things are naked and laid bare to the eyes of Him to whom we are to give our account" (Heb. 4:13). In addition, the seven eyes, being flames of fire (Rev. 2:18), are for judging by consuming, purifying, and refining. What the seven eyes behold they either consume or purify and refine. Finally—and this may be new to some readers—the seven eyes are for infusing the element of Christ into the believers for their growth and transformation. As the seven eyes look at us, they not only search and judge us, but they also transfuse and infuse what Christ is into us, causing us to become proper materials for God's spiritual and organic building. These seven watching, searching, judging, infusing eyes have been "sent forth into all the earth." Their operation is universally applicable. They are watching in every place, and they are observing, searching, and discerning everything. Everyone is subject to their manifold function.

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## The Seven Spirits and the Deadness of the Church

At this juncture let us consider the seven Spirits in Revelation 3:1, the opening word of the risen Christ to the church in Sardis: “These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: I know your works, that you have a name that you are living, and yet you are dead.” “The Lord’s character,” Darby correctly points out, “is adapted to the state of those whom He is addressing” (*Addresses* 77). The crucial point regarding the condition of the church in Sardis is that this church was dead and dying. It had a name that it was living but it was actually in a state of spiritual death, a state utterly abhorrent to the living God. The conduct and daily living (symbolized by *garments* in verse 4) of the majority in this church had been defiled by death, stained and contaminated by continual contact with deadness. (In the sight of God, death is even more defiling than sin—Lev. 11:24-25; Num. 6:6-7, 9). Stott gives the following stark description of the spiritual condition of the church in Sardis:

This socially distinguished congregation was a spiritual graveyard. It seemed to be alive, but it was actually dead. It had a name for virility, but it had no right to its name. Its works were beautiful graveclothes which were but a thin disguise for this ecclesiastical corpse. The eyes of Christ saw beyond the clothes to the skeleton....The few who did not share in the general stagnation are described as people who have not soiled their garments (v. 4). So this death was dirt....Such spiritual defilement is spiritual death....It is a terrible thing to be physically alive and at the same time spiritually dead. (85-86)

Because so many of today’s preachers excoriate sin but are oblivious to or even tolerate deadness, we need to be deeply impressed with the dreadfulness of spiritual death. After quoting the Lord’s word in Revelation 3:1, Darby, writing in the previous century, exclaims, “What a terrible condition is this—it completely portrays what we see all around us; I do not mean only at the present day, but what has actually been the state of the Church for the last century and more” (*Addresses* 81). Coates, although speaking with a milder tone, is no less discerning: “An open Bible, and much truth from God...does not ensure spiritual vitality....It is not what I am in profession, or even the ‘name’ I have with others, that has value, but what I am in *spiritual vitality*” (42-43). In his efforts to determine the cause of spiritual death, Barclay says that a church is in danger of death “when it begins to worship its own past,” “when it is more concerned with forms than with life...more concerned with correct ritual than they are with living vitality,” “when it loves systems more than it loves Jesus Christ,” and “when it is more concerned with material than with spiritual things” (*Letters* 87-88).

What, if anything, can be done about such a deplorable and

appalling condition? The answer is found in the Lord’s description of Himself as “He who has the seven Spirits of God.” A dead church needs the Christ who has the seven Spirits. “In presenting Himself to Sardis as having the seven Spirits of God the Lord indicated that He had plenitude of power and intelligence to bring about the setting up of that which would really be for the pleasure of God” (Coates 43). Speaking of the seven Spirits, Alford says, “This plenitude, Christ, the Lord of the Church, possesses...in all fulness. From Him the spiritual life of his churches comes as its source, in all its elements of vitality” (1805). Perhaps no one has spoken more strongly about the need for such a Christ than Trench:

To [those] sunken in spiritual deadness and torpor, the lamp of faith waning and almost extinguished in their hearts, the Lord presents Himself as having the fulness of all spiritual gifts; able therefore to revive, able to recover, able to bring back from the very gates of spiritual death those who would employ the little last remaining strength which they still retained, in calling, even when thus *in extremis*, upon Him. (163)

Trench is right. The only recourse for those who are languishing in a state of spiritual death is to call on the name of the One who has the seven Spirits of God. The only remedy for spiritual death is the seven Spirits. Only the seven Spirits can deal with the deadness of the church. Since the Spirit is the Spirit of life (Rom. 8:2), the seven Spirits, the Spirit of life intensified sevenfold, are mainly for the imparting of life. The eternal, indestructible divine life imparted by the seven Spirits conquers death and vitalizes the churches. The sevenfold intensified Spirit is therefore well able to deal with the defilement of death and cause the believers to become intensely living and vital.

## The Seven Spirits and God’s Building

The seven Spirits are for God’s building. In order to realize this, we need to see that the governing vision of the Bible is the vision of God’s building, that the book of Revelation affords us the consummate unveiling of God’s building, that in the Scriptures the golden lampstand with its seven lamps are for God’s building, that the seven eyes of the Lamb, which are also the seven eyes of the stone in Zechariah 3, are for God’s building, and that, ultimately and eternally in the New Jerusalem as the consummation of God’s building, the seven Spirits as seven lamps of fire burning before the throne become the Spirit as the river of water of life proceeding out of the throne.

**T**he Bible is a book of building, and the governing vision, the controlling view, in the Bible is the vision of God’s building—the corporate expression of the Triune God through His redeemed, regenerated, sanctified, and transformed people. This building is

seen in type, or blueprint, in the Old Testament and in reality, or fulfillment, in the New Testament. In Genesis 2 we see the tree of life, the flowing river, and gold, bdellium (pearl), and precious stones; in Revelation 21 and 22 we see a city built with gold, pearl, and precious stones, a city in which are the tree of life and the river of water of life. In the Old Testament we have the tabernacle, the temple, and the rebuilt temple, all of which are types of the church as God's temple, His dwelling place (1 Cor. 3:16; Eph. 2:21-22). When Peter received the revelation from the Father that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matt. 16:16), the Lord immediately spoke a word about God's building (v. 18), a building, a spiritual house, composed of Christ as the cornerstone and of all the believers as living stones (21:42; Acts 4:11; Eph. 2:20; 1 Pet. 2:4-6). Initially, God's building is His house (1 Tim. 3:15), but when it is enlarged it becomes a city—the city for which Abraham “eagerly waited,” a “city which has the foundations, whose Architect and Builder is God” (Heb. 11:10). In this building Christ is the unique foundation upon which all the believers are building, some with wood, grass, and stubble and others with gold, silver, and precious stones (1 Cor. 3:10-12).

The consummate unveiling of this organic building is in Revelation, which, contrary to the opinion of some, is primarily a book not of judgment but of building. In Revelation the divine building is unfolded in two stages—the churches as the lampstands in chapters two and three and the New Jerusalem, the eternal golden lampstand, in chapters twenty-one and twenty-two. The revelation concerning the New Jerusalem is given to the seven churches (1:4, 11; 22:16a). This indicates that, as the speaking Spirit (2:7), the Lord is speaking to those in the churches—God's initial building in this age—regarding the New Jerusalem—God's consummate building in eternity—showing His believers that the ultimate issue of the judgment by fire of all that opposes God's administration and economy will be the manifestation of the New Jerusalem, “coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (21:2). The fact that our living as overcomers in the proper church life today is directly connected to our participation in the New Jerusalem in the coming (millennial) age is made evident by the Lord's word in 3:12: “I will write upon him...the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which descends out of heaven from My God.”

If we see the central significance of God's building in the Bible and the crucial importance of God's building in Revelation, we should endeavor to see the relationship of the

seven Spirits in chapters four and five to the churches as God's present building and to the New Jerusalem as God's eternal building.

Simply stated, the seven Spirits are for God's building. As far as the seven lamps of fire are concerned, this is true in at least three ways. First, these seven lamps are based upon the seven lamps of the lampstand in Exodus 25:37 and of the lampstand in Zechariah 4:2. In the Scriptures the lampstand is related to God's building: to the tabernacle in Exodus, to the temple in 1 Kings, to the rebuilt temple in Zechariah, and to the churches in Revelation. The seven lamps of fire are the seven lamps of the lampstand, and the lampstand is related to God's building. Thus, the burning of the seven lamps is for the building indicated by the lampstand. Second, as we have pointed out, the fire of the lamps is not only for judging, refining, and purifying but also for producing, for bringing forth. What is brought forth by the burning, enlightening, searching, judging, refining, and purifying of the seven lamps of fire is God's building as the church today and as the New Jerusalem in eternity. Third, the seven Spirits as the seven lamps of fire burning for

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God's building eventually become the Spirit as the river of water of life flowing in God's building. The seven Spirits who are before the throne become the Spirit proceeding out of the throne. Whereas the burning of the seven Spirits for the New Jerusalem is temporal, the flowing of the Spirit in the New Jerusalem is eternal. The seven lamps of fire will consume what cannot be part of the New Jerusalem, but they will purify and bring forth what will be part of the New Jerusalem. Once this function of the seven Spirits has been completed, the Spirit will no longer be the fire burning for the city but will be the river flowing in the city.

Just as the seven lamps of fire are for God's building, the seven eyes of the Lamb are also for God's building. Compelling evidence for this is the connection between the seven eyes of the Lamb in Revelation 5:6 and the seven eyes of the stone in Zechariah 3:9: “‘For behold, the stone that I have set before Joshua; on one stone are seven eyes. Behold, I will engrave an inscription on it,’ declares the Lord of hosts, ‘and I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day.’” This stone typifies Christ. Dennett says, “The foundation stone of the temple was a type of Christ as the foundation in Zion” (35). Baron agrees:

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The literal foundation [stone] was a type of Him who is the “precious cornerstone” and unshakable foundation of the spiritual temple, into which believers also are built as living stones, and which through eternity shall be for the habitation of God through the Spirit. (115)

Both Baron and Dennett relate Christ as the stone in Zechariah to Christ as the stone in Isaiah: “Therefore thus says the Lord God, / ‘Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a tested stone, / A costly cornerstone for the foundation, firmly placed” (28:16). In His discourse with the Jewish religionists, the Lord Jesus referred to Himself as “the stone which the builders rejected” but which “has become the head of the corner” (Matt. 21:42). Christ came as the stone for God’s building, but the religious leaders rejected Him and, acting in concert with the Roman government, crucified Him. However, God honored this stone by resurrecting Him and making Him the cornerstone in His spiritual building. Recognizing this, Peter preached Christ not only as the Savior but also as the stone for God’s building (Acts 4:10-12).

Regarding the stone (Christ) in Zechariah 3:9, God said, “I will engrave an inscription on it.” God also said that through this engraved stone He would “remove the iniquity of that land in one day.” To engrave is to cut. When Christ was on the cross, dying as the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world (John 1:29), He was engraved, cut, by God so that we might be redeemed for God’s building. Baron believes that “when on the cross of shame He laid down His life a ransom for us...the ‘graving’ of the stone took place” (117). “This stone was engraved in one day for the iniquity of God’s people. The engraving of the stone was its being dealt with by God’s righteousness on the cross for our redemption” (Lee, *Revelation* 268).

Christ as the engraved stone has seven eyes, and these are “the eyes of the Lord which range to and fro throughout the earth” (Zech. 4:10). This is a crucial point, for it demonstrates, we are convinced, that the seven Spirits of God, which are the seven eyes of the Lamb, are for God’s building. Christ is both the Lamb for redemption and the stone for building. Therefore, He is the Lamb-stone, the redeeming and building Christ. As the Lamb Christ has seven eyes, and as the stone He also has seven eyes. These seven eyes are not only for the application of Christ’s redemption but also for the accomplishment of God’s building. In Revelation 5:6, the Lamb-stone, with His redemption as the basis, is unveiled as the One who is carrying out, through the seven Spirits as His seven eyes, God’s administration for God’s building. God’s building is the goal of His redemption. To see this is to realize that redemption, as marvelous as it is, is not an end in itself. Redemption is for building. The seven Spirits as the seven eyes of Christ the Lamb-stone always have God’s building in view. All that these seven eyes are doing in us and with us—observing, searching, discerning, infusing—is for God’s building. From this we

see that as the seven lamps of fire and as the seven eyes of the Lamb, the seven Spirits are for God’s building.

### The Seven Spirits and the Overcomers

The church, God’s building today, owes its existence to the pneumatic Christ, Christ as the life-giving Spirit. However, not long after the church came into being, it began to degrade, and the degradation gradually worsened until, in the sight of the Lord, it became intolerable. Then as the book of Revelation makes emphatically clear, He who has the seven Spirits of God intervened to deal with the church’s degradation and to sound out a call for overcomers. For the producing of the church the life-giving Spirit was sufficient, but for dealing with the degradation of the church it was necessary for the Spirit to become the seven Spirits, the sevenfold intensified Spirit. The seven Spirits, the seven lamps of fire, the seven eyes of the Lamb—all are needed to overcome the church’s degradation. In dealing with the degradation of the church, the sevenfold intensified Spirit has a singular objective—to produce overcomers. To appreciate the function of the seven Spirits in producing the overcomers we need to acknowledge the fact of the church’s degradation and to understand the nature of overcoming in this book. A full picture of the church’s degradation in its various aspects is presented in Revelation 2 and 3. Here we can comment only briefly on four principal aspects.

To the church in Ephesus the Lord Jesus said, “I have one thing against you, that you have left your first love” (2:4). Here we have the source of degradation—leaving the first, or best, love toward the Lord. The church in Ephesus had good works and had labored for the Lord, had endured suffering, and had tried the false apostles; however, she had fallen from her first love, paying more attention to work than to the Lord Himself.

The Lord rebuked the church in Pergamos for holding “the teaching of the Nicolaitans” (2:15). The most common interpretation of the word *Nicolaitans* is that it denotes “a sect which advocated license in matters of Christian conduct” (Ryrie 1789). A note in the New Scofield Reference Bible explains, “The name ‘Nicolaitans,’ according to early church fathers...refers to those who, while professing themselves to be Christians, lived licentiously” (1353). It is instructive to compare this note with that in the original Scofield Reference Bible:

From *nikao*, “to conquer,” and *laos*, “the people,” or “laity.” There is no ancient authority for a *sect* of the Nicolaitanes. If the word is symbolic it refers to the earliest form of the notion of a priestly order, or “clergy,” which later divided an equal brotherhood (Mt. 23:8) into “priests” and “laity.” (1332)

We take this latter view to be the correct one. The Nicolaitans, viewing themselves as superior to the common believers,

lifted themselves above them and thus “conquered” them, annulling the universal priesthood of the believers in Christ and destroying the organic function of the members of the Body of Christ. Commenting on “the works of the Nicolaitans” in Revelation 2:6, Watchman Nee says:

*Nikao* means “conquer” or “above others.” *Laos* means “common people,” “secular people,” or “laity.” So “nicolait” means “conquering the common people,” “climbing above the laity.” Nicolaitans, then, refers to a group of people who esteem themselves higher than the common believers....The Lord hates the behavior of the Nicolaitans. The conduct of climbing over and above the common believers as a mediatorial class is what the Lord detests; it is something to be hated....So also, the Lord disapproves of the teachings of the Nicolaitans....The church in Ephesus has only the behavior of the Nicolaitans, while the church in Pergamos has the teaching of the Nicolaitans...If certain behavior is manifested and its doctrine is also preached, that is not only the ability to behave, but also the ability to produce a theory from the behavior....I believe this matter is what the Lord hates the most. (20, 40-43)

Another sign of degradation in the church is spiritual death. As we have seen, the Lord rebuked the church in Sardis for its deadness, telling the church in that city to establish “the things which remain, which were about to die” (3:2).

The church in Laodicea had become degraded in a very different way. The Lord rebuked this church for its lukewarmness, saying, “I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. So, because you are lukewarm and neither hot nor cold, I am about to spew you out of My mouth” (3:15-16). In verse 20a the Lord indicated that Laodicea had become degraded in an even more serious way: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock.” This door is the door not of the hearts of individual believers but the door of the church. Christ is the Head of the church, yet He was standing outside the church seeking to get in. This is not only the degradation of lukewarmness but the degradation of Christlessness.

It cannot reasonably be denied that a church which has lost its first love for the Lord, which practices and teaches a system of clergy-laity hierarchy, which is in a state of spiritual death, and which is lukewarm and Christless is a degraded church. In addressing such degradation, Christ repeatedly calls for overcomers (2:7b, 11b, 17b, 26-28; 3:5, 12, 21). An overcomer is a conqueror,

a victor. “The verb [for “overcomes” in Greek] *nikao*... literally means to “be a victor” (Earle 459). In 1 John 5:4 overcoming is a matter of victory over the satanic world system, whereas in Revelation overcoming is a matter of victory over the degradation of the church. Because not many Christians realize this, it requires emphasis. In the book of Revelation to overcome is not to overcome the world system in a general way by faith but to overcome the church’s degradation in a specific way by the sevenfold intensified Spirit. At the very least, the overcomers in Revelation 2 and 3 are victorious over the four aspects of degradation mentioned above. On the positive side, these overcomers, these victors and conquerors, love the Lord supremely and absolutely; they are neither clergy nor laity but living, functioning members of the Body of Christ; they are intensely living and active in their regenerated spirit and exercise to keep themselves from deadness and from the defilement of death; they are “hot” in their pursuit of Christ for the building up of the church; and they have opened the “door” to the Lord, and He has come in to them and now dines with them in their daily experience and enjoyment of Him. These overcomers are those who, by the Lord’s mercy, have an ear to hear what the Spirit is say-

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ing to the churches (2:7a, 11a, 17a, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). This speaking Spirit is the sevenfold intensified Spirit, the Spirit who, in His intensified function, is producing overcomers—those who overcome the degradation of the church and build up the Body of Christ, which will consummate in the New Jerusalem.

### **The Seven Spirits and the Believers’ Spiritual Experience**

We believe that, in keeping with the principle of the twofoldness of divine truth in the Scriptures, our view of the seven Spirits of God should be twofold, that is, characterized by a balance of objective revealed truth and personal spiritual experience. On the one hand, the biblical propositions concerning the sevenfold intensified Spirit are objectively true and correspond to divine reality. On the other hand, the seven Spirits of God, the seven lamps of fire, and the seven eyes of the Lamb are all for the believers’ spiritual experience, both individual and corporate. Some readers, mindful of and concerned about the excesses that abound in certain Christian circles,

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may be suspicious, even fearful, of the word *experience*. There is no need for alarm. The Triune God desires that we experience Him according to His revelation. This is not an extreme matter but something very much in keeping with the teaching of the New Testament, especially the Epistles. We should not regard as authentic any supposed spiritual experience that is contrary to the Word of God, yet neither should we be closed to an experiential realization and application of the truth presented in the Word of God. John F. MacArthur, Jr. is correct when he says, "The only real test for any experience is this: Does it square with the Word of God?" (43). He is also correct when he claims that if we "commit ourselves to searching the Scriptures, and let our experience of the living Word come from that," then "our experience will bring the greatest, purest joy and blessing imaginable—because it is rooted and grounded in divine truth" (46).

**T**he experience of the seven Spirits that is "rooted and grounded in divine truth" has a number of aspects. The first is intensification. In dealing with the degradation of the church, the Spirit has been intensified sevenfold. The title *the seven Spirits* indicates that the Spirit has been intensified. The Spirit in Revelation (2:7; 14:13; 22:17), as the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit, includes the elements of divinity, humanity, the death of Christ with its effectiveness, and the resurrection of Christ with its power. Since the Spirit has been intensified, all the elements of the Spirit have also been intensified. For example, the Spirit is the Spirit of grace (Heb. 10:29), but the grace in the intensified Spirit is an intensified grace. Likewise, the Spirit is the Spirit of life (Rom. 8:2), but the life in the intensified Spirit is an intensified life. The intensification of the Spirit is for the intensification of the believers in their actual spiritual condition. What a shame it would be for the Spirit to be intensified yet the people of God would remain the same! Every aspect of the Christian life needs to be intensified by the seven Spirits. Consider the lukewarmness of the church in Laodicea, a church that was neither cold nor hot. (The Greek word rendered "hot" in Revelation 3:15 and 16 literally means "boiling.") The Lord charged this church, saying, "Be zealous [lit., boiling]...and repent" (v. 19). To be boiling hot is to be intensified. If lukewarm believers are intensified by the seven lamps of fire, they will be "boiling." Consider also the situation in the church in Ephesus, a church that had fallen from its first love. If believers who have left their first love are intensified by the seven eyes of the Lamb, their love toward the Lord Jesus will be an ardent, sevenfold intensified love. We are living in the age of the Spirit's intensification, and, both as believers and as the church, we should be unconditionally open to be intensified in every way by the seven Spirits of God.

Intensification leads to vitalization—the condition of being living and active in our regenerated spirit. Recall the Lord's word to Sardis: "You have a name that you are living, and yet you are dead" (3:1). He also said, "I have found none of your works completed before My God" (v. 2). Like those in Sardis, some Christians today have a reputation for being living, but they are dead, and what is not dead is dying. Furthermore, many of those who began a work in and for God's economy have become stagnant and moribund, failing to complete what they began and thereby displeasing the living One who is the Head of the church. Can it be disputed that such believers stand in desperate need of vitalization? It is a marvelous fact that the sevenfold intensified Spirit is the vitalizing Spirit, able to make us consistently living and active in our spirit. If we confess our deadness, we can avail ourselves of the seven Spirits of God, the sevenfold intensified Spirit of life, for our personal and corporate vitalization.

The experience of both intensification and vitalization depends on the experience of the seven Spirits as the seven lamps of fire. As the seven lamps, the seven Spirits are for burning and enlightening. Should the seven lamps be burning only before the throne of God and not in our experience of the Lord? Certainly not! For the sake of God's will to have His corporate expression, we need the actual experience of the seven lamps of fire. Consider the following testimony:

We all need to pray, "Dear divine Flame, come! Come and judge! Come and purify! Come and refine that You may produce the golden lampstand."...Every day, every morning, and every evening, we need to pray, "Lord, come; we are open to You! We open every avenue of our being to You."...I can testify that nearly every day I pray, "Lord, enlighten me; search me within and expose me, Lord. I like to be enlightened by You and exposed in Your light."...We all need to pray, "Lord, we are open. Come and shine upon us and shine from within us and enlighten every avenue and every corner of our being. I like to be exposed, purged, and purified." Then the Lord has a way to produce a pure golden lampstand. (Lee, *Economy* 253-254)

**I**f we daily open to the Lord in this way, we will experience the Spirit's enlightening and burning. We will also experience the Spirit's flowing. We have seen that eventually, in Revelation 22, the seven Spirits as the seven lamps of fire burning before the throne become the Spirit as the river of water of life flowing from the throne. The principle is the same in our experience. The more the seven lamps of fire enlighten us and burn us, the more the river of living water flows in us and through us.

In our experience of the Lord, we need the seven Spirits

not only as the seven lamps of fire but also as the seven eyes of the Lamb. Whereas the seven lamps are for enlightening and burning, the seven eyes are for looking and infusing. The sevenfold intensified Spirit is Christ looking at us and infusing Himself into us. Christ looks at us through the seven Spirits as His seven eyes not mainly to observe us and search us but primarily to infuse Himself into us. Our human experience affords an illustration. If you look at another person with love, your eyes will infuse your love into that person. In like manner, when the Lord looks at us with His seven eyes, He infuses what He is into us. In particular, He infuses His building element into us. Remember that the Lamb in Revelation 5 is the Lamb-stone, the One who has redeemed us for God's building. He desires that we not only be regenerated in our spirit but also transformed in our soul to become living stones for God's eternal spiritual building. He is the stone with seven eyes, and now He is transforming us into building stones by infusing, imparting, dispensing, Himself as the stone into our being. The more He looks at us with His infusing eyes, the more we are transformed into stones for God's consummate building, the New Jerusalem; and the more we are transformed into stones, the more we are saved from isolation, independence, and individualism and become building conscious, realizing that we have been redeemed and regenerated for God's building.

The sevenfold intensified Spirit not only intensifies, vitalizes, enlightens, burns, and infuses—He also speaks. Seven times in Revelation 2 and 3 the Lord says, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." In spiritual matters seeing depends on hearing. During the years of His earthly ministry, the Lord Jesus emphasized the importance of hearing. On more than one occasion He declared, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear" (Matt. 11:15; 13:43). In Mark 4:24 He exhorted His disciples, saying, "Take heed what you hear," and in Luke 8:18 He charged them, saying, "Take heed therefore how you hear," indicating that both *what* we hear and *how* we hear are important. Having eternal life depends on hearing: "He who hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life" (John 5:24a). Those who are dead in spirit (Eph. 2:1, 5) will have life (the uncreated, eternal life of God) if they hear the voice of the Son of God: "An hour is coming, and it is now, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live" (John 5:25). Paul also understood the importance of hearing. In Romans 10:17 he said, "Faith comes out of hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ," and in Galatians 3:2 he asked, "Did

you receive the Spirit out of the works of law or out of the hearing of faith?" In Matthew 17:5 the Father declared, "This is My Son, the Beloved, in whom I have found My delight. Hear Him!" Now in Revelation the resurrected, pneumatic Christ repeatedly tells us to hear the Spirit. The Father speaks in the Son (Heb. 1:1-2), the Son speaks as the Spirit, and the Spirit speaks to the churches. However, only those who have an ear can hear the speaking Spirit. How serious it is, then, to "become dull of hearing" (5:11). To hear the Spirit is surely a spiritual experience, and such an experience must involve the believers' regenerated spirit. Today the Spirit is still speaking through the Word of God. There is never a problem with the Spirit's speaking, but there may be a problem with our hearing. The Spirit is speaking to the churches, but this speaking can be heard only by those who have "an ear."

The Spirit's speaking is the Lord's calling for overcomers to rise above the degradation of the church and to build up the organic Body of Christ according to God's economy. Again and again the Lord says the words, "To him who overcomes." Overcoming is an action, a concrete experience. Some will respond to the Spirit's speaking,

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take action, and overcome the church's degradation. This overcoming is not a mere doctrine or concept—it is something that actually happens in one's spiritual experience. If we would be today's overcomers, conquering the degradation of the church for the sake of the Body of Christ, we need to experience the intensified Spirit in all His functions, give heed to the speaking of the sevenfold Spirit, and exercise our spirit in the life and energy of the seven Spirits of God.

**I**f the sevenfold intensified Spirit is not simply a doctrine to us, not merely a truth in the Word to which we give assent, but a reality in our spiritual experience, we may be given the opportunity to share a marvelous privilege—to be one with the Lord in His present economical move for the fulfillment of His eternal purpose. On the one hand, the sevenfold Spirit is for our intensification and vitalization; on the other hand, the sevenfold Spirit is for God's dispensational move. The overcomers produced by the seven Spirits are not only intensified and vitalized; they also follow the Lamb—the One with the seven Spirits as His

eyes—“wherever He may go” (Rev. 14:4). To follow the Lamb wherever He may go is a matter not of theory or theology but of actual, practical experience. To move with the Lord in this way requires that we be absolutely one with Him, even one spirit with Him (1 Cor. 6:17), at any cost and that we care not for our personal interests but for the heart’s desire and economy of the Triune God. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit—the sevenfold intensified Spirit—is saying to the churches. AFC

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