

MAKING KNOWN THE MULTIFARIOUS WISDOM OF GOD TO THE RULERS AND THE AUTHORITIES IN THE HEAVENLIES THROUGH THE CHURCH AS THE ENLARGEMENT OF THE TRIUNE GOD

BY JOHN PESTER

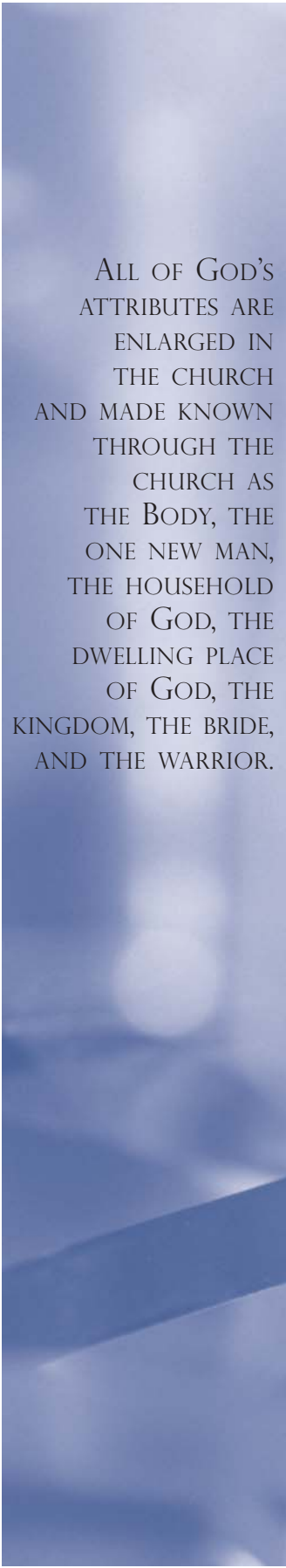
The New Testament reveals that there is a twofold testimony of the Triune God and His eternal purpose in the economy of God's full salvation—one that is made known to the people of the earth and one that is made known to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenlies. In both instances this testimony is made known through the church, but more intrinsically, it is a testimony of the church itself as the enlargement of the Triune God. In John 17, before His impending crucifixion, the Lord prayed concerning the first testimony by asking the Father of glory to glorify those whom the Father had given Him so that the world, by seeing the oneness of the church, would believe that He had been sent by the Father to make the oneness of the Triune God available to all those who believe. Such a testimony unveils the goal of God's eternal purpose to the people of the earth.

In Ephesians 3 Paul speaks concerning the second testimony by declaring that God's glorification through the church, the selected ones given to the Son by the Father, makes the multifarious wisdom of God known to the evil and dark principalities and powers in the air. Such a testimony heralds the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose to the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenlies.

The fulfillment of the eternal purpose of the Triune God, beginning with the Father's selection and predestination in eternity past (1:3-6), advancing with the Son's accomplishment of redemption (vv. 7-12), and culminating with the Spirit's sealing and pledging (vv. 13-14), is the central focus of the operations of the Triune God in Ephesians. These operations are heavenly in nature, and Paul presents them from a heavenly perspective, that is, from the high and uplifted eternal intention that resides in God's heart.

Nothing is higher than the good pleasure of God's will, and the good pleasure of God in Ephesians is not, as many think, just the accomplishment of redemption but, rather, the producing of the church as a testimony of the multifarious wisdom of God (3:9-10), especially to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenlies, who now are actively seeking to frustrate God's will. Redemption is a vital component related to the accomplishment of God's eternal purpose in Ephesians, but it is presented primarily as a necessary means to reach God's intended goal. The fulfillment of God's eternal purpose ultimately will produce the church as a testimony of an eternally enlarged Triune God.¹

The church as the enlargement of the Triune God is described in various aspects in Ephesians. In its organic identification with the life of the Triune God, the church is the Body (1:22-23). In its shared personhood and image with the Son, the church is the one new man (2:15; 4:13, 24; cf. Col. 3:10-11). In its familial relationship with the



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Triune God, the church is the household of God (Eph. 2:19). In its provision of rest for the Triune God, the church is the dwelling place of God in spirit (v. 22). In its participation in the authority of the Triune God, the church is the kingdom of God (5:5). In its loving relationship with the Triune God, the church is a bride (vv. 25-32). And in its active involvement in the defeat of the adversary and enemies of the Triune God, the church is a warrior (6:13-18).

These varied aspects of the church make known the multifarious wisdom of God because the Triune God is a being of life with an expressive image, an incorporate family, and an abode of mutual coinherence, a being exercising the fullest authority, and a fierce defender of His name and interests. All these attributes are enlarged in the church and made known through the church as the Body, the one new man, the household of God, the dwelling place of God, the kingdom, the bride, and the warrior.

These aspects will be on display eternally, as there will ultimately be “glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all the generations forever and ever” (3:21). However, there is a need now for a display of God’s multifarious wisdom to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenlies (v. 10) in order to both shame and repudiate their current and ongoing efforts to frustrate the accomplishment of God’s eternal purpose. These efforts involve a systematic satanic ordering of the world to prevent humanity from receiving and experiencing the unsearchable riches of the attributes of the Triune God in Christ through the divine dispensing of the divine life as grace that constitutes the church to be His organic enlargement (v. 8). These powers reside in the heavenlies, and so in Ephesians Paul unfolds the revelation of the church from a heavenly perspective, showing that the heavenly position of the church in Christ is higher than these powers and that the church will ultimately prevail through the heading up of all things in Christ (1:3, 10).

Since the heading up of all things in Christ touches on the things in heaven as well as on earth, Paul does not ignore or minimize the hidden and heavenly opposition of the rulers and the authorities in the heavenlies to the fulfillment of God’s eternal purpose (2:2; 3:10; 6:12). The divine response to this opposition is a divine dispensing of the divine life of the Triune God as grace that produces glory (1:6, 12, 14), the expression of the enlargement of the Triune God through the church. This dispensing issues in the progressive attainment of God’s eternal purpose, enabling the church to make known God’s multifarious wisdom to the principalities and powers, according to the eternal purpose made in Christ Jesus our Lord (3:10-11).

The Heavenly Purpose in Ephesians—the Church

The revelation of God’s eternal purpose in Ephesians is conveyed from a heavenly perspective, and it speaks of a heavenly goal—the church. There are direct references to the words *heavenlies*, *air*, or *heavens* in every chapter, with the exception of chapter 5. Ephesians begins in chapter 1 in the heavenlies in the heart of the Father, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ (v. 3), the bestowing of which has been made possible by Christ’s being raised from the dead and being seated at God’s right hand in the heavenlies (v. 20). In chapter 2 the church, the blessed recipient of the Son’s redemption, shares a seated position in the heavenlies with Him (v. 6), above the authority of the air, whose dark operation is manifested in the sons of disobedience, those who walk in the lusts and desires of the flesh (vv. 2-3), but is nullified subsequently in the Son’s salvation through the dispensing of grace (v. 5).

This dispensing produces a display of the surpassing riches of the Son’s grace in the ages to come (v. 7), a masterpiece of grace, which in chapter 3 is made known even in

this age to the rulers and authorities in the heavenlies (v. 10). In chapter 4 the One who ascended far above all the heavens bestows heavenly gifts for the building up of the church to counteract the winds of teaching and the sleight of men influenced by a system of error crafted by the powers in the air (vv. 10-14). There is no direct reference to the heavenlies in chapter 5, but there is an implicit reference to the heavens related to the presentation of the church as the bride without spot and blemish to Christ, because the bride, adorned for and presented to her Husband, originates from a heavenly position (Rev. 21:2; Eph. 5:27). Finally, in chapter 6 the real source of the opposition to the fulfillment of God's purpose is exposed as the rulers, the authorities, the world-rulers of this darkness, and the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenlies, who manipulate, influence, and direct the activities of humanity comprised of blood and flesh (v. 12).

These forces are arrayed against God and Christ in order to frustrate and delay the accomplishment of God's eternal purpose—the producing and building up of the church as the organic enlargement of the Triune God.² Stewart Custer in *In the Heavenlies: A Commentary on Ephesians* succinctly states, “The church is not an afterthought but the original purpose of God” (53). The church is not an afterthought, because it is the God-desired organic enlargement and expression of the Triune God in Christ Jesus.

In *Ephesians: A Shorter Commentary* Ernest Best acknowledges the organic relationship between Christ and the church in the context of the heading up of the church, stating, “The church, however, for its part might be said to come under Christ's cosmic headship in view of its organic union with him” (53).³ It is the organic union of God and redeemed and regenerated humanity in Christ that defines the church and that is displayed through the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenlies. And it is this enlargement and expression that is the target of the spiritual opposition of the evil forces in the air.

The Heavenly Opposition in Ephesians— the Rulers and the Authorities in the Air

Of the three direct references in Ephesians to the spiritual forces in the heavenlies, the references in 2:2 and 6:12 clearly identify the forces as being negative in origin and intent. The referents in 3:10, however, are not so easily defined by commentators. In 2:2, which speaks of the constituents of the church as having “once walked according to the age of this world, according to the ruler of the authority of the air, of the spirit which is now operating in the sons of disobedience,” the forces in the heavenlies are clearly antithetical to the interests of God.

In this verse the ruler of the authority of the air, Satan, is exposed as being the source of a constitutional corruption of humanity accomplished through the mixture of his rebellious life and nature with humanity in the fall, which produced sons of disobedience. He is also exposed as the source of an ongoing corruption, which is manifested dispositionally in children of wrath, who are confined to living according to the desires of the flesh and of the thoughts (v. 3). This constitutional and dispositional corruption is in contrast to the dispensing of the divine life, which constitutionally produces sons of God, those who are dispositionally inclined to walk as children of light (5:8).

The ruler of the authority of the air is engaged not merely in efforts to corrupt humanity with sins but in a warfare against God's interests, and his sole intent is to prevent and hinder the dispensing of the divine life that produces the church. Satan's efforts are rightly characterized as a matter involving spiritual warfare, and so in 6:12 Paul clearly speaks of the need for a warring attitude on the part of the church “against the

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rulers, against the authorities, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenlies." In so speaking, Paul further reveals that there is a hidden, heavenly opposition to the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose by a satanic resistance that is coordinated with a systematized operation of the rulers and the authorities in the heavenlies.

The rulers, the authorities, and the world-rulers of this darkness are the rebellious angels, who followed Satan in his rebellion against God and who now rule in the heavenlies over the nations of the world—such as the prince of Persia and the prince of Greece in Dan. 10:20. This indicates that the devil, Satan, has his kingdom of darkness (Matt. 12:26; Col. 1:13), in which he occupies the highest position and in which the rebellious angels are under him. (Lee, Recovery Version, Eph. 6:12, note 2)

Paul specifically singles out these rulers and authorities in the air as the source of opposition to God's interests, distinguishing them from men of blood and flesh. "Behind men of blood and flesh are the evil forces of the devil, which are against God's purpose. Hence, our wrestling, our fighting, must not be against men but against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenlies" (Lee, Recovery Version, v. 12, note 1). It is easy for Christians to regard men of blood and flesh as the enemies of God and struggle against them, but these men are being instigated and driven by spiritual forces lurking behind them.

In commenting on this verse, Ruth Paxson in *The Wealth, Walk and Warfare of the Christian* states that Paul's use of the phrase *not against flesh and blood* "clarifies the atmosphere immediately regarding the nature of our foe. The conflict is not with the human and visible, but with the superhuman and the invisible...We do not belong to the same order of being or to the same plane of life as our foe" (162). The church's warfare must ultimately address these spiritual forces in order to fully display God's victory by making known His multifarious wisdom to these same rulers and authorities (3:10).

Given the close correspondence of the words *ruler* and *authority* in 2:2 and the words *rulers* and *authorities* in 6:12 to that in 3:10, it is surprising that there is any controversy as to the identity of "the rulers and the authorities in the heavenlies" in 3:10, the third verse in Ephesians that speaks of spiritual forces, but there is.⁴ Varying interpretations related to the identity of the rulers and the authorities in 3:10 range from them being evil forces under the direction of Satan to being all spiritual beings, both good and evil, in the heavenlies.

At a further extreme, the rulers and authorities are seen only as symbolic projections of people during the time of the writing of the Epistle to the Ephesians, who were feebly attempting to articulate their struggles with outward, largely institutional, manifestations affecting their physical, psychic, and social existence. This interpretation effectively distances these "rulers" and "authorities" from any connection to actual spiritual beings, particularly evil spiritual beings.⁵

The simplest way to understand the identity of the rulers and authorities is to regard them, as Paul does, as being evil spiritual forces operating from a position in the heavens. In *Powers of Darkness: Principalities and Powers in Paul's Letters* Clinton E. Arnold says,

Paul was certainly a man of his times. In line with popular Jewish and pagan thought he too assumed that the world is filled with evil spirits who are hostile to humanity. He never showed any doubt about the existence of such a realm. Instead, he taught his churches how to live and minister in a world where these powerful supernatural opponents exist. (90)

In *Practices of Power: Revisiting the Principalities and Powers in the Pauline Letters* Robert Ewusie Moses accurately characterizes Arnold's understanding of Paul's view concerning the principalities and powers, saying,

For Paul, these personal demons were a given, not needing to be argued for. Paul never doubted the real existence of the principalities and powers. Arnold notes that belief in the real existence of the spirit realm spanned the history of Christianity until the church inherited a materialistic and rationalistic worldview from the Enlightenment. Paul saw demonic forces as a well-organized world under the command of Satan, their head. In Paul's view, Satan and his powers worked to oppose at every point the purpose of God in Christ and in the life of believers...

[Arnold's] distance from the demythologizing tendencies of Western scholarship can be summed up under one statement: "The powers of darkness are real, we need to be conscious of their influence, and we need to respond to them appropriately." His work makes a cogent case for the view that we cannot dismiss outright the existence of a spiritual realm inhabited by spiritual forces, at least if we are willing to take the biblical witness seriously. (12, 15)

Although the systems of the world that organize the current framework of human knowledge are in constant flux, the organizing intentions of the rulers and the authorities are constant in their efforts to undermine and prevent humanity from being saved and, more importantly, coming to the full knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:4). Just as idols were effectively promoted as substitutes for God by demons, rulers, and authorities in the pre-Enlightenment era (1 Cor. 10:20),⁶ other substitutes for God with the same power to incite idolatrous fealty are promoted in our current age, including technology, commerce, ideologies, and political systems.

Behind these systems are the same rulers and authorities who are actively working to hinder the fulfillment of God's purpose. The intentions of these ever-present rulers and authorities are the same; the only difference between then and now is in the outward appearance of their organized systems. Their intentions are only evil, and God's repudiation of their intentions involves a display of His multifarious wisdom particularly to them. While there is an aspect of this display that will be made known to all spiritual beings in the heavenlies, the rulers and the authorities in the heavenlies, who are intrinsically evil in nature, are the intended audience in Ephesians 3:10.

When commentators enlarge the frame of reference in 3:10 to include all created angelic beings, rather than just those who are rebellious, the potential for misunderstanding the purpose of God's display through the church increases. For example, in *Ephesians: An Introduction and Study Guide: Being a Christian, at Home and in the Cosmos* Stephen E. Fowl, in discussing the identity of the rulers and the authorities, begins by stressing the positive origin of the angelic hosts in God's creation, thereby imbuing the rebellious angels with a degree of worthiness that only the obedient angels deserve. He then applies this worthiness to the matter of making known God's multifarious wisdom, suggesting that this display may signal a restoration of the rebellious rulers and authorities to God's original purpose for them in His creation:

As 3.10 begins, Paul asserts that one of the purposes for which he has been given his particular role in evangelizing the Gentiles is 'that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might be made known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly realms'. Recall that these powers were created by God. As with Christ and the church, Ephesians locates these powers in the 'heavenly realms'. They are, however, not yet under Christ's dominion; they are not fulfilling their purpose of participating in and enhancing God's ordering of creation. (41)

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Rather than participating in and enhancing God's ordering of creation, these powers are working against and detracting from God's ordering. They are part of the universal collapse brought in through Satan's rebellion, and they will experience Christ's heading up of the things in the heavens by being made the footstool for Christ the Head when Satan and his evil minions are crushed under the feet of the church as the Body of Christ (Psa. 110:1; Luke 20:42-43; Rom. 16:20). In their being crushed, they will know and experience the full weight of the church as God's multifarious wisdom.

Fowl fails to see this as the righteous end of these rebellious hosts; instead, he sees a hope for their restoration. He says, "If the church is the means by which God's manifold wisdom is made known to the powers, then it appears that Paul is claiming that the church is the means by which these powers might be restored to their proper relationship to God and the rest of creation" (71). There will be no restoration for these fallen angels; there will be only the execution of God's judgment through the church, the very target of their evil machinations.

Whereas some commentators see evil angels as the primary referents of Paul in Ephesians 3:10 and some see both good and evil angels, others see no spiritual beings at all. Instead, there is a modernistic tendency to see the rulers and the authorities as symbolic projections of oppressive, materialistic instantiations of power. In *Unmasking the Powers: The Invisible Forces that Determine Human Existence* Walter Wink conveys this interpretation, saying,

In the ancient world people discerned and described the interiority of things by the only means available to them: symbolic projection. They were able to monitor the actual impact of the spirituality of an institution like the Roman Empire or the priesthood by throwing it up against the screen of the cosmos in the form of visual images in which the interiority of the social entity was perceived as a personal entity: an angel, demon, or devil. (4)

The projection and impact of these institutions' power upon the physical, psychic, and social existence of the people in the ancient world, according to Wink, were internalized and articulated by the people's simplistic, naive, and superstitious minds as the overbearing influence of evil spiritual forces. He advances this thought, saying,

The New Testament's "principalities and powers" is a generic category referring to the determining forces of physical, psychic, and social existence. These powers usually consist of an outer manifestation and an inner spirituality or interiority. Power must become incarnate, institutionalized or systemic in order to be effective. It has a dual aspect, possessing both an outer visible form (constitutions, judges, police, leaders, office complexes), and an inner, invisible spirit that provides it legitimacy, compliance, credibility, and clout. (4)

The problem with suggesting an institutional interpretation of the rulers and the authorities in Ephesians 3:10 and, indeed, throughout the New Testament is that God's multifarious wisdom is inherently unable to be known by institutions that are related to and spring forth from a fallen world, one that is incapable of acknowledging God, much less, comprehending His multifarious wisdom. God's wisdom is spoken in a mystery, a mystery which none of the earthly rulers of this age can know (1 Cor. 2:6-8).

Human institutions are incapable of knowing and perceiving the reality of the church in its spiritual origination, development, or manifestation. Only spiritual beings have such a capacity. Only they can see the progressive unfolding of God's eternal purpose.

These spiritual beings include the obedient angels, who longingly look into the things pertaining to God's salvation, and the evil rulers and the authorities in the air, who frantically oppose the working out of God's full salvation (1 Pet. 1:12; Col. 2:15). In a note on the word *look* in 1 Peter 1:12, Witness Lee writes,

The Greek word portrays one who is stooping and stretching his neck to look at some wonderful sight. This shows how interested the angels are in observing the things concerning Christ for God's salvation. They declared and celebrated the Savior's birth (Luke 2:8-14), they rejoice over the sinners' repenting to receive salvation (Luke 15:10), and they are happy to serve those who inherit salvation (Heb. 1:14; Acts 12:15; Matt. 18:10). (Recovery Version, note 3)

In Colossians 2:15, when referring to Christ's crucifixion on the cross, Paul writes of God stripping off the evil rulers and authorities, making an open display of them, and triumphing over them in it. In a note on the word *display* in this verse, Witness Lee writes that the display of Christ's death on the cross, which the evil angels sought to prevent but who in turn were prevented by God's stripping them away from the body of the dying Christ, was an "exhibit in the sense of an open shame. God openly shamed the evil angelic rulers and authorities on the cross and triumphed over them in it" (Recovery Version, note 4). Just as the evil rulers and authorities were shamed in the heavens by God at the cross through Christ's eternally efficacious death, they will be shamed again, but this time by the enlarged God, when the church makes known the multifarious wisdom of God to these evil spiritual beings in spite of their efforts to frustrate.

The Heavenly Economy to Make Known in Ephesians—the Divine Dispensing

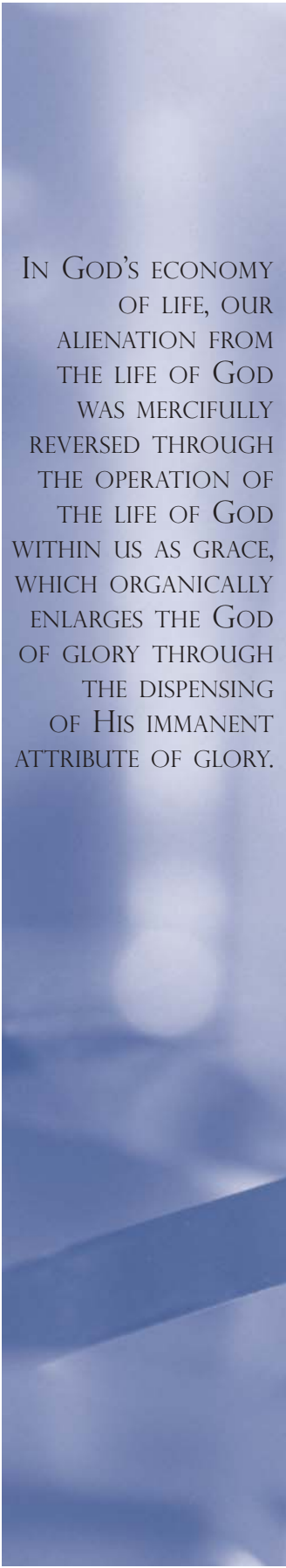
To counteract the efforts of the rulers and the authorities in the air to frustrate and delay the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose—to be enlarged through the church—there is a divine economy, a divine plan and arrangement to dispense the divine life and nature of the Triune God as grace into humanity that has been redeemed through faith in Christ and regenerated by receiving the life-giving Spirit through the faith of Christ. All the books of the New Testament implicitly acknowledge God's economy in their speaking concerning the details of God's economical process in the person and work of Christ, including His incarnation, human living, death, resurrection, and ascension, but in Ephesians it is spoken of explicitly. Without this economical process, God's redemption and regeneration of humanity would not have been possible, and the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose would not be possible as well.

In 1:10 Paul speaks directly about God's economy, His administrative plan, as being the motivating factor in all of God's actions, saying that the mystery of God's will has been made known "unto the economy of the fullness of the times." God's economy results in the heading up of all things in the heavens and on the earth in Christ. This heading up involves our initial salvation, made possible through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ—the uniquely incarnated and sinless God-man—and our ongoing salvation, also made possible through Christ as the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45).

In Ephesians 3:3 Paul further speaks directly of the economy of the mystery being made known to him, after which he was charged to "enlighten all that they may see what the economy of the mystery is" (v. 9). The book of Ephesians is Paul's answer to this charge, and his prayer in 1:17-23 is a prayer that we would see the end result of this economy—the hope of our calling—and experientially enter into this economy through the surpassing greatness of the power that is toward us who believe and that operates in us through the might of the Lord's strength.

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divine life of the Triune God in order to produce the church as the enlarged God. This organic dispensing of the divine life is based on the judicial forgiveness of sins, which is an integral part of this economy because there can be no fellowship of the light that is the Triune God with the darkness that is fallen humanity (2 Cor. 6:14). The forgiveness of sins, however, only makes possible the further steps of God's economy, those of being enlivened with the divine life and growing in the divine life to produce the church as the enlarged Triune God (Eph. 2:5; 4:16).

In chapter 1 Paul presents God's economy from the heavenly perspective of God,⁷ and in chapter 2 he presents it from the earthly perspective of fallen humanity. From an earthly perspective, Paul acknowledges the presence of offenses and sins, but he does so for the purpose of showing that these sins and offenses brought humanity into the realm of death, which can be counteracted only by the divine life. As unbelievers, we were dead in offenses and sins (v. 1), and we needed not only to be forgiven of sins but also to be enlivened (v. 5).

Without the organic enlivening of His life, we would still be dead in the eyes of God and unable to participate in His economy unto the fullness of the times, even if we had the forensic forgiveness of our sins. Our being reconciled to God because of the forgiveness of our sins through the death of His Son is so that we would be saved much more in His life (Rom. 5:10). In God's economy of life, our alienation from the life of God was mercifully reversed through the operation of the life of God within us as grace, which organically enlarges the God of glory through the dispensing of His immanent attribute of glory (Eph. 4:18; 2:4; 1:6, 12, 14). This glory is progressively made known through the multifarious wisdom of God and serves as a display of the surpassing riches of His grace in the ages to come.

For Paul, grace is more than unmerited favor; it is an experiential realization of and participation in the life and nature of the Triune God in Christ. In 2:5 being made alive together with Christ is equated to being saved by grace, and in verse 7 the experience of the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness produces a living display in Christ, which is made known through the church in chapter 3. Paul further associates his ministry with the dispensing of the divine life, characterizing it in chapter 3 as a stewardship of grace (v. 2). "The stewardship of the grace is for the dispensing of the grace of God to His chosen people for the producing and building up of the church. Out of this stewardship comes the ministry of the apostle, who is a steward in God's house, ministering Christ as God's grace to God's household" (Lee, Recovery Version, v. 2, note 2). Paul's ministry was not a set of objective teachings and doctrinal points about Christ; it was an organic furtherance of God's economy. It was his participation in the dispensing operation of the enlarged God who carries out His economy through the members of His organic Body.

The revelation of the mystery of God's economy was made known to Paul (v. 3), and he furthered God's economy through words of grace and through prayer focused on the believers' participation in God's economy. He prayed that the believers would be experientially strengthened into their regenerated human spirit so that Christ would experientially make His home in their hearts, so that they would experientially apprehend the vast dimensions of Christ, so that they would experientially know the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ, and so that they would experientially be filled unto all the fullness of God and thereby enlarge God by making known the glory of God unto all the generations (vv. 16-21). Paul's prayer in these verses is a prayer for the dispensing of the divine life to counteract the operation of death that is still possible in the church (4:17, 22).

The operation of death in the church produces division to damage the oneness of the Spirit (v. 3). It is conveyed by winds of teaching in the sleight of men (v. 14); it

emanates from the vanity of the mind (v. 17); it sustains the old man, which is being corrupted according to the lusts of the deceit (v. 22); and it produces darkened understandings, experiential alienation from the life of God, hardened hearts, and a lasciviousness that works all uncleanness in greediness (vv. 18-19). In contrast to this operation of death, the operation of the divine life brings us into an experiential learning of Christ, based on the reality that was manifested in the living and humanity of Jesus during the days of His flesh (vv. 20-21; Heb. 5:7).

In our organic union with Christ, we are taught to put off the old man and put on the new man by being renewed in the spirit of our mind (Eph. 4:22-24); we are taught to put off the lie and speak truth to one another (v. 25); we are taught to not sin in our anger, to not let the sun go down on our indignation, and to not give place to the devil (vv. 26-27); we are taught to labor rather than to steal, to speak words of grace that are good for building up, and to not grieve the Holy Spirit (vv. 28-30); and finally, we are taught to replace all bitterness, anger, wrath, clamor, and evil speaking with kindness, tenderheartedness, and forgiveness (vv. 31-32). These manifestations of the operation of the divine life are part of the multifarious wisdom of God that is made known through the church, showing that God has been enlarged by displaying the surpassing riches of His grace.

The Heavenly Display in Ephesians—the Church as the Enlarged Triune God

The phrase *the surpassing riches of His grace* in 2:7 is essentially an appositive to the phrase *the unsearchable riches of Christ* in 3:8 because both speak of a vast realm of riches related to Christ and grace and because grace and Christ cannot be ontologically separated from each other. When Christ came, grace came (John 1:17). The grace of Christ is surpassingly rich because Christ is unsearchably rich. The display in Ephesians 2:7 that comes out of the church's experience of the surpassing riches of His grace is the multifarious wisdom of God being made known to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenlies in 3:10.

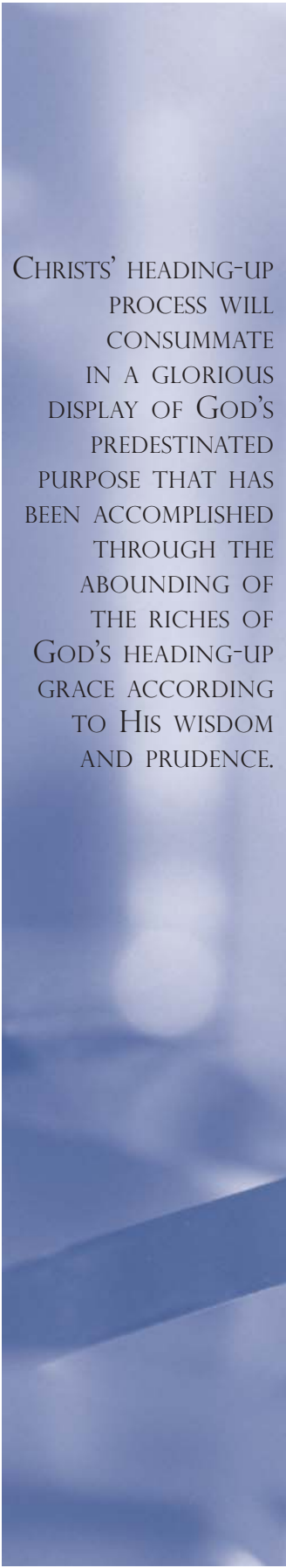
The stewardship of grace produces the church as the enlarged expression of God through the announcing of the unsearchable riches of Christ as the gospel and through its enlightening concerning God's economy. It is through the stewardship of grace that the church, the issue of the surpassing riches of His grace spoken of in chapter 2, is made known as God's multifarious wisdom, spoken of in chapter 3.

In order to understand the significance of what is made known to the rulers and the authorities, it is essential to go beyond the well-meaning but shortsighted teaching that what is made known is the gospel itself, a teaching that equates what is being made known with the preaching of the gospel, even with just a narrow gospel of the forgiveness of sins. In 3:8 through 10 Paul says,

To me, less than the least of all saints, was this grace given to announce to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ as the gospel and to enlighten all that they may see what the economy of the mystery is, which throughout the ages has been hidden in God, who created all things, in order that now to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenlies the multifarious wisdom of God might be made known through the church.

According to the context and construction of these verses, the announcement of the unsearchable riches of Christ as the gospel, along with seeing God's economy, produces a display of God's multifarious wisdom. Thus, the gospel precedes what is made known. In essence, there are two "making knowns." There is an announcing of the unsearchable riches of Christ as the gospel, which is a making known of these riches. But only when these riches are received and constituted into the believers as the church is there a making known to the rulers and the authorities that Paul references

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CHRISTS' HEADING-UP
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PREDESTINATED
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TO HIS WISDOM
AND PRUDENCE.

in verse 10. In *The Purpose of God: Ephesians*, however, R. C. Sproul equates the announcement of the gospel with the making known of God's multifarious wisdom to the rulers and authorities:

Paul is saying that this mystery is revealed to the apostles to be expressed and taught to men. But even angels and demons did not know of this secret counsel of God. So it is to be made known to the powers and principalities, and to angels. It is the task of the church to make God's plan of salvation plain to the whole cosmos, even to the heavenly beings. (85)

Sproul's suggestion that God's plan of salvation must be made plain to the whole cosmos is an indication that he equates the announcing of the gospel with the making known of God's multifarious wisdom. The preaching of the gospel, however, is not, as Sproul suggests, what is on display to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenlies. Rather, what is on display is the church that has been produced through the impartation of and constitution with the unsearchable riches of Christ that are announced as the gospel. The gospel of the unsearchable riches of Christ, which involves more than the Reformed focus on a narrow gospel of the forgiveness of sins, imparts the unsearchable riches of Christ and produces a display of the surpassing riches of His grace. When the riches of Christ are properly announced as the gospel, these riches are imparted in God's economical operation of grace through the hearing of faith. With these complementary operations—the dispensing of grace and the hearing of faith—a display of God's multifarious wisdom is produced and made known.

The display that is made known is the reality of the enlargement of the Triune God in the unsearchably rich Christ—the church. It is a display of the glory of the grace with which we have been graced in the Beloved (1:6). This grace is associated with the Father, who predestinated us unto sonship through Jesus Christ to Himself (v. 5). It is associated with the Son, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of offenses (vv. 7, 12). And it is associated with the Spirit, who is sealing us with Himself and pledging Himself to us so that He may be the reality of the Triune God in our experience (vv. 13-14).

As the riches of the Triune God's grace abound to us in all wisdom and prudence (v. 8), a process is initiated unto the economy of the fullness of the times to head up all things in Christ, including the things in the heavens and the things on the earth (v. 10). This heading-up process begins in the redeemed and regenerated humanity, those who once walked according to the ruler of the authority of the air, those who were sons of disobedience and by nature children of wrath (2:2-3) but who were redeemed through Christ's blood (1:7). And this process will consummate in a glorious display of God's predestinated purpose that has been accomplished through the abounding of the riches of God's heading-up grace according to His wisdom and prudence (vv. 8-11).

Paul's well speaking concerning the Son in verses 7 through 12 begins with redemption in verse 7, but it is clear that redemption serves primarily as the predicate for his subsequent speaking concerning the unfolding operation of the Triune God to head up all things in Christ. Of the twelve verses devoted to the well speaking of the Triune God in chapter 1, verses 3 through 14, four are devoted to the Father (vv. 3-6), six to the Son (vv. 7-12), and two to the Spirit (vv. 13-14). Of the six verses devoted to the Son, five point to or speak directly about the process of all things being headed up in Christ, indicating, at least in terms of total textual content, what the focal point of Paul's well speaking is—the heading up of all things, especially the heading up of the church that produces a display of God's multifarious wisdom, a display of glory in the church (vv. 6, 12, 14). Such a display is really a display of the Triune God who has been enlarged through the glorious church.

The Heavenly Validation in Ephesians—the Church as the Wisdom of God

The wisdom that is made known to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenlies through the heading up of the church not only comes from God because He is the source of wisdom as the only wise God (Rom. 16:27), but it is also God Himself because the wisdom of God is a person, Christ. As the wisdom of God, Christ has been made wisdom to us (1 Cor. 1:24, 30), and the church, as a display of the multifarious wisdom of God, validates the accomplishment of God's eternal purpose to the evil rulers and the authorities in the heavenlies. In the broad consideration of all that is included in the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose, the validation of this purpose to the rulers and authorities in the heavenlies may seem to be a minor matter, but humanity was created in the image and likeness of God and specifically given dominion over every creeping thing (Gen. 1:26), "typifying Satan, the serpent (3:1, 14; Rev. 12:9), and his angels (Matt. 25:41; Rev. 12:4a, 7b), as well as the demons who follow Satan (cf. Luke 10:19)" (Lee, Recovery Version, Gen. 1:26, note 6).

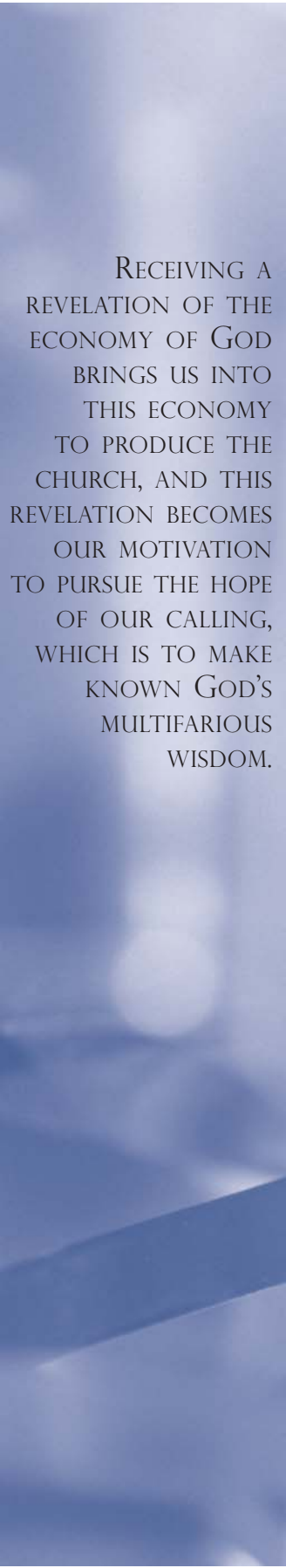
The charge related to dominion indicates the importance to God of manifesting a display of the achievement of His divine ordination through humanity to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenlies through the church. It will be a glorious and validating display of the fulfillment of God's purpose when the church, composed of redeemed human beings, those who are a little inferior to the angels (Heb. 2:7, 9) and were deceived by Satan (Gen. 3:13) but who have been redeemed by Christ's blood and regenerated by the Holy Spirit of the promise (Eph. 1:7, 13), are headed up to express the Father and to be His inheritance in the Son (v. 11). When human beings, those inferior to angels, are empowered by grace to rise up and subdue a stronger and higher created but rebellious spiritual being, which occurred with the God-man Jesus and will occur again through the church (Heb. 2:14; Rom. 16:20; Eph. 6:13), there will be a validation of the operation and expression of God's wisdom in His economy that will stand for eternity.

According to Ephesians 1:8, God's wisdom is prudently applied in the operation of His economy. All that God does and allows in the life and living of the church involves the prudent application of His wisdom. Satan cannot deter God's purpose, because he can touch only the outer man; he cannot touch the regenerated spirit of the believers, the inner man. As a consequence, his decaying influence on our outer man only affords the God of wisdom who is mingled with our regenerated human spirit the opportunities to cause our inner man to be renewed with His life, a life that is being dispensed as grace (2 Cor. 4:16). What Satan and his minions intend for evil, God in His wisdom intends for good—to preserve alive His people (Gen. 50:20). All our experiences of grace in trials and sufferings are ultimately for the preservation of our brothers (2 Cor. 1:4), just as Joseph's experiences were for the preservation of his brothers, which was for their ultimate enlargement as the nation of Israel. Our experiences of suffering, similarly, are for the building up of the church as the Body of Christ, the enlargement of the Triune God.

The preservation and enlargement of God's people, the church, according to the wisdom of God, begins with their being given a spirit of wisdom and revelation. Paul's prayer for such a spirit in Ephesians 1:17-23 is a prayer that is focused on making known God's multifarious wisdom through the church as the fullness of the One who fills all in all. These verses say,

That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of Him, the eyes of your heart having been enlightened, that you may know what is the hope of His calling, and what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the operation of the might of His strength,

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RECEIVING A
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which He caused to operate in Christ in raising Him from the dead and seating Him at His right hand in the heavenlies, far above all rule and authority and power and lordship and every name that is named not only in this age but also in that which is to come; and He subjected all things under His feet and gave Him to be Head over all things to the church, which is His Body, the fullness of the One who fills all in all.

The church's participation in the economy of God that results in a display of the church as the multifarious wisdom of God begins in the believers' spirit of wisdom and revelation. Without an experiential realization of the God of wisdom in our spirit, there is little to no participation in His economy, much less the full knowledge of Him. In order to realize and contact Him and gain an increasing experiential knowledge of Him, there is also a need for the eyes of our heart to be enlightened. The enlightening spoken of in verse 18 is related to Paul's enlightening concerning the economy of the mystery in 3:9. Receiving a revelation of the economy of God brings believers into this economy to produce the church, and this revelation in our spirit becomes our motivation to pursue the hope of our calling. The hope of our calling is to make known God's multifarious wisdom, and it will be fulfilled because it is supported by the surpassing greatness of Christ's power that operated in His being resurrected from the dead and in His being seated at the right hand of God in the heavenlies. This same power will bring the church to the point of being filled unto all the fullness of the One who fills all in all. Such a fullness will surely make known the multifarious wisdom of God.

A Consummate and Enlarged Display of God through the Church

The eternal purpose of God consummates in an enlarged display of Himself that makes known His multifarious wisdom to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenlies, fulfilling God's original intention to be enlarged in His expression and unchallenged in His administration. This enlarged expression is the church, and so an Epistle that speaks explicitly of God's purpose in one verse (cf. Eph. 3:10) speaks of the church throughout the Epistle. In opposition to our purposeful Triune God, there is an array of spiritual forces of evil in the heavenlies—Satan as the ruler of the authority of the air, and the rulers and the authorities in the heavenlies as the world-rulers of this darkness. Their sole intention is to frustrate and delay the accomplishment of God's economy, which is to head up all things unto the fullness of the times. They cannot stop God's purpose; they can only delay it. But even their delaying tactics are limited because in the fullness of the times God sent forth His only begotten Son, and in the fullness of the times God, when His masterpiece of grace, the church, is fully made known to the rulers and the authorities, will send His enlarged Son, the Firstborn, into the inhabited earth. Satan attempts to delay the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose through his operation of death, but God responds with an operation that dispenses His very divine life. Through a stewardship of grace this dispensing results in the enlargement of the Triune God through the church, shaming the enemy by validating the accomplishment of God's eternal purpose. Our God is eternally wise, and as the immanent personification of wisdom, He is enlarging Himself as a display of the surpassing riches of His grace that makes known His multifarious wisdom to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenlies through the church. **AC**

Notes

¹To speak of the Triune God being enlarged is to acknowledge an ontological reality that has been made possible through the dispensing of the divine life into human beings who have been chosen, redeemed, regenerated, transformed, and glorified. This divine dispensing imparts the divine life and nature of the Triune God into believers, reproducing the Triune God in life and nature in the believers and incorporating them into the fellowship of the Son (1 Cor. 1:9), which is the dispensing of life that exists eternally within the essential Trinity. When this eternal dispensing was made economically available to humanity through the incarnation, death, and

resurrection of Jesus Christ, the greatest spiritual blessing was extended to redeemed and regenerated humanity—participation in the organic enlargement of God. This enlargement, however, does not bring the church into the Godhead.

Although there is no separation in life and nature between the Triune God and the church, there is distinction between the two because the Godhead is not shared. This principle of distinction without separation that is present also within the coinhering persons of the essential Trinity undergirds the oneness that is spoken of in John 17, as indicated by the use of distinct, referential pronouns in the Lord's prayer. Pronounal distinctions are used in the Lord's references to both the oneness in the eternal Godhead and the oneness produced through the economical dispensing of the divine life into redeemed and regenerated humanity: "That they all may be one; even as *You*, Father, are in *Me* and *I* in *You*, that *they* also may be in *Us*" (v. 21, emphasis added). This principle is implicitly present in Paul's declaration that there will ultimately be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus (Eph. 3:21). The enlarged glory of God in the church will never match, much less exceed, the glory of Christ, because He alone is the effulgence of God's glory (Heb. 1:3) and because His full glory includes the glory of the Godhead.

²It may surprise many Christians to hear that the church, rather than redemption, is God's goal; this is because they are laden with layers of traditional concepts concerning the church. To many the church is merely a building with a steeple, and to others it is a theologically oriented gathering of like-minded individuals; few see the church from God's heavenly perspective—that it is His organic enlargement, animated and sustained by His divine life and nature. In the absence of such a view, considerations of God's eternal purpose rarely go beyond what is commonly called the scarlet thread of redemption. This characterization, derived from the reference in Joshua 2:18 to a scarlet thread used by Rahab to distinguish and save her household from God's judgment on the city of Jericho, was utilized by W. A. Criswell in a sermon to refer to the line, running throughout the Bible, related to the truth of God's salvation through the redemptive blood of Christ.

The first scriptural reference to Christ's blood in type, however, does not occur until Genesis 3, whereas God's eternal desire is signaled initially in chapter 1, which records His making of humanity in His image and according to His likeness as a vessel to receive and contain the divine life that is typified by the tree of life in chapter 2. Therefore, God's speaking concerning the enlargement of His image through the impartation of His life precedes the revelation of redemption. The church, as the repository of God's image and life (Col. 3:10), is the focus and goal of God's creation. Redemption is essential for the fulfillment of God's purpose, because redemption is needed for fallen humanity to receive and partake of the divine life and nature.

³There is a judicial and objective component in the producing of the church through the imputation of righteousness, based on Christ's satisfaction of God's righteous requirement through His perfect propitiatory sacrifice on the cross. This objective satisfaction, which is testified by its eternal acceptance in the true tabernacle in the heavens (Heb. 9:11-12, 24), however, is only a necessary precursor for the fulfillment of the larger purpose of Christ's coming—that redeemed humanity would have the divine life and have it in abundance (John 10:10) and that this life would be organically expressed in the church, through the church, and as the church.

⁴The existence of any controversy, perhaps, can be attributed to the following two points. First, there are no negative connotations associated with the rulers and the authorities in 3:10, such as those that are indicated in 2:2 and 6:12. In 2:2 the ruler of the authority of the air is operating in the sons of disobedience, producing lusts and wrath, and in 6:12 the rulers and authorities are clearly associated with a realm of darkness. Second, the context of 3:10 is positive in orientation; that is, it speaks of God's multifarious wisdom being made known as part of the fulfillment of His eternal purpose. Consequently, it is understandable that there may be some ambiguity as to the identity of the rulers and the authorities in 3:10. Nevertheless, all three verses—2:2, 6:12, and 3:10—are sufficiently similar to conclude that in all three instances the spiritual forces are those that are arrayed against God's eternal interests.

⁵In *Unmasking the Powers: The Invisible Forces that Determine Human Existence* Walter Wink comments on the reluctance of many moderns to acknowledge the existence of actual evil spiritual beings in the air who are still operating in some regard:

THE ENLARGED
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MUCH LESS EXCEED,
THE GLORY OF
CHRIST, BECAUSE
HE ALONE IS THE
EFFULGENCE OF
GOD'S GLORY
AND BECAUSE HIS
FULL GLORY
INCLUDES THE
GLORY OF THE
GODHEAD.

IDENTIFYING THE
RULERS AND THE
AUTHORITIES WITH
MATERIALISTIC
MANIFESTATIONS OF
POWER IS IN DIRECT
CONTRAVENTION TO
PAUL'S WORD THAT
OUR STRUGGLE IS
NOT AGAINST BLOOD
AND FLESH, GIVEN
THAT SUCH
INSTITUTIONS ARE
OF HUMAN ORIGIN
AND REIFICATION.

Angels, spirits, principalities, powers, gods, Satan—these, along with all other spiritual realities, are the unmentionables of our culture. The dominant materialistic worldview has absolutely no place for them. These archaic relics of a superstitious past are unspeakable because modern secularism simply has no categories, no vocabulary, no presuppositions by which to discern what it was in the actual experiences of people that brought these words to speech. And it has massive resistance even to thinking about these phenomena, having fought so long and hard to rid itself of every vestige of transcendence. (1)

Wink's comments are accurate in their description of the willingness of many modern theologians to distance themselves from acknowledging even the possibility of evil forces. Any talk of "angels, spirits, principalities, powers, gods, Satan" seems overly simplistic and inherently superstitious, especially in an age when science, including social science, has great explanatory power. The use of the word *unmentionables* in the quotation above seems to evidence a limited willingness to acknowledge the existence of a spiritual realm (after all, unmentionable things exist but simply should not be openly spoken of), but Wink's subsequent arguments, which align the identity of the rulers and the authorities in the heavenlies with materialistic manifestations of power, suggest that the belief in the existence of evil spiritual beings lacks credibility and should not enter into a discussion of the identity of the rulers and the authorities in the heavenlies. Wink's interpretation, ironically, is in direct contravention to Paul's word that our struggle is not against blood and flesh, given that institutional manifestations are by their very nature products of human origin and human reification.

⁶Concerning the connection between idols and demons, Witness Lee writes,

An idol and the things sacrificed to an idol are nothing (v. 19; 8:4). But behind them are the demons, who are abominable and hateful to God. The believers, who worship God, should abstain from identifying themselves with demons and becoming those who have fellowship with demons through the eating of things sacrificed to idols. Since demons are the reality of idols, the eating of things sacrificed to idols makes the eaters those who have fellowship with, those who participate jointly in, demons. (Recovery Version, 1 Cor. 10:20, note 1)

⁷From God's perspective, the economy of God to dispense the divine life, as presented in chapter 1, begins in eternity past with the Father's selection and predestination (vv. 3-6) and continues in time with the Son's redemption (vv. 7-12) and the Spirit's sealing and pledging (vv. 3-14). In time the Spirit applies the Son's accomplishment of the Father's purpose through the economical giving of the divine life as grace.

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