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PRINCIPALITIES AND POWERS:
A HISTORICAL AND BIBLICAL STUDY WITH STRATEGIC
APPLICATION IN NORTH AMERICAN CHURCHES

A Dissertation
Presented to
the Faculty of
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

by
Landon Matthew Coleman
May 2010

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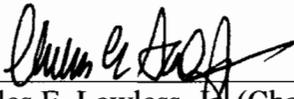
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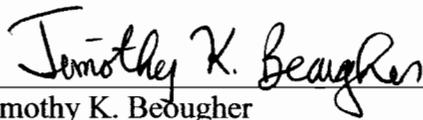
A HISTORICAL AND BIBLICAL STUDY WITH STRATEGIC
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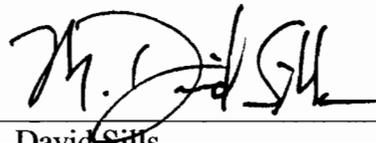
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M. David Sills

Date March 10, 2010

To Brooke,

“Many women have done excellently,

but you surpass them all.”

(Proverbs 31:29)

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANF	The Ante-Nicene Fathers
NPNF	The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers
NPNF2	The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series

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PREFACE

This dissertation is the result of the prayer and support of many people. I would not be who I am or where I am without my wife, Brooke. Her love, patience, support, and encouragement, not to mention her refusal to let me quit, have carried me along. Our sweet girls, Emma and Noelle, have provided me with constant and indescribable joy in the midst of tiring work. My parents and friends, Bill and Karen Coleman, have taught me more than they will ever know about life and ministry. My grandparents, MeeMee and Joe, have been everything grandparents are supposed to be, and their love and support have been invaluable. My in-laws, Jaime and Pam Midkiff, have been remarkably encouraging, supportive, and patient throughout my time in seminary. My pastor, David Evans, instilled in me a love for sound theology and expository preaching. I am also indebted to Larry and Tina Adams. They are really more family than friends, and God used their generosity and encouragement to guide me into and sustain me through the Ph.D. program.

Two other groups of people deserve thanks. First, the faithful believers at North Benson Baptist Church not only have put up with me for three years, but also have taught me much about the church. I have been blessed to serve as their pastor. Second, my professors at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary have been exemplary, especially Chuck Lawless, Tim Beougher, and David Sills. Their passion for knowing Jesus Christ and making him known has been a blessing to my life and ministry.

I began this dissertation with a love for the local church, and during the writing of this dissertation that love has only grown. I pray that these pages would encourage and challenge the next generation of believers to stand together against the principalities and powers, and I pray that God's wisdom would continue to be revealed to the principalities and powers through the church of Jesus Christ.

Landon Coleman

Frankfort, Kentucky

May 2010

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Over the centuries, churches, missionaries, and lay Christians have utilized numerous strategies in attempting to make disciples of all men. For example, the early church relied heavily on ground-level spiritual warfare.¹ More recently, in the eighteenth century, the Moravians implemented a strategy that included commerce and economic activities.² A century later in 1854, Henry Venn proposed a strategy that would result in self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating churches.³ In the last century, Donald McGavran promoted a strategy that took into consideration the way *peoples* become Christian.⁴

¹C. Peter Wagner defines ground-level spiritual warfare as the casting out of demons. C. Peter Wagner, *Warfare Prayer: How to Seek God's Power and Protection in the Battle to Build His Kingdom* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1992), 16. Ramsay MacMullen explains the evangelistic importance of ground-level spiritual warfare for the early church: "The manhandling of demons – humiliating them, making them howl, beg for mercy, tell their secrets, and depart in a hurry – served a purpose quite essential to the Christian definition of monotheism: it made physically (or dramatically) visible the superiority of the Christian's patron Power over all others." Ramsay MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire: A.D. 100-400* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984), 28.

²William J. Danker, *Profit for the Lord: Economic Activities in Moravian Missions and the Basel Mission Trading Company* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1971), 35.

³Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions* (London: Penguin, 1990), 221.

⁴McGavran asked, "How *do* peoples become Christian? . . . The question is how, in a manner true to the Bible, can a Christward movement be established in some

The development of missiological strategies continued during the latter half of the twentieth century. During this era, scholars used the biblical concept of the “principalities and powers” as the foundation for two novel and divergent strategies.⁵

Duane Garrett explains,

Two distinctive Protestant approaches to the ‘powers’ have emerged. One is that of Walter Wink, whose writings form the theological undergirding for the political activism of liberal Protestantism. The other began in charismatic churches but now has gained wider acceptance among traditional, evangelical Protestants; it is the ‘spiritual warfare’ movement.⁶

Few would disagree that Walter Wink is the leader of what Garrett calls the liberal Protestant approach, and most would agree that C. Peter Wagner is the leader of what Garrett calls the spiritual warfare approach.⁷ Additionally, this paper will argue that

caste, tribe or clan which will, over a period of years, so bring groups of its related families to Christian faith that the whole people is Christianized in a few decades.” Donald McGavran, *The Bridges of God: A Study in the Strategy of Missions* (n.p.: World Dominion, 1955; reprint, Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2005), 1. Page citations are from the reprint edition.

⁵The terminology of “principalities and powers” is taken from the Authorized Version. Paul referred to the principalities and powers in Rom 8:37-39, 1 Cor 15:20-28, Eph 1:16-23, Eph 3:1-13, Eph 6:10-20, Col 1:13-20, and Col 2:8-20. This dissertation will refer to “*the* principalities and powers.” The inclusion of the definite article is not an attempt to make any argument about the comprehensive identity of the principalities and powers. Instead, the definite article will be used because many of the authors discussed below used the definite article.

⁶Duane A. Garrett, *Angels and the New Spirituality* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 206.

⁷The concept of “the principalities and powers” is often expanded into the broader category of “territorial spirits.” Biblical passages used to support the concept of territorial spirits include Deut 32:8, Ps 106:37-38, Dan 10:13, 20, and Rev 2-3. Several prominent names are frequently mentioned in association with both the principalities and powers and territorial spirits. Mike Taylor mentions John Dawson, Timothy Warner, and C. Peter Wagner. Mike Taylor, “Breaking in the Kingdom,” *Evangel* 11 (1993): 79. Charles R. A. Hoole mentions John Wimber, C. Peter Wagner, Charles Kraft, and John

there is a third approach, one that will be referred to as the “conservative approach.”⁸

While the conservative approach does not have a widely recognized spokesperson, Clinton Arnold writes from this perspective, and his work represents a significant contribution to this debate.⁹

Thesis

Recent disagreements about the principalities and powers are significantly influenced by worldview differences. With respect to the relationship between

White. Charles R. A. Hoole, “Territorial Spirits: An Indian Perspective,” *Stulos Theological Journal* 5 (1997): 60. Melvin Tinker mentions George Otis, John Dawson, and Cindy Jacobs. Melvin Tinker, “The Phantom Menace: Territorial Spirits and SLSW,” *Churchman* 114 (2000): 72-73. The name that appears most often in these discussions, however, is C. Peter Wagner. Thus, Clinton Arnold is probably correct to identify Wagner as “the principal and most influential spokesperson for the approach.” Clinton E. Arnold, *Three Crucial Questions about Spiritual Warfare* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 146.

⁸Biographical information about Walter Wink, C. Peter Wagner, and Clinton Arnold is included in chapter 3.

⁹The label “liberal Protestant approach” accurately describes the position advocated by Wink and his colleagues. However, the labels “spiritual warfare approach” and “conservative approach” are more problematic. Simply put, many of those who advocate what Garrett has termed the spiritual warfare approach would identify themselves as conservatives, and many of those who advocate what I have termed the conservative approach would identify themselves as part of the spiritual warfare movement. Also problematic is the fact that advocates of the spiritual warfare approach and advocates of the conservative approach offer similar interpretations of the principalities and powers. The major difference between these two approaches is seen in their proposed responses to the principalities and powers. Advocates of the spiritual warfare approach generally support strategic-level spiritual warfare. Advocates of the conservative approach typically do not. While there are difficulties associated with these labels, any further specification would become unnecessarily burdensome. The reader should understand that the label “conservative approach” is not intended to exclude Wagner from the conservative wing of Christianity, nor is the label “spiritual warfare approach” intended to exclude Clinton Arnold from the spiritual warfare movement. Finally, each of the three broad terms used in this paper is used to describe a scholar’s

worldview and missiological strategy, few works have surpassed Paul Hiebert's classic article, "The Flaw of the Excluded Middle," in terms of either clarity or insight.¹⁰

Hiebert's personal experience as a missionary in India as well as his firsthand observations of other Western missionaries opened his eyes to the fact that the worldview of Western missionaries was different than the worldview of tribal peoples. Hiebert's analysis and conclusions about the importance of worldview are particularly helpful for understanding the missiological debate about the principalities and powers.

Hiebert's analysis of worldview proceeds along two related continuums. The first is the "immanence-transcendence" continuum, and the second is the "organic-mechanical" continuum.¹¹ He argues that Western missionaries live in an empirical and mechanical world where determinism prevails, while tribal peoples live in an immanent and organic world where relationships prevail. Most importantly for the purposes of Hiebert's argument, the majority of Western missionaries live and minister without ever recognizing the middle level of spirits and demons.¹² Thus, in the West, a "two-tiered

overall approach to the principalities and powers. They are not necessarily descriptive of a particular scholar's overall theological framework.

¹⁰This article was originally written in 1982. See Paul G. Hiebert, "The Flaw of the Excluded Middle," *Missiology* 10 (1982): 35-47. It is also included in *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues*. See Paul G. Hiebert, "The Flaw of the Excluded Middle," in *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 189-201. The latter source will be referenced. The issue of worldview is developed in chapter 5. For a definition of worldview, see Paul Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 25-26.

¹¹Hiebert, "The Flaw of the Excluded Middle," 193-94.

¹²*Ibid.*, 196.

view of reality” has prevailed.¹³ Hiebert describes his own experience:

I had excluded the middle level of supernatural this-worldly beings and forces from my own worldview. As a scientist I had been trained to deal with the empirical world in naturalistic terms. As a theologian I was taught to answer ultimate questions in theistic terms. For me the middle zone did not really exist. Unlike Indian villagers, I had given little thought to spirits of this world, to local ancestors and ghosts, or to the souls of animals. For me these belonged to the realm of fairies, trolls, and other mythical beings. Consequently I had no answers to the questions they raised.¹⁴

Walter Wink

Hiebert’s analysis of worldview and its power to shape interpretation is directly applicable to the debate about the principalities and powers. Just as Hiebert and many Western missionaries have allowed their worldview to determine their interpretation of the middle zone, Walter Wink has allowed his worldview to determine his interpretation of the principalities and powers.

In volume one of his trilogy on the principalities and powers, Wink criticized liberation theologians who naively attempted to demythologize the myth of the principalities and powers by “reducing them almost entirely to social institutions and structures.”¹⁵ Wink even admitted that at one time he made the mistake of ignoring the spiritual aspect of the principalities and powers.¹⁶ These early admissions from Wink suggested that he was open to the worldview of the biblical authors. However, Wink

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Walter Wink, *Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 6.

¹⁶Ibid., 5.

clarified his position in volume 2 of his trilogy on the principalities and powers. In the epilogue of *Unmasking the Powers*, Wink explained the ancient interpretation of the principalities and powers and argued for a new interpretation. He wrote,

There [the world of the New Testament] they [the principalities and powers] were simply a part of the furniture of the universe. One no more had to argue for their existence than we today would feel obliged to defend the existence of molecules or quasars. Their place in the ancient and medieval cosmologies was consistent with the consciousness of the times, a consciousness that projected these Powers out onto the screen of the cosmos and granted them ontological status. For that age the devil really ‘existed’ and could assume human shape; demons actually seized people from without and entered them; angels flew between heaven and earth as messengers, sat in the heavenly council representing their nations, or presided over congregations or cities or other corporate entities. People then were as far from perceiving these Powers as the interiority or spirituality of an epoch or institution or nation as most of us are from regarding them as actual personal beings. We cannot simply revive that ancient worldview without jettisoning much of what humanity has gained in the interval since. But we can reinterpret it. We can and must seek to recover in it the eternal truth revealed through its characteristic thought-forms, images, and presuppositions.¹⁷

Not only has Wink’s worldview determined his interpretation of the principalities and powers, but it has also determined his response to the principalities and powers. In the introduction of *The Powers that Be*, a digest of *Naming the Powers*, *Unmasking the Powers*, and *Engaging the Powers*, Wink confessed,

I had never been able to take demons seriously. The idea that fallen angels possessed people seemed superstitious. But if the demonic is the spirituality produced when the angel of an institution turns its back on its divine vocation, then I could not only believe in the demonic, I could point to its presence in everyday life. And if the demonic arises when an angel deviates from its calling, then social change does not depend on casting out the demon, but recalling its angel to its divine task.¹⁸

¹⁷Walter Wink, *Unmasking the Powers: The Invisible Forces that Determine Human Existence* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 172.

¹⁸Walter Wink, *The Powers that Be* (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 5-6.

These words reveal the impact Wink's worldview has had on his interpretation of and response to the principalities and powers. In light of his inability to "take demons seriously" and in light of his disdain for "that ancient worldview," it is not surprising that Wink reinterprets the principalities and powers and proposes a politically based response.

C. Peter Wagner

Wagner recognizes several phases in his scholarly career. Phase 1 was influenced by Donald McGavran and focused on church growth. Phase 2 was influenced by John Wimber and focused on spiritual power. Phase 3 currently focuses on the New Apostolic Reformation.¹⁹ During the second phase of Wagner's scholarly career, he began to give significant attention to the principalities and powers as well as territorial spirits. In contrast to Wink, Wagner has offered a radically different interpretation of and approach to the principalities and powers.

Wagner interprets the principalities and powers as personal, evil, spiritual beings, and he often uses the term "territorial spirits" to refer to the principalities and powers.²⁰ Wagner's approach to the principalities and powers is best summarized in his own definition of what he termed "strategic-level spiritual warfare." In *Confronting the Powers*, the fifth book in *The Prayer Warrior Series*, Wagner explained,

¹⁹Wagner argues that the New Apostolic Reformation has combined the "technical" church growth principles of his first scholarly phase with the "spiritual" church growth principles of his second scholarly phase. C. Peter Wagner, *The New Apostolic Churches* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1998), 14.

²⁰C. Peter Wagner, *Confronting the Powers: How the New Testament Church Experienced the Power of Strategic-Level Spiritual Warfare* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1996), 22.

Strategic-level spiritual warfare describes confrontation with high-ranking principalities and powers such as Paul writes about in Ephesians 6:12. These enemy forces are frequently called ‘territorial spirits’ because they attempt to keep large numbers of humans networked through cities, nations, neighborhoods, people groups, religious allegiance, industries or any other form of human society in spiritual captivity.²¹

Wagner interpreted the principalities and powers from the perspective of what was then a growing spiritual warfare movement. Wagner’s early interest in spiritual warfare was evident in *How to Have a Healing Ministry without Making Your Church Sick*. In this book Wagner insisted that he was neither Pentecostal nor charismatic, and instead identified himself as part of the “third wave.”²² He also noted that one of the characteristics of the third wave is a widespread belief in demons.²³

²¹Ibid. Here Wagner also deals with what he terms “ground-level spiritual warfare” and “occult level spiritual warfare.” According to Wagner, “*Ground-level spiritual warfare* involves casting demons out of people.” Additionally, Wagner claims, “*Occult-level spiritual warfare* deals with demonic forces released through activities related to Satanism, witchcraft, Freemasonry, Eastern religions, New Age, shamanism, astrology, and many other forms of structured occultism.” Ibid., 21-22.

²²C. Peter Wagner, *How to Have a Healing Ministry without Making Your Church Sick* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1988), 9. For Wagner’s perspective on the Pentecostal movement, the charismatic movement, and the third wave, see Wagner, *How to Have a Healing Ministry*, 23-31. In *Systematic Theology*, Wayne Grudem offers the following definition of the third wave: “In the 1980s yet a third renewal movement arose, called the ‘third wave’ by missions professor C. Peter Wagner at Fuller Seminary . . . ‘Third wave’ people encourage the equipping of all believers to use New Testament spiritual gifts today, and say that the proclamation of the gospel should ordinarily be accompanied by ‘signs, wonders, and miracles,’ according to the New Testament pattern. They teach, however, that Baptism in the Holy Spirit happens to all Christians at conversion, and that subsequent experiences are better called “filling” with the Holy Spirit. The most prominent representative of the ‘third wave’ is John Wimber.” Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 763.

²³Wagner, *How to Have a Healing Ministry*, 59.

While Wagner accepted the worldview of the New Testament and possessed a heart for evangelism, he placed too much emphasis on the principalities and powers by making them the focus of strategic-level spiritual warfare.²⁴ Instead of focusing on the victory won by Christ (Col 2:15, 1 Cor 15:24) and the need for corporate holiness (Eph 6:10-20), Wagner focuses on the demonic and on the need for believers to confront the principalities and powers. Thus, while Wink rejected Hiebert's middle level, Wagner expanded it. Both men failed to heed the warning Hiebert offered in 1982:

There are two dangers against which we must guard when we formulate a theology that deals with the questions raised at the middle level. . . . *The first danger is secularism.* This is to deny the reality of the spiritual realm in the events of human life, and to reduce the reality of this world to purely materialistic explanations. . . . *The second danger is a return to a Christianized form of animism* in which spirits and magic are used to explain everything.²⁵

When Wink argued “the Powers generally are only encountered as corporealized in some form,” he ruled out the possibility of personal, evil, spiritual beings, and he succumbed to the danger of secularism.²⁶ Thus, his interpretation of and response to the principalities and powers must be rejected. When Wagner argued “our primary battle for the evangelization of the world is spiritual, involving spiritual warfare with high-ranking principalities and powers,”²⁷ he took the focus off the supremacy of Christ, the power of the gospel, and the need for corporate holiness, and he succumbed to

²⁴This fact can be seen in Wagner's own definition of strategic-level spiritual warfare that has already been quoted. Wagner, *Confronting the Powers*, 22.

²⁵Hiebert, “Flaw of the Excluded Middle,” 199-200.

²⁶Wink, *Naming the Powers*, 5.

²⁷C. Peter Wagner, “Introduction,” in *Territorial Spirits: Insights on Strategic-Level Spiritual Warfare from Nineteen Christian Leaders*, ed. C. Peter Wagner (Chichester, England: Sovereign World Limited, 1991), xviii.

a Christianized form of animism.²⁸ Thus, his interpretation of and response to the principalities and powers must also be rejected.

Clinton Arnold

In contrast to the contributions of Wink and Wagner, Arnold has written about the principalities and powers from a conservative perspective.²⁹ In *The Powers of Darkness*, he began by acknowledging the reality of evil, and he insisted that believers turn to the Bible for answers. Arnold also insisted that believers accept the worldview of the Bible at face value. He wrote,

²⁸The question is not, “Does Wagner discuss the supremacy of Christ, the power of the gospel, and the need for corporate holiness?” The question is, “Does Wagner *focus* his efforts on battling the principalities and powers *or* on the supremacy of Christ, the power of the gospel, and the need for corporate holiness?” This dissertation argues that Wagner gives *primary* attention to the principalities and powers by making them the *focus* of strategic-level spiritual warfare. With respect to the charge of animism, Hiebert describes the danger of a Christianized form of animism: “In spiritism, the spirits dominate reality, and humans must constantly battle or appease them to survive. In magic, humans seek to control supernatural powers through rituals and formulas to achieve their own personal desires. Both spiritism and magic are human and ego-centered; a person can gain what he or she wants by manipulating the spirits and controlling the forces. Both reject a God-centered view of reality, and both reject worship, obedience, and submission as the human response to God’s will.” Hiebert, “Flaw of the Excluded Middle,” 200.

²⁹Other scholars align more closely with Arnold’s position than either the spiritual warfare approach or the liberal Protestant approach. For scholars who deal specifically with the principalities and powers, see Garrett, *Angels and the New Spirituality*; Robert Lightner, *Angels, Satan, and Demons: Invisible Beings that Inhabit the Spiritual World* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998); and Sydney H. T. Page, *Powers of Evil: A Biblical Study of Satan and Demons* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995). For scholars who align closely with Arnold’s position without dealing directly with the principalities and powers, see Russell D. Moore, *Adopted for Life: The Priority of Adoption for Christian Families and Churches* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009); and John Piper, *Spectacular Sins: And Their Global Purpose in the Glory of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008). Arnold has been selected as a representative of the conservative approach because of his extensive writing in the field of spiritual warfare in general and about the principalities and powers in particular. It should not be assumed, however, that every conservative scholar completely agrees with Arnold’s perspective.

Evil imposes itself upon us and those we love. And if we want help from the Bible for dealing with the problem of evil, we must be willing to take seriously what the Bible takes seriously: the intense involvement in life of a figure named Satan and his powers of darkness. Far too long the Western church has given neither sufficient nor serious attention to this topic.³⁰

Arnold went on to explain that his Asian and African students, whose worldview does not automatically exclude Hiebert's middle, have no trouble accepting the worldview of the Bible at face value.³¹ Additionally, Arnold's central criticism of the liberal Protestant approach to the principalities and powers revolved around worldview. Writing about the liberal Protestant approach he noted, "For many of these interpreters a major factor that leads them to a 'structural' interpretation is the modern Western world view, which denies the reality of the actual existence of evil spirits."³²

Because of his acceptance of both the worldview and teaching of the Bible, Arnold interpreted the principalities and powers as personal, evil, spiritual beings. He even cautiously advocated the notion of territorial spirits. In *Three Crucial Questions about Spiritual Warfare* Arnold argued,

The biblical and historical evidence supports the idea that there are 'territorial spirits.' These are fallen angels that wield some kind of dominion over people groups, empires, countries, or cities. They exercise their supernatural power not only to bring harm and misery, but most important, to keep people from coming to a knowledge of the one true God. Historically, this has happened most commonly when these spirits create, animate, and maintain deviant religions and cults to which people give their devotion and worship.³³

³⁰Clinton E. Arnold, *The Powers of Darkness: Principalities and Powers in Paul's Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992), 11.

³¹Ibid.

³²Ibid., 195.

³³Arnold, *Three Crucial Questions about Spiritual Warfare*, 160.

While Arnold's interpretation of the principalities and powers was closely aligned with that of Wagner and the spiritual warfare approach, Arnold's proposed response to the principalities and powers was significantly different. Instead of strategic-level spiritual warfare, Arnold argued that spiritual warfare against the principalities and powers involves the proclamation of the gospel and personal holiness.³⁴ Additionally, he gave particular attention to biblical teaching about the person and the work of Christ as a means of responding to the principalities and powers.³⁵ Finally, instead of suggesting that the church actively engage the principalities and powers, Arnold argued, "The church visibly testifies to God's wisdom *by its very existence*."³⁶

In light of Wink's faulty worldview assumptions, Arnold was right to reject the liberal Protestant interpretation of and approach to the principalities and powers. In light of Wagner's excessive focus on the demonic, Arnold was right to reject the spiritual warfare approach to the principalities and powers. While Arnold did offer biblical proposals for responding to the principalities and powers, and while he did recognize the importance of corporately responding to the principalities and powers, he never offered a comprehensive proposal for a corporate stand against the principalities and powers.³⁷

³⁴Clinton E. Arnold, *Power and Magic: The Concept of Power in Ephesians in Light of its Historical Setting* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 170. Also, idem, *Powers of Darkness*, 154. Chuck Lawless agrees with Arnold on this point. Chuck Lawless, *Disciplined Warriors: Growing Healthy Churches that are Equipped for Spiritual Warfare* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002).

³⁵Clinton E. Arnold, *The Colossian Syncretism: The Interface between Christianity and Folk Belief at Colossae* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 311.

³⁶Arnold, *Power and Magic*, 63.

³⁷See the discussion below for Arnold's corporate suggestions. To be fair, Arnold never claimed that he was offering a comprehensive proposal for the church's

In *The Powers of Darkness*, Arnold's final section consists of three chapters collectively titled "Interpreting the Powers for Today." Chapter 13 is titled "Reality or Myth?" and it deals mostly with worldview issues.³⁸ Chapter 14 is titled "The Powers and People," and it deals mostly with the individual Christian.³⁹ The end of chapter 14 does include two sections that focus on the church, but eight paragraphs out of more than two-hundred pages hardly count as a significant proposal for the church's corporate stand against the principalities and powers.⁴⁰ Chapter 15 is titled "The Powers and Society," and it deals mostly with the extremes of the liberal Protestant approach and the spiritual warfare approach.⁴¹ Finally, the conclusion is titled "Contending with the Powers." Here Arnold explains that he is presenting "a suggestive summary of the relevance of Paul's

stand against the principalities and powers. With respect to the principalities and powers, Arnold's two most popular works are *The Powers of Darkness* and *Three Crucial Questions about Spiritual Warfare*, and in both works Arnold clearly articulated his purpose. In *Three Crucial Questions about Spiritual Warfare* Arnold states, "This book is an attempt to provide biblical, theological, and some church-historical perspectives to these three crucial questions about spiritual warfare." Arnold, *Three Crucial Questions about Spiritual Warfare*, 13. In *The Powers of Darkness* Arnold states, "In the following pages I hope to show precisely what role evil spiritual powers had in the world view of one of Christianity's most brilliant and inspired thinkers, the apostle Paul." Arnold, *The Powers of Darkness*, 17. Both works accomplished their stated purpose, but neither offered a comprehensive proposal for the church's corporate stand against the principalities and powers.

³⁸Arnold, *The Powers of Darkness*, 169-82.

³⁹Ibid., 183-93.

⁴⁰Ibid., 191-93. These sections were titled "The Powers Assail the Purity of the Church" and "The Powers Seek to Hinder the Mission of the Church." They are both helpful treatments of the church's stand against the principalities and powers. Nevertheless, these sections are regrettably brief, and they do not represent a comprehensive proposal for the church's stand against the principalities and powers.

⁴¹Ibid., 194-209.

teaching on the powers of darkness stated in a prescriptive way for the church today.”⁴²

While these final eight pages are both biblical and helpful, they do not represent a comprehensive proposal for the church’s stand against the principalities and powers for two reasons. First, this section represents less than 4 percent of the entire book. While Arnold has done a masterful job critiquing misguided views and exegeting the biblical text, he has not presented comprehensive strategy for responding corporately to the principalities and powers. Second, Arnold’s eight pages of proposed response are largely directed to the individual Christian, not the church.⁴³

Similarly, in *Three Crucial Questions about Spiritual Warfare* Arnold did not offer a comprehensive proposal for the church’s corporate stand against the principalities and powers. He did describe a plan for helping the church deal with corporate sin.⁴⁴ He also included a short section that emphasized the importance of personal *and* corporate purity.⁴⁵ However, this section contains only three short paragraphs, and those paragraphs give more space to the Old Testament kings than the New Testament church.⁴⁶ Arnold went on to give some attention to the importance of corporate prayer and corporate mission, but these final pages do not constitute an comprehensive proposal

⁴²Ibid., 210.

⁴³Ibid., 210-17. The only corporate proposals made by Arnold in this section are suggestions for corporate prayer and corporate mission.

⁴⁴Arnold, *Three Crucial Questions about Spiritual Warfare*, 190.

⁴⁵Ibid., 186.

⁴⁶Ibid.

for the church's corporate stand against the principalities and powers.⁴⁷

It should be noted that this critique of Arnold is not a critique of the specific proposals made in *Three Crucial Questions about Spiritual Warfare* or *The Powers of Darkness*. Instead, this critique is a lament that Arnold never developed a comprehensive proposal for the church's corporate stand against the principalities and powers.⁴⁸

Proposal

Almost ten years into the twenty-first century, one is able to step back with perspective and survey the vast amount of literature dealing with the principalities and powers. Wink and his colleagues have rightly emphasized the spiritual aspect of the principalities and powers.⁴⁹ However, they have wrongly insisted that this spiritual aspect cannot be separated from the physical, structural, corporeal manifestations of the principalities and powers.⁵⁰ Thus, the liberal Protestant approach advocates a secularized response that misses the emphasis of the New Testament by focusing on political activism.⁵¹ On the other hand, Wagner and his colleagues have rightly insisted that the New Testament believers viewed the principalities and powers as personal, evil, spiritual

⁴⁷Ibid., 187-90.

⁴⁸It should be noted that I was able to initiate email correspondence with Wink, Wagner, and Arnold. I asked each scholar if their interpretation of or response to the principalities and powers had changed since the publications of their respective works. Each scholar indicated that his overall approach had not changed.

⁴⁹Wink, *Naming the Powers*, 6.

⁵⁰Ibid., 5.

⁵¹Wink, *The Powers that Be*, 5-6.

beings.⁵² However, by focusing on the principalities and powers and by promoting strategic-level spiritual warfare, the spiritual warfare approach has turned to a Christianized form of animism.⁵³ The influence of worldview can be seen in both the liberal Protestant approach to the principalities and powers and the spiritual warfare approach to the principalities and powers.

Arnold and his colleagues have not only offered critiques of these misguided interpretations and proposals, but they have also offered a biblical interpretation of the principalities and powers. Nevertheless, what seems to be missing, particularly in North America, is an emphasis on the fact that standing against the principalities and powers is a corporate stand. The absence of this emphasis, as well as the absence of a comprehensive strategy for a corporate response to the principalities and powers is regrettable in light of North American worldview issues, particularly rampant individualism.⁵⁴

⁵²Wagner, *Confronting the Powers*, 22.

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴The issue of individualism is developed in chapter 5. North American individualism and its negative effects on Christianity have been well documented. For scholarly discussions of North American individualism and its impact on theology, truth, and the church, see Paul Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008); David F. Wells, *Above All Earthly Pow'rs: Christ in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005); idem, *The Courage to Be Protestant: Truth Lovers, Marketers, and Emergents in the Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008); idem, *No Place for Truth, Or, Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993); Charles H. Kraft, *Christianity with Power: Your Worldview and Your Experience of the Supernatural* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Publications, 1989); and Gailyn Van Rhee, *Communicating Christ in Animistic Contexts* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991).

Thus, this dissertation has filled a hole in the scholarly literature dealing with the principalities and powers. By considering the teaching of both Scripture and church history, this dissertation argues that the principalities and powers are personal, evil, spiritual beings, it argues that that standing against the principalities and powers is a corporate battle, and it offers a comprehensive strategy for the church's stand against the principalities and powers.

Background

As has been the case with millions of other Christians around the world, my initial exposure to the principalities and powers began with the popular fiction books of Frank E. Peretti.⁵⁵ It was not until I entered the doctoral program at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary that I was once again exposed to the concept of the principalities and powers. This exposure initially came through a seminar led by professor Chuck Lawless titled "Spiritual Warfare in Evangelism and Missions."⁵⁶ Three other classes in

⁵⁵Lawless explains, "While it is likely that Peretti's books caught the wave of an already increasing interest in spiritual warfare, it is also clear that his works both stimulated and accelerated interest in the topic. Indeed, *This Present Darkness* and its sequel, *Piercing the Darkness*, sold by mid-1996 a combined 3,692,000 copies." Charles Lawless, "The Relationship between Evangelism and Spiritual Warfare in the North American Spiritual Warfare Movement, 1986-1997" (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1997), 1. Peretti's most influential books were of little interest to me since I was in grade school when they were originally published. *This Present Darkness* was originally published in 1986, and *Piercing the Darkness* was originally published in 1989. Frank E. Peretti, *This Present Darkness* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2003). Idem, *Piercing the Darkness* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2003). However, two books Peretti published in the late nineties were of interest to me during my senior year of high school: *The Oath* and *The Visitation*. Idem, *The Oath* (Nashville: W Publishing Group, 1995), and *The Visitation* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 1999).

⁵⁶My subject of research during this seminar was the principalities and powers in the New Testament. It was the research and writing of this paper first sparked my interest in the principalities and powers. Also encouraging was the teaching and writing

my doctoral program promoted my interest in the principalities and powers. First, professor Tim Beougher led a seminar titled “The Methods and Influence of American Evangelists.” Second, professor Lawless led a colloquium titled “The Church Growth Movement.” Third, professor George Martin led a seminar titled “The History of Christian Missions.” In each of these classes I was able to further my study of the principalities and powers, and through this study I became convinced that a work like the one offered here was needed for a variety of reasons.

First, as the first decade of the twenty-first century ends, much of the debate about spiritual warfare in general and principalities and powers in particular has died down.⁵⁷ Thus, I have been able to step back with perspective and survey the literature that deals with the principalities and powers.

Second, many conservative contributions have been too preoccupied with critique.⁵⁸ This is not to say critique was not needed. In fact, these critiques were much needed in light of both the liberal Protestant approach to the principalities and powers and the spiritual warfare approach to the principalities and powers. Nevertheless, these

of Lawless, who presented an alternative approach to spiritual warfare that took into account the importance of discipleship within the local church. Lawless, *Discipled Warriors*.

⁵⁷Evidence that this debate has died down can be seen in the pertinent publications of Wink, Wagner, and Arnold. Each scholar published his major works on the principalities and powers towards the end of the last century.

⁵⁸A prime example is Chuck Lowe’s book *Territorial Spirits and World Evangelisation*. His critique of strategic-level spiritual warfare is thorough and convincing, but his proposed response fails to represent a positive, comprehensive proposal for the church’s stand against the principalities and powers. Chuck Lowe, *Territorial Spirits and World Evangelisation* (Sevenoaks, Kent: OMF International, 1998), 129-51.

critiques failed to develop into a comprehensive strategy for the church's corporate stand against the principalities and powers.

Third, despite Jesus' emphasis on the centrality of the church (Matt 16:17-19), it is easy to forget the church in the formulation of missiological strategy. Additionally, it seems many Christians have yet to learn the lessons set before them decades ago by George Ladd. In 1959 he passionately argued, "God's Kingdom creates the Church and works in the world through the Church."⁵⁹ As Christians, our response to the principalities and powers must not neglect the centrality of the church of Jesus Christ.

Delimitations

Several delimitations to this study must be noted. First, this dissertation focuses on the principalities and powers, and it does not deal comprehensively with the broader issue of territorial spirits. As was stated earlier, the terminology of "principalities and powers" is taken from the Authorized Version, and in scholarly writing it is the preferred terminology. The main Pauline passages that are examined in this dissertation are Romans 8:37-39, 1 Corinthians 15:20-28, Ephesians 1:16-23, Ephesians 3:1-13, Ephesians 6:10-20, Colossians 1:13-20, and Colossians 2:8-20. These passages and others such as Deuteronomy 32:8, Psalm 106:37-38, Daniel 10:13, 20, and Revelation 2-3 are frequently referenced in discussions about territorial spirits. While there is obvious overlap between the two categories, the focus in this dissertation is on the principalities and powers, and territorial spirits are discussed only as they pertain to the principalities and powers.

⁵⁹George Eldon Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom: Scriptural Studies in the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 117.

Related to this delimitation is the fact that this dissertation does not attempt to deal comprehensively with strategic-level spiritual warfare. As with territorial spirits, this issue is discussed and critiqued only as it relates to the principalities and powers.

Second, while a broad survey of church history is offered in chapter two, this dissertation primarily focuses on the North American context. Wink, Wagner, and Arnold represent the culmination of the debate over the principalities and powers, and all three wrote out of the North American context. Therefore, primary attention has been given to the debate as it has taken place in North America. Additionally, the corporate response offered in chapter five is tailored for North American churches. With this delimitation in mind, it should be noted that as long as the proposed corporate response is rooted in biblical principles, it certainly has application beyond the North American context.

Finally, three issues are beyond the scope of this dissertation and do not represent a significant contribution to its overall thesis. First, this dissertation does not attempt to discover why Paul never made an explicit connection between the principalities and powers and the sort of exorcism found in the gospels. Instead, the focus in this dissertation is on how Paul encouraged local churches to respond to the principalities and powers. Second, this dissertation does not attempt to discover why Paul frequently used the terminology of “principalities and powers” but rarely used the word “demon.” To be sure, Paul did use the word “demon” in 1 Corinthians 10:20-21 and 1 Timothy 4:1, and these passages are discussed. Nevertheless, attempting to discover the reason for Paul’s preference is not only beyond the scope of this dissertation, but it also fails to represent a necessary contribution to the overall thesis of this

dissertation. Third, this dissertation does not investigate the non-canonical usage of the terminology of “principalities and powers.” Several scholars have already offered significant contributions with respect to this issue, and their work is referenced.⁶⁰

Methodology

This study involves an examination of historical and contemporary writings about the principalities and powers. In my process of locating and researching these works, several institutions have proved invaluable. These institutions include the James P. Boyce Centennial Library at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, the Ernest Miller White Library at the Louisville Presbyterian Seminary, and the Paul Sawyer Public Library in Frankfort, Kentucky. Additionally, through seminar reading and personal study I have personally collected many pertinent works. The combination of these resources has allowed me to undertake a thorough examination of both historical and contemporary approaches to the principalities and powers.

As was stated earlier, each of the three major approaches to the principalities and powers has a primary spokesperson. Wink is the dominant voice for the liberal

⁶⁰For treatments of non-canonical references to the principalities and powers, see Arnold, *Powers of Darkness*; idem, *Power and Magi*; idem, *The Colossian Syncretism*; Garrett, *Angels and the New Spirituality*; Francis X. Gokey, *The Terminology for the Devil and Evil Spirits in the Apostolic Fathers* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1961); Edward Langton, *Essentials of Demonology: A Study of Jewish and Christian Doctrine, Its Origin and Development* (London: The Epworth Press, 1949); idem, *Good and Evil Spirits: A Study of the Jewish and Christian Doctrine, Its Origin and Development* (New York: Macmillan, 1942); Kevin P. Sullivan, *Wrestling with Angels: A Study of the Relationship between Angels and Humans in Ancient Jewish Literature and the New Testament* (Boston: Brill, 2004); Ronn A. Johnson, “The Old Testament Background for Paul’s Use of ‘Principalities and Powers’” (Ph.D. diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 2004); Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987); and idem, *Demonology of the Early Christian World* (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1984).

Protestant approach to the principalities and powers, Wagner is the dominant voice for the spiritual warfare approach to the principalities and powers, and Arnold is the dominant voice for the conservative approach to the principalities and powers. Through personal websites and email correspondence, it has become clear that the approaches of these representative scholars have not changed in recent years. In conclusion, I have been able to proceed with a method of research that has allowed me to argue that the principalities and powers are personal, evil, spiritual beings that must be resisted on a corporate level. My research has also allowed me to set forth a comprehensive strategy for the church's stand against the principalities and powers.

Outline

The purpose of this dissertation is to show that the principalities and powers are personal, evil, spiritual beings, to show that standing against the principalities and powers is a corporate battle, and to offer a comprehensive strategy for the church's stand against the principalities and powers. This current chapter has discussed the shortcomings of the three recent approaches to the principalities and powers, as well as some of the worldview issues that impact this debate.

Chapter 2 offers a historical perspective on the principalities and powers. This historical study begins with the post-apostolic early church and concludes with the writings of G. B. Caird, Hendrik Berkhof, and Henrich Schlier.⁶¹ The following four historical periods are considered: the early church (A.D. 100-500), the medieval period

⁶¹G. B. Caird, *Principalities and Powers: A Study in Pauline Theology* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1956). Hendrik Berkhof, *Christ and the Powers*, trans. John Howard Yoder (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1962). Heinrich Schlier, *Principalities and Powers in the New Testament* (London: Burns and Oates, 1961).

(A.D. 500-1500), the Reformation (A.D. 1500-1800), and the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (A.D. 1800-present). For each period considered, attention is given to the predominant interpretation of the principalities and powers as well as the predominant response to the principalities and powers.

Chapter 3 presents an in depth analysis of the three major contemporary approaches to the principalities and powers. The writings of Wink, Wagner, and Arnold are discussed, as well as the writings of their colleagues. Each of the three contemporary approaches is analyzed in the areas of worldview assumptions, interpretation of the principalities and powers, response of the church, and historical justification.

Chapter 4 offers a biblical perspective on the principalities and powers. First, the relevant passages are interpreted and discussed. Second, an analytical framework is borrowed from P. T. O'Brien. This framework allows for a systematic analysis of the principalities and powers by considering their creation, their fall, their initial defeat, their struggle, and their final defeat.⁶²

Chapter 5 argues that standing against the principalities and powers is a corporate battle. It begins with a brief discussion of the relationship between the kingdom of God and the church in an attempt to demonstrate the centrality of the church in the kingdom of God. Then, the importance of worldview is highlighted. Finally, a specific strategy is offered for the church's stand against the principalities and powers.⁶³

⁶²P. T. O'Brien, "Principalities and Powers: Opponents of the Church," in *Biblical Interpretation and the Church*, ed. D. A. Carson (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984), 138.

⁶³Appendix 1 contains specific and practical suggestions for implementing this strategy in a local church.

CHAPTER 2

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE PRINCIPALITIES AND POWERS

Throughout human history and across cultures, most people have believed in angelic and demonic beings. Leander Petzoldt argues, “There may be no people in our human history who do not know of supernatural beings with whom they share their environment and who help to explain the inexplicable in human life and individual experience.”¹ What is generally true about mankind’s belief in angelic and demonic beings is particularly true about Christianity; throughout church history, most Christian people have believed in angelic and demonic beings.² Henry Ansgar Kelly offers the following explanation for this widespread belief in angelic and demonic beings:

¹Leander Petzoldt, “The Universe of Demons and the World of the Middle Ages,” in *Demons: Mediators between This World and the Other*, ed. Ruth Petzoldt and Paul Neubauer (New York: Peter Lang, 1998), 13. Writing specifically about demons in the introduction of this volume, Paul Neubauer and Ruth Petzoldt argue, “Their presence and their influence have been documented throughout all cultures with narrative traditions.” Paul Neubauer and Ruth Petzoldt, “Introduction,” in *Demons: Mediators between This World and the Other*, ed. Ruth Petzoldt and Paul Neubauer (New York: Peter Lang, 1998), 7.

²Peter R. Schemm, Jr., “The Agents of God,” in *A Theology for the Church*, ed. Daniel L. Akin (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2007), 293. On a related note, Bernard J. Bamberger argues, “The belief in the reality and power of the Devil is indeed to be found in every age of historical Christianity.” Barnard J. Bamberger, *Fallen Angels* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1952), 208. Similarly, Jeffrey Burton Russell argues, “Belief in the Devil has always been part and parcel of Christianity, firmly rooted in the New Testament, in tradition, and in virtually all Christian thinkers up into very modern times.” Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Lucifer: The Devil in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984), 303.

From the beginning the Christian message of salvation was given a demonological dimension. The Gospels show Jesus delivering men from the oppression of unclean spirits and overthrowing the ruler of this world, and the epistles of Paul affirm the Christian's deliverance from servitude to the principalities and powers.³

While church history reveals a widespread belief in angelic and demonic beings, church history also reveals significant disagreement about the nature and activity of these angelic and demonic beings. As Millard Erickson explains, "The topic of angels has probably had a more varied history than most doctrines."⁴

Because of this varied history, it is necessary to engage in historical theology before interpreting and proposing a response to the principalities and powers. In the following quotation, Edward Langton describes the need for historical theology with respect to angelology, demonology, and by implication, the principalities and powers:

The belief in demons and angels is woven into the fabric of Jewish and Christian teaching concerning God, man, and the world from its earliest period until the present time. How large a place in Christian theology the conceptions of good and evil supernatural or superhuman powers have held until the last century can only be fully appreciated by research students who are willing to spend much time and labour in the study of ancient theological treatises, embracing systematic theology, volumes of sermons, tomes of Church history, as well as medieval literature in general. The dominating position in Christian thought formerly held by the conceptions of Satan, the demons, and the angels will not be gathered from modern theological treatises, sermons, or other current religious literature. These conceptions, it is true, have not been entirely eliminated. The terms Satan or the Devil, demons or evil spirits, and angels still form part of our inherited religious terminology. But anyone who studies the writings of the accredited teachers of the Churches of today will be forced to admit that in relation to our subject these stand in great contrast to the teaching of the Church in any former period of its history since the time of the apostles. Things that were formerly regarded as substantial

³Henry Ansgar Kelly, *The Devil at Baptism: Ritual, Theology, and Drama* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), 272.

⁴Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 459. Erickson's statement about the "varied history" of angelology is in reference to holy angels. However, as this chapter will show, the doctrines of angelology and demonology are closely related.

realities have now become mere shadows. Ideas that were once near to the centre of the picture have now a place only upon the fringe. Teachings which, until the modern period, were of vital interest to the profoundest minds of the Church are now viewed as out-of-date conceptions which have scarcely any relevance to the present experience of man.⁵

This chapter is intended to follow the advice Langton offered sixty years ago by listening to what ancient and recent Christian theological treatises say about the principalities and powers. Specifically, this chapter will focus on Christian theological treatises from the following four broad eras of church history: the early church (A.D. 100-500), the medieval period (A.D. 500-1500), the Reformation (A.D. 1500-1800), and the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (A.D. 1800-2000).⁶ In each period, attention will be given to the predominant interpretation of the principalities and powers as well as the

⁵Edward Langton, *Essentials of Demonology: A Study of Jewish and Christian Doctrine, Its Origin and Development* (London: The Epworth Press, 1949), vii.

⁶Similar historical frameworks are used in other scholarly works dealing with the principalities and powers, angelology, demonology, satanology, and spiritual warfare. Oskar Skarsaune and Tormond Engelsviken focus on possession and exorcism, and they consider antiquity, the Middle Ages, the Reformation, and the post-Reformation. Oskar Skarsaune and Tormond Engelsviken, "Possession and Exorcism in the History of the Church," in *Deliver Us from Evil: An Uneasy Frontier in Christian Missions*, ed. A. Scott Moreau and others (Monrovia, CA: World Vision, 2002), 65. Chuck Lowe focuses on territorial spirits, and he considers the early and medieval church as well as the Reformers. Chuck Lowe, *Territorial Spirits and World Evangelisation* (Sevenoaks, Kent: OMF International, 1998). Robert Lightner deals with angelology and demonology, and he considers the Ancient Period (A.D. 1-500), the Middle Ages (A.D. 500-1500), the Reformation (A.D. 1500-1648), and the Modern Period (A.D. 1648-present). Robert Lightner, *Angels, Satan, and Demons: Invisible Beings that Inhabit the Spiritual World* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 9-14. Schemm also deals with angelology and demonology, and he considers the Apologists and the Patristic Period, the Medieval and the Reformation Period, and the Modern Period. Schemm, "The Agents of God," 312-21. For other historical frameworks used in related discussions, see Michael S. B. Reid, *Strategic Level Spiritual Warfare: A Modern Mythology?* (Fairfax, VA: Xulon, 2002), 82-104; and, Jeffrey Burton Russell, *The Prince of Darkness: Radical Evil and the Power of Good in History* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988).

predominant response to the principalities and powers.⁷

The Early Church

The church fathers lived and ministered during the first four centuries after the death of the apostles.⁸ Everett Ferguson argues that during this period of history, demonic beings were believed to be a part of everyday life. In *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* he writes, “Demonic forces were everywhere and were constantly affecting

⁷While this chapter will interact with historical interpretations of and approaches to the principalities and powers, it will not attempt to provide a thorough treatment of either angelology or demonology. Instead, angelology and demonology will be examined only as they relate to the principalities and powers. Additionally, since the focus of this dissertation is the relationship between the principalities and powers and the church, the focus will be on Christian church history. Jewish and pre-Christian understandings of the principalities and powers will not be addressed. Jewish and pre-Christian understandings of the principalities and powers have been discussed at length by numerous scholars. For example, see Clinton E. Arnold, *The Colossian Syncretism: The Interface between Christianity and Folk Belief at Colossae* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996); idem, *Power and Magic: The Concept of Power in Ephesians in Light of its Historical Setting* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992); idem, *Powers of Darkness: Principalities and Powers in Paul’s Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992); Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987); idem, *Demonology of the Early Christian World* (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1984); Duane A. Garrett, *Angels and the New Spirituality* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995); Francis X. Gokey, *The Terminology for the Devil and Evil Spirits in the Apostolic Fathers* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1961); Ronn A. Johnson, “The Old Testament Background for Paul’s Use of ‘Principalities and Powers’” (Ph.D. diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 2004); Langton, *Essentials of Demonology*; idem, *Good and Evil Spirits: A Study of the Jewish and Christian Doctrine, Its Origin and Development* (New York: Macmillan, 1942); and Kevin P. Sullivan, *Wrestling with Angels: A Study of the Relationship between Angels and Humans in Ancient Jewish Literature and the New Testament* (Boston: Brill, 2004).

⁸It is possible to divide this time period (A.D. 100-500) into the following categories: the Apostolic Fathers, the Ante-Nicene Fathers, the Nicene Church Fathers, and the Post-Nicene Fathers. Tye Yau Siew, “Spiritual Territoriality as a Premise for the Modern Spiritual Mapping Movement” (Ph.D. diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1999), 283-332. This dissertation will group these four categories together.

human life.”⁹ Not only was there a widespread belief in demonic forces during the time of the early church, but there was also widespread agreement that the principalities and powers were personal, spiritual beings.¹⁰ The question is, what exactly did the church fathers believe about these beings?

Identity of the Principalities and Powers

This section will show that the church fathers believed the principalities and powers were created beings. While they interpreted the principalities and powers as both holy angels and demons, many of the church fathers acknowledged that there was a definite hierarchy among the principalities and powers. Nevertheless, during the early church period these hierarchies were discussed with humility and without wild speculation. Moreover, many of the church fathers believed that the wicked principalities

⁹Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 185. Both Michael Green and Lightner agree with Ferguson on this issue. Green writes, “The ancient Hellenistic world was hag-ridden with the awareness of *daimonia*.” *Daimonia* originally referred to any spiritual being, but over time the term came to refer to evil, spiritual beings. Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 232. Lightner writes, “There are indications that Christians have believed in the existence of good and evil angels from the very beginning of the Christian era.” Lightner, *Angels, Satan, and Demons*, 9. Writing during the early church period, Tertullian insisted that all people instinctively know that there are evil spirits. Tertullian *Apology* 22.1-2, trans. Rudolph Arbesmann, Sister Emily Joseph Daly, and Edwin A. Quain, in *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation*, vol. 10, ed. Roy Joseph Deferrari (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1950), 68.

¹⁰Even though Rudolf Bultmann sought to demythologize the principalities and powers, he admitted, “There is no reason to doubt that the early Christians regarded these powers as real demonic beings.” Rudolf Bultmann, *Primitive Christianity in Its Contemporary Setting*, trans. R. H. Fuller (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1956), 190. Likewise, Gokey admits that the ancient interpreters would have interpreted the principalities as personal, spiritual powers. Gokey, “The Terminology for the Devil and Evil Spirits in the Apostolic Fathers,” 75. Kelly points to Justin Martyr as one of the church fathers who merged the ideas of principalities and powers with fallen demons.

and powers exercised territorial authority as they stood behind the gods of the nations.

Creatures. The early church fathers agreed that angelic and demonic beings, including the principalities and powers, were created by God. In the fourth century, Basil wrote,

Accordingly the mode of the creation of the heavenly powers is passed over in silence, for the historian of the cosmogony has revealed to us only the creation of things perceptible by sense. But do thou, who hast power from the things that are seen to form an analogy of the unseen, glorify the Maker by whom all things were made, visible and invisible, principalities and powers, authorities, thrones, and dominions, and all other reasonable natures whom we cannot name.¹¹

Additionally, John of Damascus articulated the opinion of many when he argued that angelic and demonic beings were personal creatures who possessed free wills.¹²

According to the church fathers, a portion of the angelic creation used their free will to rebel against their Creator. Origen explained that the principalities and powers are wicked, not because it was their nature to be wicked and not because they were created wicked, but because they exercised their free wills in such a way that they

Henry Ansgar Kelly, *The Devil, Demonology and Witchcraft: The Development of Christian Beliefs in Evil Spirits*, rev. ed. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974), 29.

¹¹Basil *The Holy Spirit* 16.38, trans. Bloomfield Jackson, in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series*, vol. 8, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1894; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 137. Augustine argued that although the creation narrative does not explicitly mention the creation of the angelic beings, it does imply as much. He also argued that while their creation is merely implicit in the creation narrative, “elsewhere Holy Scripture asserts it in the clearest manner.” Augustine *City of God* 11.9, trans. Marcus Dods, in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 2, ed. Philip Schaff (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1871; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 301.

¹²John of Damascus argued that God is the creator of all the angels. He also argued that the angels, who are endowed with free will, are incorporeal, intelligent, and immortal. John of Damascus *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* 2.3, trans. S. D.

have “obtained these degrees in evil in proportion to their conduct, and the progress which they made in wickedness.”¹³

Also widely agreed upon was the fact that the fallen principalities and powers both tremble before Christ in the present and will bow before Christ in the future. This submission is based on the fact that the principalities and powers were created beings, but it is also based on the fact that in light of the cross they were defeated beings. Justin declared, “You can perceive that the concealed power of God was in Christ the crucified, before whom demons, and all the principalities and powers of the earth, tremble.”¹⁴

Hierarchies. Garrett insists that it would be wrong to think of the church fathers as “angel-crazy,” and he insists that for the most part they were reserved in their

F. Salmond, in NPNF2, vol. 9, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1898; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 457-59.

¹³Origen *De Principiis* 1.8.4, trans. Frederick Crombie, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 4, ed. A. Cleveland Coxe (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1885; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 406. Minucius Felix echoed Origen when he wrote, “There exist deceitful and wandering spirits who have lost their heavenly vigor from having been dragged down by earthly stains and lusts.” Minucius Felix *The Octavius* 26.8, trans. Rudolph Arbesmann, Emily Joseph Daly, and Edwin A. Quain, in *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation*, vol. 10, ed. Roy Joseph Deferrari (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1950), 378.

¹⁴Justin Martyr *Dialogue with Trypho* 49, in ANF, vol. 1, trans. and ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, rev. A. Cleveland Coxe (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1867; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 304. Also see Justin Martyr *The First Apology* 131, in ANF, vol. 1, trans. and ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, rev. A. Cleveland Coxe (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1867; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 337. Origen offered a lengthy discussion concerning the relationship between Christ and the principalities and powers. He argued that the principalities and powers exist both as holy angels and fallen demons. He also acknowledged that while the fallen principalities and powers wrestle against the saints, they are ultimately subject to Christ. Or. *De Principiis* 1.5.1, 1.5.2 (trans. Frederick Crombie, ed. A. Cleveland Coxe, ANF 4:392).

treatments of angelic and demonic beings.¹⁵ An example of this restraint is found in their discussions of angelic hierarchies. Augustine conceded that there was an angelic hierarchy; however, he maintained that he was ignorant about the order of the angelic hierarchy.¹⁶ Athanasius admitted that there was a multitude of principalities and powers, but insisted that it was more important to understand their wiles than their distinctions.¹⁷ Gregory of Nyssa recognized the designations of thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers, but he urged caution in examining these terms and distinctions.¹⁸ Gregory Nazianzen wrote, “Do you see how we get dizzy over this subject, and cannot advance to any point, unless it be as far as this, that we know there are Angels and Archangels, Thrones, Dominions, Princedoms, Powers, Splendours, Ascents, Intelligent Powers or Intelligencies?”¹⁹

“**gods.**” Another area of widespread agreement among the early church fathers was the belief that demons, including the fallen principalities and powers, could

¹⁵Garrett, *Angels and the New Spirituality*, 77.

¹⁶Augustine *Enchiridion* 58, trans. J. F. Shaw, in NPNF, vol. 3, ed. Philip Schaff (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1887; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 345.

¹⁷Athanasius *Life of Anthony* 21, trans. H. Ellershaw, in NPNF2, vol. 4, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1891; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 425.

¹⁸Gregory of Nyssa *Against Eunomius* 1.23, trans. William Moore and Henry Austin Wilson, in NPNF2, vol. 5 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1892; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 88. Jerome also mentioned various ranks without insisting on a particular hierarchy. Jerome *Apology* 1.23, trans. William Henry Fremantle, in NPNF2, vol. 3, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1892; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 740-41.

¹⁹Gregory Nazianzen *Orations* 28.31, trans. Charles Gordon Browne and James Edward Swallow, in NPNF2, vol. 7, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace

be equated with the pagan gods. In an article about demons in the early church period, Ferguson argues, “An important Jewish contribution to Christian thought was the identification of demons with the gods of pagan idolatry.”²⁰ Connected with this belief was the assumption that the names of these demons could be known. Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and Municius Felix all agree that the pagan gods are demons, and they were comfortable assigning the names of the pagan gods to the demons who actually stood behind the pagan gods.²¹

Because the early church fathers identified the principalities and powers with the pagan gods, there was consensus on the belief that demonic beings were responsible

(Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1893; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 456.

²⁰Everett Ferguson, “Demons,” in *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, ed. Everett Ferguson (New York: Garland Publishing, 1990), 260. Skarsaune and Engelsviken examined the issue of demon possession in the early church, and they found two common themes in the writings of the early church fathers. They write, “The first theme is that the gods of the Gentiles are considered to be demons. . . . The second theme is the notion that when people worship demons they risk being possessed by them.” Skarsaune and Engelsviken, “Possession and Exorcism in the History of the Church,” 69.

²¹Justin described the process by which he came to know the names of some of these demonic, imposter gods. Writing about individuals who had been terrorized by demons, he wrote, “Being carried away by fear, and not knowing that these were demons, they called them gods, and gave to each the name which each of the demons chose for himself.” Just. *The First Apology* 5 (trans. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson; rev. A. Cleveland Coxe, ANF 1:214-15). In *The Second Apology* Justin singled out Neptune and Pluto as two of the gods who are in reality fallen angels masquerading as gods. Justin Martyr *The Second Apology* 5, in ANF, vol. 1, trans. and ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, rev. A. Cleveland Coxe (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1867; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 257. Clement of Alexandria *Exhortation to the Heathen* 3.1, trans. W. L. Alexander, in ANF, vol. 2, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, rev. A. Cleveland Coxe (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1867; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 250. Tert. *Apology* 23.2, 24.8, 25.1-17 (trans. Rudolph Arbesmann, Sister Emily Joseph Daly, and Edwin A. Quain; ed. Roy Joseph Defarrari, 71, 77-79). Min. Fel. *Octavius* 27 (trans. Rudolph Arbesmann, Sister Emily Joseph Daly, and Edwin A. Quain, ed. Roy Joseph Defarrari, 380-81).

for pagan religion, counterfeit miracles, false prophecies, and astrology.²² Justin claimed there was a man in Pontus named Marcion who was “teaching his disciples to believe in some other god greater than the Creator. And he, by the aid of the devils, has caused many of every nation to speak blasphemies.”²³ Lactantius described something similar:

They [demons] also brought to light astrology, and augury, and divination; and though these things are in themselves false, yet they themselves, the authors of evils, so govern and regulate them that they are believed to be true. They also invented the tricks of the magic art, to deceive the eyes. By their aid it comes to pass, that that which is appears not to be, and that which is not appears to be. They themselves invented necromancies, responses, and oracles, to delude the minds of men with lying divination by means of ambiguous issues.²⁴

Territory. Several of the early church fathers connected angels and demons to specific territories. Clinton Arnold disagrees and argues, “Explicit references to demons over territories – villages, cities, provinces, regions, or countries – are quite rare in the church fathers. No mention of territorial spirits is made in the Apostolic Fathers.”²⁵ However, the following references seem to indicate that Arnold has overstated his case. Whether they had holy or wicked principalities and powers in mind, some of the church

²²Ferguson, “Demons,” 260.

²³Just. *The First Apology* 26 (trans. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson; rev. A. Cleveland Coxe, ANF 1:227). Hippolytus argued that Simon the Magician in Acts 8 was inspired by demons. Hippolytus, *Refutation* 6.2, trans. J. H. Macmahon, in ANF, vol. 5, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, rev. A. Cleveland Coxe (Edinburgh: T&T Clark; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 129.

²⁴Lactantius *The Epitome of the Divine Institutes* 28, trans. William Fletcher, in ANF, vol. 7, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1886; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 350.

²⁵Clinton E. Arnold, *Three Crucial Questions about Spiritual Warfare* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 157.

fathers did associate the principalities and powers with specific territories.²⁶

Justin referred to evil demons and evil angels that dwell in Damascus and Egypt, but he did not explicitly restrict these evil demons and evil angels to the territories of Damascus and Egypt.²⁷ Clement of Alexandria appeared to recognize territorial assignments when he argued, “Regiments of angels are distributed over the nations and cities.”²⁸ Tertullian argued, “every province and city has its own god,” but he also insisted that demons were not limited by territory.²⁹ Lactantius claimed that demons, which he identified as pagan gods, inhabit specific houses and temples; however, he did not restrict the influence and power of demons to these locations.³⁰ Origen believed the nations were created according to the number of angels, and he also believed angels were

²⁶This does not mean the church fathers believed in the modern notion of “territorial spirits.” What is clear, however, is the fact that more than one church father made a connection between the principalities and powers and territorial authority.

²⁷Just. *Dialogue with Trypho* 78 (trans. and ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, rev. A. Cleveland Coxe, ANF 1:333-34).

²⁸Clement of Alexandria *The Stromata* 6.17, trans. W. L. Alexander, in ANF, vol. 2, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1867; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 757.

²⁹Tert. *Apology* 24.8, 25.1-17, 22.8 (trans. Rudolph Arbesmann, Sister Emily Joseph Daly, and Edwin A. Quain, ed. Roy Joseph Defarrari, 77-79, 19).

³⁰Lact. *The Divine Institutes* 2.15 (trans. William Fletcher; ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, ANF 7:93). Minucius Felix claimed that demons lived in temples, but like Justin, he did not restrict the influence demons to particular temples. Min. Fel. *Octavius* 27 (trans. Rudolph Arbesmann, Sister Emily Joseph Daly, and Edwin A. Quain; ed. Roy Joseph Defarrari, 379-80). Cyprian believed that evil spirits lived in statues and consecrated images, but like Justin, Lactantius, and Minucius Felix, he did not restrict the power or influence of these demons to statues and consecrated images. Cyprian *The Treatises of Cyprian* 6.7, trans. Ernest Wallis, in ANF, vol. 5, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, rev. A. Cleveland Coxe (Edinburgh: T&T Clark; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 767.

assigned to particular churches.³¹ Speaking of angelic beings that could be moved to evil, John of Damascus claimed, “They are the guardians of the divisions of the earth; they are set over nations and regions, allotted to them by their Creator.”³²

Response of the Church

In addition to their beliefs about the principalities and powers, several of the early church fathers suggested means of responding to the principalities and powers. This section will show that the church fathers urged believers to respond to the principalities and powers through practicing holiness, proclaiming the gospel, and engaging in power encounters.

Practicing holiness. In *Demonology of the Early Christian World*, Ferguson explains, “To continue in prayer is prominent in the instructions given to Christians concerning what will keep them from the deceitful demons and enable them to remain blameless.”³³ Two of the greatest thinkers of the early church, Athanasius and Augustine, stressed the importance of holiness in standing against the principalities and powers. Athanasius admitted that the principalities and powers were real beings whose

³¹Or. *De Principiis* 1.5.1-2, 1.8.1 (trans Frederick Crombie, ed. A. Cleveland Coxe, ANF 4:392, 404).

³²Jo. Dam. *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* 2.3 (trans. S. D. F. Salmond, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, NPNF2 9:457-59). John also argued that the angelic powers that guard the earth are part of the innumerable host of angels that fell with Satan. *Ibid.*, 2.4 (9:459-60).

³³Ferguson, *Demonology of the Early Christian World*, 128. Chuck Lowe agrees. He explains that the church fathers entrusted themselves to “the purity of holy living.” Lowe, *Territorial Spirits and World Evangelisation*, 93. Erwin Van Der Meer writes that the church fathers devoted themselves to worship, prayer, and discipline.

number and nature could be endlessly debated, but he maintained that it was most important for believers to recognize their wiles. He wrote,

For we have terrible and crafty foes – the evil spirits – and against them we wrestle, as the Apostle said, ‘Not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities and against the powers, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.’ Great is their number in the air around us, and they are not far from us. Now there are a great many distinctions among them; and concerning their nature and distinctions much could be said, but such a description is for others of greater powers than we possess. *But at this time it is pressing and necessary for us only to know their wiles against ourselves* [italics mine].³⁴

Augustine agreed that understanding the devices of the principalities and powers was more important than understanding their nature and number. Thus, he emphasized the importance of believers practicing holiness in response to the wicked principalities and powers. He wrote,

It is by true piety that men of God cast out the hostile power of the air which opposes godliness; it is by exorcising it, not by propitiating it; and they overcome all the temptations of the adversary by praying, not to him, but to their own God against him. For the devil cannot conquer or subdue any but those who are in league with sin.³⁵

Likewise, Origen argued that demonic beings “have no power over those who ‘have put on the whole armour of God,’ who have received strength to ‘withstand the wiles of the devil,’ and who are ever engaged in contests with them.”³⁶

Erwin Van Der Meer, “Reflections on Spiritual Mapping,” *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* 20 (2001): 53.

³⁴Ath. *Life of Anthony* 21 (trans. H. Ellershaw, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, NPNF 4:425).

³⁵Aug. *City of God* 10.22 (trans. Marcus Dods, ed. Philip Schaff, NPNF 2:281).

³⁶Origen *Against Celsus* 8.34, trans. Frederick Crombie, in ANF, vol. 4, ed. A.

Proclaiming the gospel. The early Christians also responded to the principalities and powers with the bold proclamation of the gospel. Ferguson writes, “The preaching of the gospel of Christ was the means of pushing back the realm of evil . . . and the demons were left inoperative when Christians resisted their temptations.”³⁷

Augustine discussed the power of the gospel for believers when he wrote,

For the devil cannot conquer or subdue any but those who are in league with sin; and therefore he is conquered in the name of Him who assumed humanity, and that without sin, that Himself being both Priest and Sacrifice, He might bring about the remission of sins, that is to say, might bring it about through the Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, by whom we are reconciled to God, the cleansing from sin being accomplished.³⁸

Similarly, Origen insisted, “For it is not by incantations that Christians seem to prevail (over evil spirits), but by the name of Jesus, accompanied by the announcement of the narratives which relate to Him.”³⁹

Regrettably, some believers in the early church period allowed the gospel to become syncretized with magic, and this syncretism eventually became part of the early church’s response to the principalities and powers. Ferguson explains, “The line separating Christian practice from magic was not as clear as some of the literary sources would claim. Many Christians used the sign of the cross and amulets to ward off evil

Cleveland Coxe (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1885; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 1004.

³⁷Ferguson, “Demons,” 261.

³⁸Aug. *City of God* 10.22 (trans. Marcus Dods; ed. Philip Schaff, NPNF 2:281).

³⁹Or. *Against Celsus* 1.6 (trans. Frederick Crombie; ed. A. Cleveland Coxe, ANF 4:589).

spirits.”⁴⁰ Elsewhere Ferguson suggests that sometime during the fourth century Christians began to make a connection between the relics of the martyrs and power over demons.⁴¹ Stephen Benko and Kelly agree with Ferguson’s claim that syncretism occurred between the gospel and magic. They explain that the early Christians also sought protection from the principalities and powers through objects, formulas, words, and especially baptism.⁴²

Engaging in power encounters. Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the early church’s response to the principalities and powers was the prevalence of power encounters.⁴³ The early church fathers never shied away from power encounters with the evil principalities and powers. Ramsay MacMullen argues that these power encounters were crucial to the conversion of pagans, and he suggests that historians ought to attach as much importance to power encounters as did the early church fathers.⁴⁴ Everett Ferguson agrees, and contends, “In a world that was very conscious of supernatural

⁴⁰Ferguson, “Demons,” 261.

⁴¹Everett Ferguson, *Church History: From Christ to Pre-Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 242.

⁴²Stephen Benko, *Pagan Rome and the Early Christians* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 118-31. Kelly, *The Devil at Baptism*, 106-07.

⁴³In *How to Have a Healing Ministry without Making Your Church Sick*, C. Peter Wagner offers a general definition of “power encounter.” He explains that the term refers to “a visible, practical demonstration that Jesus Christ is more powerful than the spirits, powers or false gods worshiped or feared by the members of a given people group.” C. Peter Wagner, *How to Have a Healing Ministry without Making Your Church Sick* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1988), 150.

⁴⁴Ramsay MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire: A.D. 100-400* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984), 27.

power influencing human life, the Christian claim to offer deliverance from evil spirits was a powerful factor in the growth of the church.”⁴⁵

The actual words of the early church fathers show that the previous statements about the importance of power encounters are not exaggerations. For example, Justin boasted, “We, who believe on our Lord Jesus, who was crucified under Pontius Pilate, when we exorcise all demons and evil spirits, have them subjected to us.”⁴⁶ Origen insisted that the name of Jesus was powerful enough to drive out demons, and he maintained that the principalities and powers had no power over believers.⁴⁷ Going beyond mere words, the lives and ministries of Martin of Tours, Gregory the

⁴⁵Ferguson, “Demons,” 261. Green agrees with MacMullen and Ferguson. Writing about the powerful preaching of the early evangelists, he insists, “But there was another dimension to this power. It involved healings and exorcisms, and this was a factor of incalculable importance for the advance of the gospel in a world which had inadequate medical services and was oppressed with belief in demon forces of every kind.” Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, 263.

⁴⁶Just. *Dialogue with Trypho* 76 (trans. and ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, rev. A. Cleveland Coxe, ANF 1:331). Irenaeus echoed Justin when he wrote, “For some do certainly and truly drive out devils.” Irenaeus *Against Heresies* 2.32.4, trans. and ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, rev. A. Cleveland Coxe, in ANF, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1867; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 588. Tertullian argued that demons were powerless in the presence of Christians. Tert. *Apology* 23.7-10 (trans. Rudolph Arbesmann, Sister Emily Joseph Daly, and Edwin A. Quain; ed. Roy Joseph Defarrari, 72-73). Minucius Felix claimed that demons, who were pagan gods, were cast out by Christians and forced to admit their true identity. Min. Fel. *Octavius* 27 (trans. Rudolph Arbesmann, Sister Emily Joseph Daly, and Edwin A. Quain; ed. Roy Joseph Defarrari, 380-81). Athanasius also claimed that Christ was expelling demons through the power of his name. Athanasius *On the Incarnation of the Word* 1.32, trans. and ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, in NPNF2, vol. 4 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1891; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 216.

⁴⁷Or. *Against Celsus* 1.6, 8.34 (trans. Frederick Crombie; ed. A. Cleveland Coxe, ANF 4:589, 1004).

Wonderworker, and Benedict of Nursia displayed the early church's willingness to engage in power encounters with the principalities and powers.⁴⁸

Summary

In summary, the church fathers understood the principalities and powers to be personal, spiritual beings. At times they spoke of holy principalities and powers, but they also acknowledged evil principalities and powers. The church fathers understood all of the principalities and powers to be created beings. Many church fathers freely equated the principalities and powers with pagan gods, and several cautiously recognized their territorial authority. While they argued that there were different ranks among the principalities and powers, the church fathers did not speculate about specific hierarchies.

In response to the principalities and powers, the church fathers advocated the practice of holiness and the proclamation of the gospel. At times superstition and magic became syncretized with the message and symbols of the gospel. Additionally, the early

⁴⁸For accounts of Martin's demolishing pagan temples, cutting down sacred pine trees, and exorcising demons, see Sulpitius Severus *On the Life of St. Martin* 13, 14, 17, 18, trans. Alexander Roberts, in NPNF2, vol. 11, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1894; reprint, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1975), 15-19; MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire*, 61-62; Arnold, *Three Crucial Questions about Spiritual Warfare*, 170-72; and Alban Butler, *The Lives of the Fathers, Martyrs and Other Principal Saints* (London: Virtue and Company Limited, 1936), 5:1409. For accounts of Gregory's power encounters, see Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, 268; MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire*, 61; Arnold, *Three Crucial Questions about Spiritual Warfare*, 170-72; and W. Telfer, "The Latin Life of St. Gregory Thaumaturgus," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 31 (1930): 142-55, 354-63. For accounts of Benedict's destroying a pagan temple, smashing an idol of Apollo, burning sacred woods, and building Monte Cassino, see Hugh Edmond Ford, "Benedict of Nursia," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 2, ed. Charles Herbermann (New York: Robert Appleton, 1907), 471; Theodore Maynard, *Saint Benedict and His Monks* (London: Staples, 1956), 36-42; and Ildephonse Schuster, *Saint Benedict and His Times* (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1951), 140-84.

church fathers were willing to engage in power encounters with the principalities and powers.

The Medieval Period

The accepted worldview of the early church period remained dominant into the medieval period. In fact, enough similarities exist between the two periods that some scholars treat them together.⁴⁹ David Keck explains, “The Middle Ages inherited the early church’s readings of the angels of the Bible, and what is perhaps most striking is the basic continuity between the two eras.”⁵⁰ While similarities do exist, there are enough differences to warrant a section that deals with the predominant interpretations of and responses to the principalities and powers during the medieval period.⁵¹

Identity of the Principalities and Powers

There were many medieval scholars who wrote about angels, demons, and the principalities and powers, including, but not limited to, Gregory the Great, Anselm, Bernard of Clairvaux, Bonaventure, and Jacobus de Voragine. However, the two most influential medieval scholars on this topic were Pseudo-Dionysius and Thomas Aquinas.⁵² The work of Pseudo-Dionysius marked the transition between the early

⁴⁹For example, see Lowe, *Territorial Spirits and World Evangelisation*, 85-88.

⁵⁰David Keck, *Angels and Angelology in the Middle Ages* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 13.

⁵¹Church historians generally agree that the medieval period can be dated approximately A.D. 500-1500. Donald Logan and Lightner both use these dates. See Donald Logan, *A History of the Church in the Middle Ages* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 13; Lightner, *Angels, Satan, and Demons*, 11.

⁵²Garrett suggests that Pseudo-Dionysius’ *The Celestial Hierarchies* is “the

church period and the medieval period with respect to the principalities and powers.⁵³

The work of Aquinas marked the culmination of the medieval thought on angels, demons, and the principalities and powers.⁵⁴ Thus, by focusing on the work of these two men, this section will show that the medieval church tended to interpret the principalities and powers as holy angels. Additionally, this section will discuss the medieval beliefs about spirit hierarchies and guardian spirits.

Creatures. As was the case during the early church period, there was

mother of Christian angelphilia.” He also points out that Aquinas accepted the traditional hierarchy as first enumerated by Pseudo-Dionysius. Garrett, *Angels and the New Spirituality*, 83. Lowe argues that Pseudo-Dionysius’ hierarchy of angelic beings was the most popular. Lowe, *Territorial Spirits and World Evangelisation*, 90. Stephen Noll argues that Pseudo-Dionysius was “the patron of angelology for both East and West.” Noll also suggests that the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius were “granted virtual apostolic authority until the late Middle Ages.” Stephen F. Noll, “Thinking about Angels,” in *The Unseen World*, ed. Anthony N. S. Lane (Grand Rapids: Paternoster, 1996), 5-6. Lightner insists that Aquinas offered “the greatest contribution to the study of angels in the medieval period.” In his study, Lightner includes Pseudo-Dionysius in the early church period. Lightner, *Angels, Satan, and Demons*, 11. Millard Erickson writes, “Medieval Christianity engaged in extensive discussion about angels. The major impetus was provided by the work of a pseudonymous fifth or sixth-century writer claiming to be Dionysius the Areopagite, who had been converted by Paul in Athens.” Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 459. For the importance of Aquinas, see footnote 53.

⁵³During the medieval period, the church believed that the works of Pseudo-Dionysius were written by Paul’s Athenian convert Dionysius the Areopagite (Acts 17:16-24). Today, however, most scholars believe that the works of Pseudo-Dionysius should be attributed to an anonymous Syrian monk who wrote in the fifth or sixth century. See Garrett, *Angels and the New Spirituality*, 82; Keck, *Angels and Angelology in the Middle Ages*, 55; Stephen F. Noll, “Thinking about Angels,” 6; Theodora Ward, *Men and Angels* (New York: Viking, 1969), 106; and Russell, *Lucifer*, 29.

⁵⁴Noll describes the importance of Aquinas: “Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), the ‘angelic doctor’, offers the grand synthesis of classical angelology, harmonizing Biblical and traditional proof texts.” Noll, “Thinking about Angels,” 5-7. Reid insists that Aquinas was the main exponent of scholasticism. Reid, *Strategic Level Spiritual Warfare*, 91. Bamberger contends Aquinas is “regarded by the Catholic Church as the authoritative expositor of its philosophy and theology.” Bamberger, *Fallen Angels*, 203.

widespread belief in angelic and demonic beings during the medieval period. Ward explains, “Everyone, from princes to peasants, believed in demons and attributed to them, under the power of Satan, most evil happenings.”⁵⁵ Not only did most people believe in angels and demons, but most people also understood that angels and demons were created beings.⁵⁶ Pseudo-Dionysius insisted, “One truth must be affirmed above all else. It is that the transcendent Deity has out of goodness established the existence of everything and brought it into being.”⁵⁷ The dominant theological voice from the medieval period was Aquinas, and he clearly believed that angelic beings existed because they were created by God.⁵⁸ As Keck explains, Aquinas spoke for the majority of medieval scholars on the issue of creation:

On these most important issues concerning the creation and the angels – that angels are created by God and that God alone is to be considered a creator in the sense of bringing something into existence ex-nihilo – Christians theologians of the medieval period did not differ from each other or from the orthodox patristic consensus.⁵⁹

⁵⁵Ward, *Men and Angels*, 105-06. Both on the popular and scholarly levels, it seems Ward is much closer to the truth on this issue than Lightner who argues, “Compared with the ancient period, there was little sustained interest in angels on the scholarly level in the Middle Ages.” Lightner, *Angels, Satan, and Demons*, 11.

⁵⁶Keck, *Angels and Angelology in the Middle Ages*, 20.

⁵⁷Pseudo-Dionysius *The Celestial Hierarchy* 4.1, ed. John Farina, trans. Colm Luibheid, in *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works* (New York: Paulist, 1987), 156. Anselm and Bonaventure agreed that all angelic and demonic beings were created by God. Anselm *On the Fall of the Devil* 1, ed. and trans. by Thomas Williams, in *Anselm: Basic Writings* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2007), 169. Bonaventure *Breviloquium* 2.7.1, trans. Erwin Esser Nemmers (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1946), 62-63.

⁵⁸Thomas Aquinas *Summa Theologica* 1.61.1, 1.61.3, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benzinger Brothers, Inc., 1947), 302-03.

⁵⁹Keck, *Angels and Angelology in the Middle Ages*, 20.

Aquinas further argued that the angels, as created beings, were not omnipresent or omniscient.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, Aquinas insisted that the angels had been endowed by their creator with free will.⁶¹ He explained that the angels were created good, that some became evil through sin, and that the demons who fell were unchangeably evil.⁶² This was also the view of Anselm, Bonaventure, and Gregory the Great.⁶³ According to Aquinas and the medieval theologians, these created beings, some who remained holy and some who fell into sin, were numerous, incorporeal, and intelligent.⁶⁴ Those who had fallen into sin, it was believed, could transform themselves into any form, and they were responsible for sexual violation, mental and physical illness, lost children, unexplainable attacks, possession, and haunting.⁶⁵

⁶⁰Aquinas *Summa Theologica* 1.52.2, 1.53.3, 1.55.3, 1.57.2, 1.57.4 (trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 268, 272, 279, 285-86). Also see Thomas Aquinas *Truth* 8.12, 8.13, trans. Robert W. Mulligan (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1952), 1:310.

⁶¹Aquinas *Summa Theologica* 1.59.1, 1.59.3 (trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 294-95).

⁶²*Ibid.*, 1.63.4, 1.63.9, 1.64.1, 1.64.2 (314-21).

⁶³Anselm argued that the fallen angels could only be reconciled by a God-angel, and he insisted that the death of the God-man could not reconcile angelic beings. Anselm *Why God Became Man* 2.21, ed. Brian Davies and G. R. Evans, trans. Janet Fairweather, in *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 354. Anselm discussed the angelic fall at length in *On the Fall of the Devil*. Anselm *On the Fall of the Devil* 2-3, 5-6 (ed. and trans. by Thomas Williams, 171-81). Bonaventure *Breviloquium* 2.6.2, 2.7.4 (trans. Erwin Esser Nemmers, 61, 64). Homes F. Dudden, *Gregory the Great: His Place in History and Thought*, vol. 2 (New York: Russell and Russell, 1905), 364.

⁶⁴Aquinas *Summa Theologica* 1.50.1, 1.50.3 (trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 259, 262).

⁶⁵Ward, *Men and Angels*, 107. Russell, *The Prince of Darkness*, 115.

Hierarchies. It is widely recognized that the medieval theologians devoted much time to hierarchies of heavenly beings, and it is widely recognized that the standard hierarchy was first developed by Pseudo-Dionysius.⁶⁶ Garrett explains, “Pseudo-Dionysius’ pecking order is the most famous and imitated,” and he states that Aquinas accepted the nine-leveled hierarchy of Pseudo-Dionysius.⁶⁷

In *The Celestial Hierarchy*, Pseudo-Dionysius offered the following explanation for his hierarchy: “The word of God has provided nine explanatory designations for the heavenly beings, and my own sacred initiator has divided these into three threefold groups.”⁶⁸ His first group of three consists of seraphim, cherubim, and thrones; his second group of three consists of powers, dominions, and authorities; and his third group of three consists of principalities, archangels, and angels.⁶⁹

Throughout the rest of the medieval period, the hierarchy of Pseudo-Dionysius would be formative for most theologians.⁷⁰ In the eleventh century, Bernard of Clairvaux not only replicated Pseudo-Dionysius’ hierarchy, but he also explained the distinctive

⁶⁶Lowe, *Territorial Spirits and World Evangelisation*, 90.

⁶⁷Garrett, *Angels and the New Spirituality*, 84, 88.

⁶⁸Pseudo-Dionysius *The Celestial Hierarchy* 6.2 (ed. John Farina; trans. Colm Luibheid, 160).

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, 6.2 (160-61).

⁷⁰Keck explains the influence of this hierarchy: “The renewed study of Pseudo-Dionysius and his *Celestial Hierarchy* that began in the middle of the twelfth century provided medieval Christendom with an even greater authority for discussing hierarchies. Because of their studies of their Areopagite’s extensive reflections on these spirits, Hugh of Saint Victor . . . Bonaventure, and Aquinas were able to explore the angelic orders far more confidently than Augustine and Bernard could.” Keck, *Angels and Angelology in the Middle Ages*, 55.

characteristics and responsibilities of each heavenly being.⁷¹ A century later, Bonaventure, whose writing earned him the nickname the “Seraphic Doctor,” wrote voluminously about the importance of Pseudo-Dionysius’ hierarchy.⁷² The preeminent theologian of the medieval period also earned a nickname for his writing on the topic of angelology. Thomas Aquinas, known as the “Angelic Doctor,” accepted Pseudo-Dionysius’ hierarchy.⁷³

While the medieval theologians developed spirit hierarchies, and while they spoke the language of the “principalities and powers,” it must be acknowledged that the medieval hierarchies based on that of Pseudo-Dionysius were focused on angelic beings and not demonic beings. This is not to say that demonology was absent in the medieval period.⁷⁴ However, Ward is correct when she writes, “While the cherubim, seraphim, and

⁷¹Bernard of Clairvaux *On Consideration* 4.7, 4.8, 4.10, 5.11, ed. John Farina, trans. G. R. Evans, in *Bernard of Clairvaux: Selected Works* (New York: Paulist, 1987), 152-57.

⁷²Bonaventure *Breviloquium* 2.8.1, 2.8.3 (64-66). Bonaventure, *The Triple Way, or Love Enkindled*, trans. Jose de Vinck, in *The Works of Bonaventure* (Paterson, NJ: St. Anthony Guild, 1960), 1:61, 93-94. Bonaventure, *Collations on the Six Days* 21.19, 21.20, 21.21, trans. Jose de Vinck, in *The Works of Bonaventure: Cardinal, Seraphic Doctor, and Saint* (Paterson, NJ: St. Anthony Guild, 1960), 331-33.

⁷³Aquinas *Truth* 8.1 (trans. Robert W. Mulligan, 1:310). Jacobus de Voragine was born five years after Aquinas. In his writings, he also duplicated Pseudo-Dionysius’ hierarchy. Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, trans. William Granger Ryan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 1:294. Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, trans. William Granger Ryan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 2:203.

⁷⁴As an example, Gregory the Great had much to say about demons. See Gregory the Great, *Epistle XI*, trans. James Barmby, in NPNF2, vol. 13, ed. Philip Schaff (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1892; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 19; Gregory the Great, *Epistle LXXVI*, trans. James Barmby, in NPNF2, vol. 13, ed. Philip Schaff (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1892; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 132-33.

thrones, the dominions, virtues, and powers, and, closest to man, the principdoms, archangels, and angels remained in their immutable places, the kingdom of Satan contained no such formal organization.”⁷⁵ Noting the influence of Pseudo-Dionysius, Russell suggests, “The Devil did not play a leading role in Dionysius’ thought, and he constructed no evil hierarchy to mirror the heavenly or earthly hierarchies.”⁷⁶ Thus, as far as the principalities and powers are concerned, the focus during the medieval period was on the holy angels.

Guardians. The medieval theologians retained the belief of the early church that angelic and demonic beings possessed some sort of territorial authority. Pseudo-Dionysius wrote, “There is one universal source and it is toward this source that the angels, charged with the sacred and hierarchical direction of each nation, led those willing to follow them. Think of Melchizedek. He was filled with love for God and he was a hierarchy not of false deities but of the true God on high.”⁷⁷ He also spoke about the angel of Egypt and the angel of Babylon that revealed truth to the rulers of these nations.⁷⁸ Keck explains that the medieval belief in angelic territories was based on passages like Deuteronomy 32:8 and Daniel 10.⁷⁹ He also explains that it was the

⁷⁵Ward, *Men and Angels*, 106.

⁷⁶Russell, *Lucifer*, 32.

⁷⁷Pseudo-Dionysius *The Celestial Hierarchy* 9.3 (ed. John Farina; trans. Colm Luibheid, 172).

⁷⁸*Ibid.*, 9.4 (172).

⁷⁹Keck, *Angels and Angelology in the Middle Ages*, 38, 62-63.

principalities who were thought to have authority over the nations of the earth.⁸⁰

A related issue is one that was also found during the early church period. The medieval theologians believed that demons stood behind false teachers and the gods of the nations. Russell writes,

Anything that had been consecrated to the pagan gods became sacred to Satan. Pagan temples were his dwelling places: Christians either pulled them down or sanctified them as churches. Trees, springs, mountains, stiles, caves, and ruins (especially megaliths), groves, streams, and woods were haunts of the Prince of Darkness.⁸¹

Keck adds, “Popular beliefs in the powers of pagan diviners, astrologers, and magicians evoked Christian considerations of angelology because theologians of late antiquity and the early Middle Ages believed that such people derived their powers from demons.”⁸²

While medieval theologians believed in angelic territories and the demonic nature of false religion, they placed more emphasis on the concept of guardian angels.⁸³ Bonaventure claimed that of the nine categories of heavenly beings, it was the lowest ranking “angels” who were “sent for ministration and assigned to the custody of men for whom they minister by purifying, illuminating, and perfecting according to the command

⁸⁰Ibid., 38.

⁸¹Russell, *The Prince of Darkness*, 115.

⁸²Keck, *Angels and Angelology in the Middle Ages*, 18.

⁸³Lowe points out that many medieval theologians believed every visible object had a guardian angel. Lowe, *Territorial Spirits and World Evangelisation*, 87. Keck insists, “Scholastics . . . all agreed that in some way all humans have a guardian angel.” He points to Caesarius and Jacobus as examples of medieval theologians who believed each person had two guardian spirits, one a protecting angel and the other a tempting demon. Keck, *Angels and Angelology in the Middle Ages*, 38, 161.

of the will of God.”⁸⁴ Aquinas articulated the standard position when he explained,

[God] has given his angels charge over you to guard you in all your ways. . . . Because our present life is a sort of road him along which many dangers, internal and external, lie in wait, an angel guard is appointed for each man as long as he is a wayfarer. But when he reaches the end of the road he will no longer have a guardian angel, but either an angel who shares with him the kingdom or a demon punishing him in hell.⁸⁵

Like Aquinas, Jacobus de Voragine assumed that guardian angels will be present at the final judgment.⁸⁶ He asserted that guardian angels help a man progress in grace, keep a man from falling into sin, enable a man to get up when he does fall into sin, and prevent a man from sinning as often.⁸⁷

Response of the Church

The medieval church responded to heavenly beings through three primary means. First, unlike the early church, the medieval church attempted to interact with guardian angels directly through prayer. Second, like the early church, the medieval church engaged in power encounters with demonic beings. Third, to a greater degree than the early church, the medieval church relied on magic and superstition.

Prayer. Since the medieval theologians predominantly viewed the principalities and powers as categories of holy angels, and since the concept of guardian

⁸⁴Bonaventure *Breviloquium* 2.8.1 (trans. Erwin Esser Nemmers, 64-65).

⁸⁵Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 113.1, 113.2, ed. Timothy McDermott, in *Summa Theologiae: A Concise Translation* (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1989), 158.

⁸⁶Jacobus *The Golden Legend* (trans. William Granger Ryan, 1:12).

⁸⁷Jacobus *The Golden Legend* (trans. William Granger Ryan, 2:207-08).

angels was so widespread during the medieval period, it is necessary to consider how the Christians of this period responded to holy angels. Keck has written one of the definitive works on angelology in the medieval period, and he argues, “The belief in these angels led medieval Christians to offer prayers to their personal guardians, and such prayers helped nourish the hope of an intimate relationship with an angel.”⁸⁸ At times, according to Keck, part of this relationship could involve discovering the name of one’s guardian angel. While the church acknowledged the names of only three archangels (Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael) Keck explains, “The history of angelology suggests recurring human desires to communicate with angels more personally.”⁸⁹

Power encounters. Skarsaune and Engelsviken write, “Compared to the ancient church, the numbers of exorcisms and their significance seem to have diminished in the Middle Ages, at least according to our sources.”⁹⁰ While the number of exorcisms and their significance may have declined, exorcisms and power encounters did not disappear during the medieval period. Focusing on exorcism, Keith Thomas writes,

The medieval Church had given theological definition to the doctrines of possession and obsession, but it had also provided a tolerably effective remedy for such complaints. The evil spirit, it said, could be commanded to depart in a formal exorcism conducted by a priest acting in the name of God and the Church.⁹¹

⁸⁸Keck, *Angels and Angelology in the Middle Ages*, 38.

⁸⁹Ibid., 63, 164.

⁹⁰Skarsaune and Engelsviken, “Possession and Exorcism in the History of the Church,” 73.

⁹¹Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1971), 478. Obsession refers to diabolical and demonic attacks from outside one’s body, while possession refers to diabolical and demonic attacks from within one’s body.

Discussing power encounters more generally, Thomas points out,

The claim to supernatural power was an essential element in the Anglo-Saxon Church's fight against paganism, and missionaries did not fail to stress the superiority of Christian prayers to heathen charms. The medieval Church thus found itself saddled with the tradition that the working of miracles was the most efficacious means of demonstrating its monopoly of the truth.⁹²

Perhaps the best example of a missionary engaging in power encounters comes from the eighth century. Alban Butler, describing one of Boniface's many power encounters, wrote, "The saint, returning to his mission in Hesse, continued his spiritual conquests, and cut down a tall oak consecrated to Jupiter, the timber of which he employed in building a chapel in honour of the prince of the apostles."⁹³ Kenneth Scott Latourette described a similar story. He explained that in A.D. 723, after being consecrated a bishop and sent back to Germany, Boniface began to cut down the sacred oak of Thor. Before he could finish, a great wind blew the tree down, and the people became convinced of the power of Boniface's God.⁹⁴ Latourette offers the following conclusion about Boniface's life and ministry: "He seems to have met with marked success, for we read that he baptized many thousands, destroyed temples, and built churches."⁹⁵

⁹²Ibid., 26.

⁹³Alban Butler, *The Lives of the Fathers, Martyrs and Other Principal Saints* (London: Virtue and Company, 1936) 2:600.

⁹⁴Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity: The Thousand Years of Uncertainty AD 500-AD 1500* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1938), 2:92.

⁹⁵Ibid., 98. It should be noted that there is a significant difference between the types of power encounters one sees in the ministry of Boniface and the types of power encounters being advocated by C. Peter Wagner and others within the third wave. While

Magic. While power encounters and exorcism continued to a degree in the medieval period, some have described the primary mode of responding to demonic beings as magic. As Bamberger observes, “During the Middle Ages, superstitious practice became somewhat more open and respectable.”⁹⁶

These magical and superstitious practices took a variety of forms. Van Der Meer notes, “The devil and his evil spirits felt very real to believers in this period and they tried to ward these off by making the sign of the cross. . . . Generally, the response of the church to the demonic in this period may have been marked more by gross superstition and speculation.”⁹⁷ Lowe points to the prayer marches of the medieval church, particularly those that took place on the day of Rogations. He states, “On the day of Rogations, priests would lead processions around the borders of the fields, carrying a cross, banners and bells, in order to drive away evil spirits and to ensure high crop yields.”⁹⁸

Probably the most helpful treatment of superstition and magic as a response to the demonic in the medieval period is *Religion and the Decline of Magic* by Thomas. He

Boniface’s power encounters tended to center on the alleged power of sacred objects or places, the power encounters of the third wave center on healing the sick, casting out demons, and strategic-level spiritual warfare. For Wagner’s description of power encounters from a third wave perspective, see Wagner, *How to Have a Healing Ministry*, 26, 31, 65-90, 179-206. Wagner’s position on strategic-level spiritual warfare is discussed in the following chapter.

⁹⁶Bamberger, *Fallen Angels*, 211.

⁹⁷Van Der Meer, “Reflections on Spiritual Mapping,” 54.

⁹⁸Lowe, *Territorial Spirits and World Evangelisation*, 92. Thomas also discusses the prayer marches of the medieval church. Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 62-63.

notes the use of such objects as holy water, amulets, talismans, charms, and holy relics.⁹⁹ With respect to the use of holy water, Thomas writes, “The Devil, it was agreed, was allergic to holy water, and wherever his influence was suspected it was an appropriate remedy.”¹⁰⁰ With respect to the use of charms, Thomas writes, “The medieval Church thus did a great deal to weaken the fundamental distinction between a prayer and a charm, and to encourage the idea that there was virtue in the mere repetition of words.”¹⁰¹ Thus, the medieval church turned to magic and superstition in responding to demonic powers.

Summary

Reflecting on the angelology and demonology of the medieval period, Schemm observes, “If Dionysius was the major influence on the angelology for the early medieval period, then Thomas Aquinas . . . was the high point of speculative angelology.”¹⁰²

Influenced largely by Pseudo-Dionysius and Aquinas, the theologians of the medieval

⁹⁹Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 30-31.

¹⁰⁰*Ibid.*, 30.

¹⁰¹*Ibid.*, 42. While not related to the church’s response to the principalities and powers or demonic beings in general, Thomas makes an insightful observation about magic, superstition, and the Mass. He writes, “But it was above all in connection with the sacraments of the Church that such beliefs arose. The Mass, in particular, was associated with magical power and for this, it must be said, the teaching of the Church was at least indirectly responsible. During the long history of the Christian Church the sacrament of the altar had undergone a process of theological reinterpretation. By the later Middle Ages the general effect had been to shift the emphasis away from the communion of the faithful, and to place it upon the formal consecration of the elements by the priest. The ceremony thus acquired in the popular mind a mechanical efficacy in which the operative factor was not the participation of the congregation, who had become virtual spectators, but the special power of the priest.” *Ibid.*, 33.

¹⁰²Schemm, “The Agents of God,” 315.

period did not dramatically alter the basic interpretation of angels, demons, principalities, and powers that they inherited from the early church. While the medieval theologians tended to interpret the principalities and powers as holy angels, they also retained an awareness of the demonic realm.

Also noteworthy is the fact that emphasis was increasingly placed on the guardian nature of angels instead of the territorial nature of angels. In response to the angelic and demonic beings that inhabited their world, the medieval church sought to communicate with guardian angels and, to a degree, engage in power encounters with demonic powers. Above all, the church allowed the gospel to be syncretized with magic and superstition. As Thomas writes, “By the early Middle Ages the ecclesiastical authorities had developed a comprehensive range of formulae designed to draw down God’s practical blessing upon secular activities.”¹⁰³

The Reformation Period

Skarsaune and Engelsviken argue, “The Reformation did not significantly alter the worldview of the Middle Ages.”¹⁰⁴ Because the fundamental worldview did not change, the general interpretation of angels, demons, principalities, and powers was not significantly different than that of the early church and the medieval period. However, as this section will show, the church’s willingness to speculate about the nature of the principalities and powers diminished greatly, and the church’s response to the principalities and powers changed drastically.

¹⁰³Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 29.

¹⁰⁴Skarsaune and Engelsviken, “Possession and Exorcism in the History of the Church,” 76.

Identity of the Principalities and Powers

Martin Luther and John Calvin set the tone for the prevailing approach to angels, demons, and the principalities and powers during the Reformation.¹⁰⁵ This section will focus on their work, but it will also show how some of their successors carried on the interpretations and approaches of the Reformation period.

Speculation. The most remarkable aspect of the Reformers' approach to angelology, demonology, and satanology was an absolute refusal to engage in theological speculation.¹⁰⁶ Thus, before their interpretation of and approach to the principalities are presented, it is vital to understand their theological method.

Luther plainly articulated his thoughts about speculative theology when he wrote, "Speculative theology belongs to the devil in hell."¹⁰⁷ Calvin agreed with Luther

¹⁰⁵Schemm argues that Martin Luther (1483-1546) and John Calvin (1509-1564) were "two of the most significant figures of the Reformation period." Schemm, "Agents of God," 319. In his historical treatment of the Reformation period, Lowe considers Luther, Calvin, and John Wesley. Lowe, *Territorial Spirits and World Evangelisation*, 85-102. Reid's approach is similar to Lowe's. He considers Luther and Calvin as representatives of the Reformation period, and he also shows that the Puritans and the Methodists adopted similar interpretations of and approaches to angels, demons, and the principalities and powers. Reid, *Strategic Level Spiritual Warfare*, 92-96. Russell argues, "Martin Luther . . . devoted more theological and personal concern to the Devil than anyone else since the desert fathers." He also argues that John Calvin was "the second greatest Protestant reformer." Russell, *The Prince of Darkness*, 170, 173. Bamberger's comments are applicable here. He explains, "We need not examine tediously all that the Reformers wrote on the subject. It will be sufficient to refer to John Calvin – next to Luther, the most influential of the early Protestant leaders." Bamberger, *Fallen Angels*, 223.

¹⁰⁶For discussions about the Reformers' refusal to speculate about angelology and demonology, see Schemm, "The Agents of God," 317; Reid, *Strategic Level Spiritual Warfare*, 92; Lowe, *Territorial Spirits and World Evangelisation*, 94, 97-98; Noll, *Angels of Light, Powers of Darkness*, 18; and Garrett, *Angels and the New Spirituality*, 90.

¹⁰⁷Martin Luther, *Table Talk*, trans. Theodore G. Tappert, in *Luther's Works*,

on this issue, and he urged caution with speculation about the nature, hierarchy, and number of angelic beings.¹⁰⁸ Based on Daniel 10, Calvin was willing to advocate the concept of angelic territories, but he pled ignorance on the issue of guardian angels.¹⁰⁹

Wesley carried on the Reformation reserve when he wrote, “Of angels, indeed, we know nothing with any certainty but by revelation.”¹¹⁰

When the Reformers decried the practice of speculative theology, they rightly placed the blame on Pseudo-Dionysius. Luther insisted, “The mystical theology of Dionysius is nothing but trumpery.”¹¹¹ Luther also argued,

To speak more boldly, it greatly displeases me to assign such importance to this Dionysius, whoever he may have been, for he shows hardly any signs of solid learning. I would ask, by what authority and with what arguments does he prove his hodge-podge about the angels in his *Celestial Hierarchy* – a book over which many curious and superstitious spirits have cudged their brains?¹¹²

In the end, Luther boldly insisted that Dionysius deserved to be ridiculed for

ed. Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967), 54:22.

¹⁰⁸John Calvin *Institutio Christianae Religionis* [1559] 1.14.4, 1.14.8, in vol. 1 of *Ioannis Calvini Opera quae supersunt omnia*, ed. Guilielmus Baum, Eduardus Cunitz, and Eduardus Reuss, *Corpus Refomatorum* [CR], vol. 30 (Halle: C.A. Schwetschke, 1864; reprint, New York: Johnston reprint Corp., 1964), 1100; trans Ford Lewis Battles, under the title *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, *Library of Christian Classics* [LCC], vols. 20-21 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 164, 168-69.

¹⁰⁹*Ibid.*, 1.14.7 (trans. Battles, LCC 1:167).

¹¹⁰John Wesley, “Of Evil Angels,” in *The Works of John Wesley* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1958), 6:370.

¹¹¹Luther, *Table Talk*, in *Luther’s Works* (1967): 54:112.

¹¹²Martin Luther, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, trans. A. T. W. Steinhauser, in *Luther’s Works*, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1959), 36:109.

his speculative theology.¹¹³ Calvin, while not willing to ridicule Dionysius, did acknowledge deficiencies in his speculative approach. In his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Calvin stated,

No one will deny that Dionysius, whoever he was, subtly and skillfully discussed many matters in his *Celestial Hierarchy*. But if anyone examines it more closely, he will find it for the most part nothing but talk. The theologian's task is not to divert the ears with chatter, but to strengthen consciences by teaching things true, sure, and profitable.¹¹⁴

Creatures. Martin Luther did not devote much space to his interpretation of angelic and demonic beings, but he did believe they existed. In fact, Luther freely acknowledged his interactions with Satan and his demons.¹¹⁵ Luther also acknowledged that at times Paul used the terminology of the principalities and powers to refer to demonic beings. In *Lectures on Romans* Luther argued that the principalities of Romans 8:38 referred to fallen angels.¹¹⁶ Additionally, Luther argued that Ephesians 6:12 referred to the devil and his angels.¹¹⁷

¹¹³Martin Luther, *Psalm 90*, trans. Paul. M. Bretscher, in *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia, 1956), 13:110-11.

¹¹⁴John Calvin *Institutio Christianae Religionis* 1.14.4 (trans. Battles, LCC 21: 164).

¹¹⁵Luther, *Table Talk*, in *Luther's Works* (1967): 54:78, 279-80.

¹¹⁶Martin Luther, *Lectures on Romans*, trans. Jacob A. O. Preus, in *Luther's Works*, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1972), 25:78. Luther interpreted Romans 13 as a reference to governmental authorities. *Ibid.*, 25:109. Calvin also interpreted Romans 13 and Titus 3 as references to governmental authorities. See John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, in vol. 21 of *Calvin's Commentaries*, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 324; and John Calvin, *Sermons on the Acts of the Apostles: Chapters 1-7*, trans. Rob Roy McGregor (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2008), 254, 590.

¹¹⁷Martin Luther, "The First Sermon, Mark 9, 1522, Invocavit Sunday," trans.

John Calvin largely agreed with Luther's interpretation of the principalities and powers. Like the church fathers and medieval theologians before him, Calvin insisted that the angels were created by God.¹¹⁸ While Calvin rejected the speculations of the medieval period, he followed the medieval tendency to interpret the principalities and powers as holy angels.¹¹⁹ In the *Institutes* he argued that the holy angels "are sometimes called principalities, sometimes powers, sometimes dominions . . . Finally, because in a sense the glory of God resides in them, they are for this reason also called thrones."¹²⁰

While Calvin tended to view the principalities and powers as holy angels, he

John W. Soberstein, in *Luther's Works*, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1959), 51:73. Also see Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, trans. J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnson (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1957), 133. In contrast to the position taken in this dissertation, Luther viewed the "elementary principles" of Galatians and Colossians as references to the law of God and the traditions of men. Martin Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, trans. Erasmus Middleton, ed. John Prince Fallows (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1979), 228. For Calvin's interpretation of the "elementary principles," see John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians*, in vol. 21 of *Calvin's Commentaries*, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 117; idem, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*, in vol. 21 of *Calvin's Commentaries*, trans. John Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 181.

¹¹⁸John Calvin *Institutio Christianae Religionis* 1.14.3 (trans. Battles, LCC 21:162).

¹¹⁹Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians*, 216, 255. Idem, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*, 150-51. Idem, *Commentary on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, in vol. 20 of *Calvin's Commentaries*, trans. John Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 27. Idem, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, in vol. 19 of *Calvin's Commentaries*, trans. John Owen (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 330. Idem, *Sermons on the Acts of the Apostles*, 238. Idem, *Sermons on Galatians*, trans. Kathy Childress (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1997), 89.

¹²⁰John Calvin *Institutio Christianae Religionis* 1.14.5 (trans. Battles, LCC 21:166).

did at times interpret the principalities and powers as demonic beings. For example, he interpreted the principalities of Ephesians 6 and Colossians 2 as personal, evil, spiritual beings.¹²¹ Calvin rejected the suggestion that demons were nothing more than inspirations or impulses created in the minds of men by God, and he insisted on a personal interpretation of the demons.¹²² He summarized his own view of the fallen principalities and powers when he wrote, “Let us be content with this brief summary of the nature of devils; they were when first created angels of God, but by degeneration they ruined themselves, and became instruments of ruin for others.”¹²³

Heretics. One final aspect of the Reformer’s interpretation of angels, demons, and the principalities and powers is worth noting. During the Reformation period, there was widespread agreement that the teaching of heretics was demonically inspired. Calvin suggested, “Sometimes Satan is a lying spirit in the mouth of false prophets.”¹²⁴ Luther

¹²¹Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians*, 336. Idem, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*, 190.

¹²²John Calvin *Institutio Christianae Religionis* 1.14.19 (trans. Battles, LCC 21:178).

¹²³Ibid., 1.14.16 (20:175). This interpretation was also held by the successors of the Protestant Reformation. The Puritan William Gurnall interpreted the principalities and powers as personal, evil, spiritual beings. William Gurnall, *The Christian in Complete Armour: Daily Readings in Spiritual Warfare*, ed. James S. Bell, Jr. (Chicago: Moody, 1994). John Wesley also shared Calvin’s position on the fallen principalities and powers. In a sermon titled, “Of Evil Angels,” he wrote, “By divine revelation we are informed, that they were all created holy and happy; yet they did not all continue as they were created: Some kept, but some left, their first estate. The former of these are now good angels; the latter, evil angels.” Wesley also thought Ephesians 6 contained the whole scriptural teaching of evil angels. Wesley, “Of Evil Angels,” 371.

¹²⁴John Calvin, *1, 2 Timothy and Titus*, The Crossway Classic Commentaries (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1998), 67.

usually applied this principle to the pope and the Catholic Church, and he stated the issue more specifically and more forcefully than Calvin. Luther insisted, “You have heard above . . . what a devil’s spirit, blasphemer, instigator of all kinds of idolatry, man of sin, and child of perdition the pope is.”¹²⁵ Elsewhere Luther wrote the following words to the Catholic Church:

You have so many abominable lies and so much false doctrine which you do not wish to abandon – you must further admit that you are not the holy church, but the devil’s church, especially those who uphold the doctrine and compel others to do the same, for they knowingly worship the devil in his lies because they admit that these articles are untrue.¹²⁶

Perhaps Luther stated his position most forcefully when he claimed that the pope was the Antichrist, the devil incarnate.¹²⁷

Response of the Church

Thomas argues, “If the distinction between magic and religion had been blurred by the medieval Church, it was strongly reasserted by the propagandists of the Protestant Reformation.”¹²⁸ This section will show that, instead of syncretism between Christianity and magic, the Reformers tended to rely solely on the power of the gospel

¹²⁵Martin Luther, *Against the Roman Papacy, an Institution of the Devil*, trans. Eric W. Gritsch, in *Luther’s Works*, ed. Helmut Lehmann (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1966), 41:359.

¹²⁶Martin Luther, *Against Hanswurst*, trans. Eric W. Gritsch, in *Luther’s Works*, ed. Helmut Lehmann, trans. Eric W. Gritsch (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 41:224. In the same work Luther insisted that the Anabaptists had become devils. *Ibid.*, 41:242.

¹²⁷Luther, *Table Talk*, in *Luther’s Works* (1967), 54:346-47. Also see Nathan Johnstone, *The Devil and Demonism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 27.

¹²⁸Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 51.

and personal holiness in their struggle against demonic forces.¹²⁹

Proclaiming the gospel. The Reformers argued that any response to the fallen, demonic principalities and powers ought to be rooted in the gospel. They contended that God was absolutely sovereign, and they maintained that the devil and his demons had been routed at the cross. Lowe explains, “Luther counsels confidence: Christians need not fear the devil, and for two reasons. First of all, God is sovereign over him. . . . Secondly, Christ has defeated him on the cross.”¹³⁰ Luther himself insisted that Satan and his demons could be put to flight through the proclamation of the gospel, and he explained that he had personally resisted Satan and his demons by quoting

¹²⁹There is debate concerning the role exorcism played during the Reformation period. Kelly argues that the Lutherans and the Calvinists minimized or did away with exorcism. Kelley, *The Devil, Demonology and Witchcraft*, 83. With respect to Kelly’s claim, “minimized” is probably closer to the truth than “did away with.” Skarsaune and Engelsviken explain, “Luther also holds onto the reality of the demons. He thought that one could and should drive the evil spirits out of the possessed by prayer.” Skarsaune and Engelsviken, “Possession and Exorcism in the History of the Church.” Walter Sundberg notes, “Luther emphasizes exorcism in his baptismal orders of 1523 and 1526. Recognizing that the devil is *princeps mundi* (prince of the world) who owns us at our birth, the order begins by calling on the devil to vacate his property.” Walter Sundberg, “Satan the Enemy,” *Word and World* 28 (2008): 32. In light of the work of Skarsaune, Engelsviken, and Sundberg, it would be wrong to claim the Reformers eliminated the practice of exorcism. However, Kelly is right to point out that the importance of exorcism was minimized during the Reformation period.

¹³⁰Lowe, *Territorial Spirits and World Evangelisation*, 95-96. Reid explains that Calvin shared Luther’s perspective, writing, “With regard to spiritual warfare, he believed in God’s total sovereignty and that, accordingly, the man who trusted in God need not fear the devil.” Reid, *Strategic Level Spiritual Warfare*, 93. Noll also points to the fact that Calvin’s demonology is framed within his belief in God’s sovereignty. Noll, *Angels of Light, Powers of Darkness*, 17-18. These arguments about the importance of God’s sovereignty are consistent with what Luther and Calvin actually wrote. See Martin Luther, *On the Councils and the Church*, trans Eric W. Gritsch, in *Luther’s Works*, ed. Helmut Lehmann (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1966), 41:89; John Calvin *Institutio Christianae Religionis* 1.14.17 (trans. Battles, LCC 21: 175).

Scripture.¹³¹

Specifically, Luther encouraged believers to hold on to the distinction between the law and the gospel, and he emphasized the importance of understanding the person and work of Christ. In *Table Talk* he explained, “It’s the supreme art of the devil that he can make the law out of the gospel. If I can hold on to the distinction between law and gospel, I can say to him any and every time that he should kiss my backside.”¹³² In his *Lectures on Galatians*, Luther counseled, “If you look to this Person, therefore, you see sin, death, the wrath of God, hell, the devil, and all evils conquered and put to death.”¹³³

Calvin also encouraged believers to avoid theological speculation and instead focus on the foundational truths of God’s written Word. He pointed to the example and teaching of Jesus when he argued,

If we would be duly wise, we must leave those empty speculations which idle men have taught apart from God’s Word concerning the nature, orders, and number of angels. I know that many persons more greedily seize upon and take more delight in them than in such things as have been put to daily use. But, if we are not ashamed of being Christ’s disciples, let us not be ashamed to follow that method which he has prescribed. Thus it will come to pass that, content with his teaching, we shall not only abandon but also abhor those utterly empty speculations from which he calls us back. . . . The theologian’s task is not to divert the ears with chatter, but to strengthen consciences by teaching things true, sure, and profitable.¹³⁴

¹³¹Luther, *Table Talk*, in *Luther’s Works* (1967), 54:318, 279-80.

¹³²*Ibid.*, 54:106.

¹³³Martin Luther, *Lectures on Galatians*, ed. and trans. Jaroslav Pelikan, in *Luther’s Works* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1963), 26:282.

¹³⁴John Calvin *Institutio Christianae Religionis* 1.14.4 (trans. Battles, LCC 21:164).

In the face of hostile principalities and powers, Luther and Calvin found comfort in the “true, sure, and profitable” teaching of Scripture, and they pointed God’s people to the biblical truth about God’s sovereignty and Christ’s victory.

Practicing holiness. During the Reformation period, there began to be a greater emphasis on the role of demons in temptation.¹³⁵ In light of this growing emphasis, Reid argues that the Reformers and their successors primarily viewed their response to the principalities and powers in terms of practicing holiness by putting on the armor of God, persisting in prayer, and pursuing a relationship with God.¹³⁶

An examination of Luther’s writing reveals an emphasis on the pursuit of holiness as one of the means by which demonic temptation could be resisted. Luther argued that it was not enough to merely quote Scripture to the devil; instead, he insisted that believers must pray first and pray continually.¹³⁷ Luther also maintained that believers should pray for each other and with each other as they oppose Satan.¹³⁸ Furthermore, he emphasized the Lord’s Supper as one means by which believers could draw closer to God. Luther stated, “It [the Lord’s Supper] produces and strengthens faith, conquers sin, the devil, death, hell, and all evil; it makes us obedient to God.”¹³⁹

¹³⁵Johnstone, *The Devil and Demonism in Early Modern England*, 2.

¹³⁶Reid, *Strategic Level Spiritual Warfare*, 95.

¹³⁷Luther, *Table Talk*, in *Luther’s Works* (1967), 54:105-06.

¹³⁸*Ibid.*, 54:78.

¹³⁹Martin Luther, “That These Words of Christ, ‘This Is My Body,’ etc., Still Stand Firm Against the Fanatics, 1527,” trans. Robert H. Fischer, in *Luther’s Works*, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1961), 37:133.

The writing of Calvin also reveals a recognition of the importance of pursuing holiness through putting on the armor of God, persisting in prayer, and pursuing a relationship with God. Writing about the danger of focusing on supernatural beings instead of on personal holiness, Calvin warned: “The angels must not divert us from directing our gaze to the Lord alone.”¹⁴⁰ Calvin went on to explain that the biblical teaching about demons is not intended to satisfy our curiosity or fuel theological speculation; rather, it is intended to prepare God’s people to resist demonic temptation. He asserted, “All that Scripture teaches concerning devils aims at arousing us to take precaution against their stratagems and contrivances, and also to make us equip ourselves with those weapons which are strong and powerful enough to vanquish these most powerful foes.”¹⁴¹

Wesley carried on the tradition of the Reformers. Like Calvin, he argued that the biblical teaching about demons was intended to prepare God’s people to resist demonic temptation and persist in obedience. Writing about the principalities and powers of Ephesians 6, he commented, “And highly necessary it is that we should well understand what God has revealed concerning them, that they may gain no advantage over us by our ignorance; that we may know how to wrestle against them effectually.”¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰John Calvin *Institutio Christianae Religionis* 1.14.11 (trans. Battles, LCC 21: 171).

¹⁴¹*Ibid.*, 1.14.13 (172-73). *Ibid.*, 1.14.14, 1.14.15 (173-74)

¹⁴²Wesley, “Of Evil Angels,” 371. Elsewhere, Wesley warned, “The devices whereby the subtle god of this world labors to destroy the children of God – or at least to torment whom he cannot destroy, to perplex and hinder them in running the race which is set before them – are numberless as the stars of heaven, or the sand upon the seashore.”

Summary

In summary, the Reformers were less comfortable with theological speculation than their medieval predecessors. Nevertheless, they did not drastically alter the interpretation of the principalities and powers that they inherited. What they did was look exclusively to Scripture for truth. In doing so, they drastically altered the means of responding to the principalities and powers. In the place of power encounters mixed with magic, the Reformers emphasized the proclamation of the gospel as well as the practice of holiness. For Luther and Calvin, holiness involved putting on the armor of God, persisting in prayer, and pursuing a relationship with God.¹⁴³

The Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries

While varying responses to the principalities and powers were proposed during the early church, the medieval period, and the Reformation, all three periods shared an understanding that the principalities and powers were to be interpreted as either angelic or demonic beings. Different interpreters may have viewed the principalities and powers as good or evil, angelic or demonic, but all interpreters viewed the principalities and powers as a subcategory of either angelology or demonology.

John Wesley, "Satan's Devices," in *Classic Sermons on Spiritual Warfare*, ed. Warren W. Wiersbe (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1992), 149.

¹⁴³Luther advocated and practiced other means of resisting the devil and his demons. He acknowledged that a particular woman was disturbed by the devil, and he explained that she drove him away by breaking wind. Luther acknowledged that this was not an example to always be followed. Luther, *Table Talk*, in *Luther's Works* (1967), 54:279-80. Luther also wrote, "But the devil looks for me when I am home in bed, and one or two devils constantly lie in wait for me. They are clever devils. If they can't get anywhere in my heart, they grab my head and torment me there, and when that becomes useless, I'll turn by behind upon them. That's where they belong." *Ibid.*, 54:83.

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries two changes took places.¹⁴⁴

First, the principalities and powers in particular became much more prominent in theological discussions. Second, the predominant interpretation of the principalities and powers changed dramatically. P. T. O'Brien has written about the historical development of the concept of the principalities and powers. He explains,

During the nineteenth century little attention was paid to the principalities and powers as part of Paul's teaching. Statements about the powers were either read as confirmation of the conventional orthodox doctrine about angels and devils, or else they were seen as the last vestiges of an antiquated mythology in Pauline thought with which more enlightened ages need waste no time. . . . If little attention was paid to the powers in Pauline thought during the nineteenth century and early part of the twentieth, then in the 1930s a change occurred. A number of German theologians, after the rise of Nazism, began reading the relevant Pauline texts in a new way.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴Russell makes a similar argument about the history of satanology. He describes his series on the devil with these words: "In this series, *The Devil* took the subject from the earliest times through the period of the New Testament; *Satan* covered early Christianity through the fifth century; *Lucifer* dealt with the Middle Ages. This volume treats the period from the Reformation to the present. Whereas the first three volumes showed the development of a degree of consensus, even in detail, about the concept of the Devil, the fourth volume shows a fragmentation of the tradition." Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Mephistopheles: The Devil in the Modern World* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), 11.

¹⁴⁵P. T. O'Brien, "Principalities and Powers: Opponents of the Church," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 16 (1992): 354-56. This article originally appeared in *Biblical Interpretation and the Church*. Idem, "Principalities and Powers: Opponents of the Church," in *Biblical Interpretation and the Church*, ed. D. A. Carson (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984). It should be noted that O'Brien's article is focused on the end of the nineteenth century to the present. *Ibid.*, 354. Other scholars look farther back into history for the genesis of the interpretive shifts that took place in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Arnold argues that the Enlightenment was pivotal to the changes that took place in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Arnold, *Powers of Darkness*, 170. Noll also writes about the importance of the Enlightenment. Noll, "Thinking about Angels," 13. He even claims, "Angelic beings, not God, were the primary objects of the Enlightenment attack on biblical faith." Noll, *Angels of Light, Powers of Darkness*, 22. Bamberger highlights the importance of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) and Friederich Schleiermacher (1768-1834). Bamberger, *Fallen Angels*, 237. Russell highlights the importance of Rene Descartes (1632-1677), Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677), John Locke

O'Brien goes on to explain that while this hermeneutical shift was underway in Europe as early as the 1930s, it was not until after World War II that the discussion made its way to English speaking contexts.¹⁴⁶ This section will describe the changes that took place during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries with respect to the interpretation of and response to the principalities and powers.

Identity of the Principalities and Powers

Gregory Boyd laments, "Until recently . . . Western culture had been going down a track of increasing secularism. Our perspective of the world had been increasingly colored by materialistic presuppositions, and this had been leaving less and less room for a belief in such things as angels and demons."¹⁴⁷ This increasing secularism is put on display by the history of interpretation of the principalities and powers. However, as the following section will argue, increasing Western secularization did not prevent some interpreters from viewing the principalities and powers as personal, evil, spiritual beings.

Traditional interpretations. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries several prominent preachers, including Charles Spurgeon, George Campbell Morgan, Donald

(1632-1704), and David Hume (1711-1776). Russell, *Mephistopheles*, 128. Paul Hiebert goes back the Cartesian dualism of the sixteenth century. Paul Hiebert, "Spiritual Warfare and Worldview," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 24 (2000): 246.

¹⁴⁶O'Brien, "Principalities and Powers," 362. John Stott makes the same observation in his commentary on Ephesians. John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Ephesians* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 1979), 267.

¹⁴⁷Gregory A. Boyd, *God at War: The Bible and Spiritual Conflict* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), 59.

Grey Barnhouse, and Martyn Lloyd-Jones, offered traditional interpretations of the principalities and powers. That is, they interpreted the principalities and powers as personal, spiritual beings, and for the most part, they interpreted the principalities and powers as evil beings. In *The Invisible War*, Donald Grey Barnhouse wrote,

We are not too closely concerned with the writings of the mystics of the early centuries. The Scripture, themselves, give us definite warrant, however, for the teaching that there is a gradation of power and intelligence, and that some beings of every rank have remained faithful to God and that some of every rank have followed Satan in his rebellion.¹⁴⁸

In sermons dealing with Ephesians 6:12, Charles Spurgeon and George Campbell Morgan both acknowledged that the principalities and powers were demonic beings.¹⁴⁹ Martyn Lloyd-Jones admitted that many people no longer believe in demons; nevertheless, he urged Christians to understand that they wrestle with demonic principalities and powers.¹⁵⁰

While he is best remembered for his contributions to missiology, John Nevius also offered a conservative perspective on demonology.¹⁵¹ In his book *Demon*

¹⁴⁸Donald Grey Barnhouse, *The Invisible War: The Panorama of the Continuing Conflict between Good and Evil* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1965), 128.

¹⁴⁹Charles Spurgeon, *Spiritual Warfare in a Believer's Life*, ed. Robert Hall (Lynnwood, WA: Emerald, 1993), 151; George Campbell Morgan, "The Christian Conflict," in *Classic Sermons on Spiritual Warfare*, ed. Warren W. Wiersbe (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1992), 75.

¹⁵⁰Martyn Lloyd-Jones, "The Call to Battle," in *Classic Sermons on Spiritual Warfare*, ed. Warren W. Wiersbe (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1992), 49.

¹⁵¹David Powlison argues, "Nevius, a Presbyterian missionary to China in the nineteenth century, is often considered the founder the modern practical demonology because of his book *Demon Possession and Allied Themes*. He reported hundreds of cases of demon possession among the Chinese but used the classic mode to deliver

Possession and Allied Themes he wrote,

Actual communication with unseen spirits; their influence on the acts and destinies of individuals and nations; and demon-possession are taught clearly and unmistakably in both the Old and New Testaments. . . . The Bible recognizes not only the material world, but a spiritual world intimately connected with it, and spiritual beings both good and bad, who have access to, and influence for good and ill, the world's inhabitants.¹⁵²

Like his conservative contemporaries Spurgeon, Morgan, Barnhouse, and Lloyd-Jones, Nevius interpreted the principalities and powers as demonic beings.¹⁵³

Other scholars in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries also interpreted the principalities and powers as personal, evil, spiritual beings.¹⁵⁴ One such scholar was Merrill Unger. In his book *Biblical Demonology*, Unger referred to the work of Lewis Sperry Chafer, John Owen, G. Campbell Morgan, A. A. Hodge, and Charles Hodge when he insisted that the demons were evil spirits in rebellion with Satan against God.¹⁵⁵

them.” David Powlison, *Power Encounters: Reclaiming Spiritual Warfare* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 36.

¹⁵²John L. Nevius, *Demon Possession and Allied Themes*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: Fleming H. Revell, 1896), 243.

¹⁵³*Ibid.*, 266.

¹⁵⁴For example, James Gray wrote *Spiritism and the Fallen Angels in Light of the Old and New Testaments*, and he argued that the principalities and powers were essentially demons. James M. Gray, *Spiritism and the Fallen Angels in Light of the Old and New Testaments* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1920), 40-41.

¹⁵⁵Merrill F. Unger, *Biblical Demonology: A Study of Spiritual Forces at Work Today* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1994), 16. There were other conservative treatments of angelology and demonology during this period. One such work, originally published in 1953 and dealing primarily with angelology, was Jean Danielou's *The Angel and Their Mission*. Jean Danilou, *The Angels and Their Mission*, trans. David Heimann (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1988). Another influential work was Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics*. On the issue of angelology, Barth basically adopted the Reformers' refusal to engage in theological speculation. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The*

Unger realized his interpretation of the demonic had fallen out of favor with many theologians, and he fully understood the theological climate of his time. He admitted:

It hardly requires pointing out that the Bible doctrine of a personal devil and demons has met with a great storm of skepticism in recent years. Many, in a boasted age of science and enlightenment, dismiss the Biblical claim as a mere remnant of medieval superstition, or treat the whole matter as an amusing joke. . . . It is also confidently declared that no longer can a respectable scholar be found anywhere who believes in a personal devil or demons.¹⁵⁶

In taking a stance that was amusing to most of his contemporaries, Unger merely pointed to the fact that Scripture consistently speaks as if demons were real, personal, evil, spiritual beings.¹⁵⁷ He also noted, “There is not a hint that Jesus or any of the New Testament writers had the slightest doubt as to the real existence of either Satan or demons. They believed in their reality quite as much as in the existence of God, or of the good angels.”¹⁵⁸ Like many before him, Unger suggested the wicked principalities and powers worked through possession, magic, divination, necromancy, and heresy.¹⁵⁹

Reinterpretations. Despite these conservative voices, the dominant interpretation of the principalities and powers during the nineteenth and twentieth

Doctrine of Creation (London: T&T Clark International, 2004), 3:369-70. Barth argued that the Bible said nothing about, “the ‘nature’ of angels, whether they are persons, or what is their relationship to the physical world and to space, their number and order, their creation, their original unity, their ensuing division into angels and demons, and many other things.” *Ibid.*, 3:410. On the issue of demonology, however, Barth’s theology took a strange turn when he insisted that the devil and demons were not created by God. *Ibid.*, 3:522-23.

¹⁵⁶ Unger, *Biblical Demonology*, 35.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 35-36.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 36.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 77-200.

centuries is best described as a reinterpretation. The man most frequently credited with these reinterpretations is Rudolf Bultmann. Arnold explains,

In the religious academic community the eminent Marburg theologian Rudolf Bultmann has significantly influenced the present generation of scholars. Nurtured in an academic environment that spurned the belief in devils and demons as antiquated and useless for moderns, Bultmann too regarded them as part of the mythical language of the New Testament. For Bultmann, however, myth has an essential role to play in early Christianity because it explained the other world (the divine and spiritual) in terms of this world. Nevertheless, Bultmann considered this prescientific view of the world as obsolete. . . . Many moderns are content merely to discard either the whole New Testament or the statements in the New Testament that allegedly reflect the outmoded mythical view of the world. Bultmann, however, wanted to take the message of the New Testament seriously and sought to find contemporary meaning in the references to the powers. Consequently, Bultmann suggested a program of ‘demythologizing’ Scripture, that is, stripping off the elements of its outmoded worldview as a means of hearing what it has to say for the present day.¹⁶⁰

In *Primitive Christianity in Its Contemporary Setting and Theology of the New Testament*, Bultmann consistently argued that when Paul wrote about the principalities and powers he was using mythical language derived from Gnosticism.¹⁶¹ In *Theology of the New Testament*, he went on to explain, “*Theological propositions* – even those of the New Testament – can never be the *object* of faith; they can only be the *explication* of the understanding which is inherent in faith itself. Being such explication, they are

¹⁶⁰Arnold, *Powers of Darkness*, 170-71. O’Brien, Boyd, Wayne Grudem, and Erickson all highlight the influence of Bultmann and his hermeneutic of demythologization to the debate about angels, demons, and specifically the principalities and powers. See O’Brien, “Principalities and Powers,” 356, 358; Boyd, *God at War*, 59; Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 419; Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 461.

¹⁶¹Bultmann, *Primitive Christianity in Its Contemporary Setting*, 190, 197; idem, *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. Kendrick Grobel (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1951), 1:173, 2:147, 150-52.

determined by the believer's situation and hence are necessarily incomplete."¹⁶²

Bultmann insisted that Scripture containing mythological language must be demythologized. He offered the following description of this process: "If right interpretation of Scripture is to demonstrate the Christianity to which it bears witness to be the rational religion, then this interpretation must peel off everything local and temporal, everything individual and particular, in order to win that which is timelessly general."¹⁶³ In promoting the demythologization of Scripture, Bultmann opened the door for the principalities and powers to be reinterpreted.

Oscar Cullmann was one of the first to walk through the door Bultmann opened. While rejecting Bultmann's demythologization, Cullmann accepted his critical approach to Scripture.¹⁶⁴ The result was a novel interpretation of the principalities and powers. Cullmann argued that Paul had in mind a double reference to both angelic and governmental powers when he wrote about the principalities and powers.¹⁶⁵ In *Christ*

¹⁶²Ibid., 2:237-38. The emphasis in this quotation is in the original.

¹⁶³Ibid., 2:243. It should be noted that Bultmann was not the only voice promoting a hermeneutic of demythologization. Emil Brunner also promoted this approach to Scripture, especially with respect to the angels, demons, and the principalities and powers. He noted, "With the doctrine of angels and devils we enter a theological sphere which bristles with controversial questions. For the Fundamentalist, of course, this subject presents no particular problems. The Bible speaks of angels and of devils; in accordance with the Scripture therefore, we can do so too. But for us *this way* is impossible." Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption*, trans. Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1952), 133. Brunner wrote, "We must be ready to admit that even the Biblical writers were children of their own day and that the world from which they derived their ideas has no authority for our faith." Ibid., 147.

¹⁶⁴Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time: The Primitive Christian Conception of Time and History*, trans. Floyd V. Filson (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1950), 13.

¹⁶⁵O'Brien, "Principalities and Powers," 361.

and *Time* Cullmann insisted, “The actual State authority is thought of as the executive agent of angelic powers.”¹⁶⁶ Elsewhere, in *The State in the New Testament*, Cullmann insisted that Romans 13 and Colossians 2 meant “at once ‘angelic powers’ and ‘State.’”¹⁶⁷ While he did not fully demythologize the principalities and powers, Cullmann did pave the way for other reinterpretations.¹⁶⁸

One such interpretation was offered by Gordon Rupp. Rupp singled out the phrase “principalities and powers,” and he admitted that Paul used the phrase to refer to a vast hierarchy of spiritual beings.¹⁶⁹ Then, without argumentation or rationale, Rupp simply transferred the concept of the principalities and powers to the impersonal forces of history, one of which he identified as the Industrial Revolution.¹⁷⁰ While many scholars followed Rupp’s interpretation of the principalities and powers, the three most influential scholars were Hendrik Berkhof, G. B. Caird, and Heinrich Schlier.

¹⁶⁶Cullmann, *Christ and Time*, 195.

¹⁶⁷Oscar Cullmann, *The State in the New Testament* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1956), 66.

¹⁶⁸G. H. C. Macgregor referred favorably to both Cullmann and Bultmann. Like Cullmann, he suggested that Paul had a double reference in mind when he wrote about the principalities and powers. Like Bultmann, he suggested that the principalities and powers should merely be thought of “as part of the religious symbolism and ideology of the times in which Paul lived.” G. H. C. Macgregor, “Principalities and Powers: The Cosmic Background of Paul’s Thought,” *New Testament Studies* 1 (1954): 19, 22-23, 28. David Little also referred favorably to Cullman and also demythologized the principalities and powers. He pointed to slavery, communities, the law, corporations, age groups, conformity, class, racism, economic systems, and political powers as examples of the principalities and powers. David Little, “Principalities and Powers and the Christian Ethic,” *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 13 (1958): 25-28.

¹⁶⁹O’Brien, “Principalities and Powers,” 363.

¹⁷⁰Gordon Rupp, *Principalities and Powers: Studies in the Christian Conflict*

Berkhof's book *Christ and the Powers* was published in English in 1962, but it was originally written in 1953.¹⁷¹ In this book, Berkhof denied that the principalities and powers represented either angelic and demonic beings or an antiquated mythology.¹⁷² He was certain that Paul had borrowed the terminology of "principalities and powers" from Jewish apocalyptic, but he insisted that Paul used the terms in an entirely different way.¹⁷³ Berkhof explains, "In short, the apocalypses think primarily of the principalities and powers as heavenly angels; Paul sees them as structures of earthly existence."¹⁷⁴ He went on to elaborate,

There are too many difficulties to permit a careful theologian to think of taking seriously all that Paul says as describing the nature and function of angels. The conclusion is obvious; we must set aside the thought that Paul's 'Powers' are angels. Whether they be conceived as persons or as impersonal structures of life and society, they form a category of their own.¹⁷⁵

Thus, Berkhof interpreted the principalities and powers as time, space, life and death, philosophy, the state, politics, class, social struggle, national interest, public opinion, accepted morality, and the ideas of decency, humanity, and democracy.¹⁷⁶

Caird's book *Principalities and Powers* was published in 1956, but the lectures

in History (Nashville: Parthenon, 1952), 114, 130.

¹⁷¹Hendrik Berkhof, *Christ and the Powers*, trans. John Howard Yoder (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1962).

¹⁷²*Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁷³*Ibid.*, 17, 23.

¹⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁷⁵*Ibid.*, 25-26.

¹⁷⁶*Ibid.*, 22, 32-33.

on which the book was based were delivered in 1954.¹⁷⁷ Unlike Berkhof, who credited Paul with demythologizing the principalities and powers, Caird suggested, “Perhaps Cullmann is right in claiming that Paul had both interpretations in mind, and deliberately used terms which could be taken either way.”¹⁷⁸ Caird devoted significant space to this possibility in *Paul’s Letters from Prison*.¹⁷⁹ His exegesis of Colossians 1 typifies his exegesis of the other Pauline passages that refer to the principalities and powers. He wrote: “[Paul] may conceivably have had a mental picture of *thrones, dominions, principalities, and authorities* as angels. But a mental picture is not the same thing as a concept. All that matters is that their names disclose what they represent. They stand for all the various forms of power and authority which pervade the corporate life of man.”¹⁸⁰ Thus, like Berkhof, Caird ended up interpreting the principalities and powers as structures instead of personal, evil, spiritual beings.¹⁸¹

While Schlier’s best known work, *Principalities and Powers in the New Testament*, was not published until 1961, Schlier was one of the first theologians to interpret the principalities and powers not as personal, evil, spiritual beings, but as the

¹⁷⁷G. B. Caird, *Principalities and Powers: A Study in Pauline Theology* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1956).

¹⁷⁸*Ibid.*, 22-23.

¹⁷⁹G. B. Caird, *Paul’s Letters from Prison: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976).

¹⁸⁰*Ibid.*, 178.

¹⁸¹Writing about Caird’s *Principalities and Powers*, Stott states, “I cannot personally approach with any high degree of confidence a work which can refer to Paul’s ‘faulty logic and equally faulty exegesis’, not to mention ‘the insufficiency of Paul’s spurious arguments.’” Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, 269.

atmosphere of the times.¹⁸² According to O'Brien, Schlier was promoting this interpretation as early as the 1930s.¹⁸³ In *Principalities and Powers in the New Testament*, Schlier insisted that the principalities and powers were beings of power.¹⁸⁴ He argued, "The principalities do not merely possess power; they are power, or at any rate it is as power that they exist."¹⁸⁵ As power itself, Schlier argued that the principalities and powers "exercise their being by taking possession of the world as a whole, and of individual men, the elements, political and social institutions, historical conditions and circumstances, spiritual and religious trends."¹⁸⁶ Thus, like so many of his contemporaries, Schlier interpreted the principalities and powers structurally instead of as personal, evil, spiritual beings.

Response of the Church

In light of the differences between the traditional interpretations of the principalities and powers and the reinterpretations offered in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it is not surprising to find different responses to the principalities and powers within this time period. As one would expect, those who interpreted the principalities

¹⁸²Henrich Schlier, *Principalities and Powers in the New Testament* (London: Burns and Oats, 1961).

¹⁸³O'Brien, "Principalities and Powers," 356.

¹⁸⁴Schlier, *Principalities and Powers in the New Testament*, 19.

¹⁸⁵*Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁸⁶*Ibid.*, 67. At other places in the same work Schlier proposed that the principalities and powers manifest themselves in political powers, religion, the hearts of men, pagan gods, the Jewish Law, Christian heresies, the human body, the human spirit, nature, the situations of history, and even the particular 'spirit' of the world, a period, an attitude, a nation, or a locality. *Ibid.*, 24, 26, 28, 31.

and powers as personal, evil, spiritual beings tended to advocate responses that had some historical precedent. These responses included relying on the power of the gospel, practicing holiness, and engaging in power encounters. By way of contrast, those who reinterpreted the principalities and powers tended to advocate responses without historical precedent. Frequently, these responses took the form of political action.

Traditional responses. Conservative preachers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries took seriously the Christian's struggle against the wicked principalities and powers.¹⁸⁷ Like the Reformers and the church fathers, these men looked to the power of the cross when responding to the principalities and powers. Spurgeon's approach was typical. In a sermon on Colossians 2:15, he focused entirely on Christ's victory at Calvary.¹⁸⁸ Specifically, Spurgeon insisted, "The cross is the ground of Christ's ultimate triumph. Christ may be said to have really triumphed there because it was by that one act of His – that one offering of Himself – that He completely

¹⁸⁷Lloyd-Jones wrote these words about Eph 6:10-20: "There is nothing that is more urgently important for all who claim the name of Christian, than to grasp and to understand the teaching of this particular section of Scripture." Lloyd-Jones, "The Call to Battle," 49. Morgan wrote these words about the same passage: "The conflict is between those who share Christ's life, and are preparing for eternal service in the presence of their present responsibility, on the one hand, and all the fallen spirits of the higher worlds, all the hosts of wickedness that rule and inspire and master the things of this world, on the other. Against these massed forces we have to fight: and I am one of those who growingly feel that we need to recognize the adversary, and to be conscious of the fact that our battle is not merely a battle against the weakness we find within." Morgan, "The Christian Conflict," 75-76. Unger cautioned, "The consideration of practical moment, however, as Scriptural reserve reveals, is not whence the demons came, but that they actually *are*, that they are evil and harmful spirit personalities, that in their fellowship there is no safety, and that against them continual warfare must be waged." Unger, *Biblical Demonology*, 40-41.

¹⁸⁸Spurgeon, *Spiritual Warfare in a Believer's Life*, 15-27.

vanquished all His foes.”¹⁸⁹

Spurgeon was also typical in his insistence on the power of the Word of God in the believer’s struggle against the principalities and powers. He warned,

Our warfare is not child’s play: *we shall need a sword*. We have to deal with fierce foes who are to be met only with the best weapons. You may be of a very quiet spirit, but your adversaries are not. If you attempt to play at Christian warfare, they will not. To meet the powers of darkness is no pretend battle. Nothing but your eternal damnation will satisfy the fiendish hearts of Satan and his crew. In this combat, you will have to use a sword such as even evil spirits can feel. If you are to live through this fight and come away victorious, you will be forced to fight at close quarters. The foe aims at the heart and pushes home. A spear will not do, nor a bow and arrow. The enemy is too near for anything but hand-to-hand fighting. And our foes are not only of our house but also of our heart. I find an enemy within that is always near, and I cannot get away from him. Now for the short sword of Holy Scripture, to stab and cut, near and now. No sling and stone will avail us here, but we must take the sword. You have to slay your foe, or your foe will slay you.¹⁹⁰

One conservative scholar who recognized the necessity of engaging in power encounters with demons was John Nevius. Principally, these power encounters took the form of exorcism, and, as Powlison points out, Nevius was the authority on exorcism during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.¹⁹¹ In his book *Demon Possession and Allied Themes*, Nevius tells about dozens of instances of possession and the exorcisms that followed.¹⁹² These anecdotes are reminiscent of the power encounters of the early

¹⁸⁹Ibid., 23. In the same sermon he also reasoned, “If Christ on the cross has spoiled Satan, let us not be afraid to encounter this great enemy of our souls. In all things we must be made like Christ. We must bear our cross, and on that cross we must fight as Christ did with sin and death and hell. Let us not fear. The result of the battle is certain, for as the Lord our Savior has overcome once, even so shall we most surely conquer in Him.” Ibid., 20-21.

¹⁹⁰Ibid., 172.

¹⁹¹Powlison, *Power Encounters*, 36.

¹⁹²Nevius, *Demon Possession and Allied Themes*.

church fathers, and even the power encounters of the book of Acts.

New responses. Since the various reinterpretations of the principalities and powers found their fullest expression in the work of Berkhof, Caird, and Schlier, their work will be the focus of this section. Berkhof argued that Paul himself had demythologized the principalities and powers.¹⁹³ He reasoned that since some of these structures, which were created to connect us to God, were fallen, “The believer’s combat is never to strive *against* the Orders, but rather to battle for God’s intention for them, and against their corruption.”¹⁹⁴ Berkhof was more specific when he wrote:

We can only preach the manifold wisdom of God to Mammon if our life displays that we are joyfully freed from his clutches. To reject nationalism we must begin by no longer recognizing in our own bosoms any difference between peoples. We shall only resist social injustice and the disintegration of community if justice and mercy prevail in our own common life and social differences have lost their power to divide.¹⁹⁵

Like Berkhof, Caird’s interpretation of the powers was structural, and like Cullmann, Caird gave specific attention to the “State.”¹⁹⁶ While Berkhof advocated preaching to, rejecting, and resisting the principalities and powers, Caird advocated submission. He insisted, “The Christian must accept the authority of the state, not seeking in any way to influence or alter its policies.”¹⁹⁷ Caird explained that this kind of

¹⁹³Thomas McAlpine argues this point. Thomas H. McAlpine, *Facing the Powers: What are the Options?* (Monrovia, CA: MARC, 1991), 12.

¹⁹⁴Berkhof, *Christ and the Powers*, 29.

¹⁹⁵*Ibid.*, 51.

¹⁹⁶Caird, *Principalities and Powers*, 22-23.

¹⁹⁷*Ibid.*, 28-29.

submission was an attempt to follow the example of Christ. He reasoned, “It follows, then, that Christ’s method of dealing with evil must be our method also. As ‘men in Christ’ we must be ready to absorb all that the powers of evil can do to us, and to neutralize it with forgiving love.”¹⁹⁸ While he believed Christ-like submission could redeem the fallen principalities and powers, Caird also argued, “The powers can be robbed of their tyrannical influence and brought into their proper subjection to God only in the Cross. The final victory, then, is the Parousia of him who once was crucified.”¹⁹⁹

In contrast to Berkhof and Caird, who suggested resisting the fallen principalities and powers and submitting to the fallen principalities and powers, Schlier emphasized the significance of the church. Schlier viewed the principalities and powers as manifestations of power and domination expressed through structures like politics, religion, nature, and history.²⁰⁰ However, he insisted that the church was the one place and the one institution where the principalities and powers were powerless.²⁰¹ According to Schlier, this powerlessness did not mean the principalities and powers would ignore the church. On the contrary, he recognized, “The New Testament makes it clear that the onslaught of the principalities, while affecting creation generally, has as its supreme objective Jesus Christ and his Church.”²⁰² Like Caird, Schlier insisted that his hope was

¹⁹⁸Ibid., 100.

¹⁹⁹Ibid., 28, 101.

²⁰⁰Schlier, *Principalities and Powers in the New Testament*, 24, 26, 28, 31.

²⁰¹Ibid., 47.

²⁰²Ibid., 52, 68.

ultimately grounded in the victory of the cross and the second coming of Jesus Christ.²⁰³

In the meantime, however, Schlier argued:

The members of the Church who have already been delivered from the principalities in Baptism in Jesus Christ, must resist them the more strongly. Their aim must be to defeat the principalities in faith and loyalty, in works of justice and truth, in unceasing prayer, sober and vigilant, with the gift of the discernment of spirits. They must also endeavor through sacrifice to create in the Church a place free from their domination, as a sign of the new heavens and the new earth which are to come.²⁰⁴

Summary

There was an explosion of interest in the principalities and powers during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. While some preachers, missionaries, and scholars continued to interpret the principalities and powers as personal, spiritual beings, the influence of Bultmann was immense. Those who followed Bultmann's lead interpreted the principalities and powers structurally, and suggested responses such as political resistance, non-violent submission. Some even recognized the centrality of the church in the struggle against the principalities and powers.

Stott describes the situation well:

The scholars concerned have used great skill in their determination to make Paul's obscure references to heavenly powers speak relevantly to our own earthly situation. Hence the attraction of this theory, which a number of authors of evangelical persuasion have also begun to adopt. But hence also its suspicious character. For some are sharing with us with great candor the two embarrassments which led them to embrace it. First, they say, the traditional interpretation reflected an archaic world-view, with angels and demons, not far removed from spooks and poltergeists. Secondly, they could find in the New Testament no allusion to social structures, which have become a significant modern preoccupation.²⁰⁵

²⁰³Ibid., 68.

²⁰⁴Ibid.

²⁰⁵Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, 271.

Stott's analysis is correct. Because the modern worldview forced Bultmann, Berkhof, Caird, and Schlier to reinterpret the principalities and powers, both their interpretations and responses are dubious. More biblical, and with historical precedent, are the interpretations and responses of conservatives such as Spurgeon, Nevius, and Unger.

Conclusion

This section has described how four historical periods interpreted and responded to the principalities and powers. The early church interpreted the principalities and powers as personal, spiritual beings, some of whom were holy and some of whom were evil. The church fathers emphasized proclaiming the gospel, practicing holiness, and engaging in power encounters. The influential scholars of the medieval period tended to view the principalities and powers as holy angels, and they were comfortable speculating about the hierarchy and function of the principalities and powers. They responded to these beings through prayer, and they responded to their demonic foes with a Christianity that had been syncretized with superstition and magic. The Reformers rejected all speculation, they interpreted the principalities and powers as both angelic and demonic beings, and they responded to their demonic foes through the power of the gospel and personal holiness.

Finally, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, two divergent approaches to the principalities and powers developed. One group of scholars demythologized the principalities and powers, and proposed politically based responses. Another group of scholars held to a traditional interpretation of the principalities and powers and emphasized the power of the gospel and personal holiness. This debate resulted in the three approaches to the principalities and powers that are discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3
CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES ON
THE PRINCIPALITIES AND POWERS

In an article titled, “Where Angels Fear to Tread: Appraising the Current Fascination with Spiritual Warfare,” Christian Breuninger insightfully observes, “Reading the varied terrain of contemporary literature about the powers one is struck with how theological foundations lead to diverse, even contradictory, praxis.”¹

Breuninger has identified a key aspect of the contemporary debate about the principalities and the powers. Building on Breuninger’s insights, this chapter will show that in the contemporary debate about the principalities and powers, different theological foundations and different worldview assumptions have in fact led to diverse and contradictory proposals for the church’s stand against the principalities and powers.

Walter Wink

According to his personal website, Walter Wink is Professor Emeritus of Biblical Interpretation at Auburn Theological Seminary in New York City. He previously served as a parish minister, a professor at Union Theological Seminary, and a Peace Fellow at the United States Institute of Peace.²

¹Christian Breuninger, “Where Angels Fear to Tread: Appraising the Current Fascination with Spiritual Warfare,” *Covenant Quarterly* 53 (1995): 41.

²Walter Wink, “WalterWink.Com” [on-line]; accessed October 30, 2009; available from <http://www.walterwink.com>; Internet.

In 1982, Wink and his wife June spent several months in Central and South America. During this trip Wink observed “military dictatorships and the struggle for justice and democracy,” and it was during this trip that Wink’s trilogy on the principalities and powers began to take shape.³ After observing so much injustice, and after reading Wesley Carr’s *Angels and Principalities*, Wink began developing his own perspective on the principalities and powers.⁴ While Wink has continued to be involved in numerous religious and political causes, he is best known for his writing about the principalities and powers.⁵

³Ibid. Wink also describes this four month trip in the first volume of his trilogy on the principalities and powers, *Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament*. Looking back on his time in Chile, Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Peru, Costa Rica, and Nicaragua, he explains, “At the end of the trip I became ill. I had planned to spend the last bit of unbroken time writing, but now I was so weak and underweight that I could scarcely function. Worse, I was overwhelmed with despair. I had gone to Latin America hoping that what we experienced there would help me write a book that could make a difference. The evils we encountered were so monolithic, so massively supported by our own government, in some cases so anchored in a long history of tyranny, that it scarcely seemed that anything could make a difference.” Walter Wink, *Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), ix.

⁴Wink explains that he found Carr’s book thought provoking despite the fact that he believed it was mostly wrong. Wink, *Naming the Powers*, ix. Carr’s original interpretation of the principalities and powers can be summarized with one sentence from his book. He argues, “The terms used for the powers, however, are not applied to the demons.” Carr interprets all biblical references to the principalities and powers as references to holy angels. In dealing with Eph 6:12, which clearly speaks of the principalities and powers as wicked beings, Carr suggests that Eph 6 is a second century addition to Paul’s work. Wesley Carr, *Angels and Principalities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 122-23.

⁵In addition to multiple trips to South America, Wink also worked in El Salvador, Mexico, and Northern Ireland. In each of these places Wink taught nonviolent resistance. Today he lives with his wife in the Berkshire mountains of Western Massachusetts. The Winks say they strive to live the “simple” life. Walter Wink, “WalterWink.Com.”

Worldview Assumptions

To his credit, Wink is a consistent critic of materialism. He writes:

What increasing numbers of people are now realizing, both inside and outside organized religion, is that Christianity's lack of credibility is not a consequence of the inadequacy of its intrinsic message, but of the fact that its intrinsic message cannot – simple, categorically, cannot – be communicated meaningfully within a materialistic cosmology.⁶

Wink goes on to explain that while this realization forces some to abandon religion and others to dismiss science, he wants to “contribute toward a new, postmaterialist cosmology.”⁷ He believes this “postmaterialist cosmology” is needed because, “It is as impossible for most of us to believe in the real existence of demonic or angelic powers as it is to believe in dragons, or elves, or a flat world.”⁸

These statements imply that Wink is at least open to the biblical worldview; however, Wink strongly rejects the worldview of the ancients. In *Unmasking the Powers* Wink states, “It is not my intent to defend the biblical worldview, for it is in many ways beyond being salvaged, limited as it was by the science, philosophy, and religion of its age.”⁹ Later, in the same work, after describing the biblical worldview and its interpretation of the principalities and powers, Wink argues,

We cannot simply revive that ancient worldview without jettisoning much of what humanity has gained in the interval since. But we can reinterpret it. We can and must seek to recover in it the eternal truth revealed through its characteristic thought-forms, images, and presuppositions. The new age dawning may not

⁶Walter Wink, *Unmasking the Powers: The Invisible Forces that Determine Human Existence* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 6.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Wink, *Naming the Powers*, 4.

⁹Wink, *Unmasking the Powers*, 5.

‘believe in’ angels and demons the way an earlier period believed in them. But these Powers may be granted a happier fate.¹⁰

While Wink repeatedly disparages the biblical worldview, he also consistently suggests that both demythologization and depersonification of the principalities and powers was already taking place in the ancient world.¹¹ In *Naming the Powers* Wink argues, “Paul has already taken key steps toward ‘demythologizing’ or at least depersonalizing.”¹² In *Engaging the Powers* Wink insists, “Even the angels in Judaism were impersonal agents of God.”¹³ Thus, Wink’s treatment of the biblical worldview is

¹⁰Ibid., 172. Elsewhere, in *Engaging the Powers*, Wink criticizes Frank Peretti for attempting to “repristinate the ancient worldview today.” Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 9. In yet another place, Wink again criticizes Peretti for accepting the biblical worldview, a worldview that Wink insists is “defunct.” Walter Wink, “Principalities and Powers: A Different Worldview,” *Church and Society* (1995): 19. In his digest of his trilogy, *The Powers That Be*, Wink argues that the ancient worldview resulted in “gross literalism,” and he admits that he “had never been able to take demons seriously” because the idea seemed too superstitious. Walter Wink, *The Powers That Be: Theology for a New Millennium* (New York: Galilee Doubleday, 1999), 3, 5.

¹¹Clinton Arnold makes this point in *Powers of Darkness*. Clinton E. Arnold, *Powers of Darkness: Principalities and Powers in Paul’s Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992), 198, 200. Wink is able to make this argument based on his insistence that all New Testament references to “power” should be interpreted in the broadest possible sense. Following Hendrik Berkhof and Wink himself, many of Wink’s contemporaries picked up the argument that Paul himself had demythologized the principalities and powers. For example, see Richard Mouw, *Politics and the Biblical Drama* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 87; Anthony J. Tambasco, “Principalities, Powers and Peace,” in *Blessed Are the Peacemakers: Biblical Perspectives on Peace and Its Social Foundations*, ed. Anthony J. Tambasco (New York: Paulist, 1989), 117; and Chris Forbes, “Paul’s Principalities and Powers: Demythologizing Apocalyptic?” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 82 (2001): 61-63.

¹²Wink, *Naming the Powers*, 103. Elsewhere in the same work, Wink insists, “The New Testament is not fond of the spiritualistic reductionism of later Christendom.” Ibid., 82.

¹³Wink, *Engaging the Powers*, 4.

inconsistent. On the one hand, he argues that reinterpretation is necessary because the biblical worldview is defunct. On the other hand, he argues that reinterpretation was already taking place in the ancient world. Arnold points out Wink's inconsistency: "He is willing to recognize that the ancients did actually believe in a real Satan, evil angels, and demons, yet he also wants to see Paul and his contemporaries as aware of the myth about the 'powers.'"¹⁴

Two other aspects of Wink's worldview must be mentioned. First, Wink's epistemological base is too broad. In developing a theology of the principalities and powers, Wink confesses his reliance on non-canonical sources. He states,

In attempting to recover the inner meaning of the first century worldview, one is not limited to New Testament texts. Virtually any scrap of papyrus, however dubious its literary or religious value, can help us recover the basic cosmology of the epoch. . . . The real test of the canon of Scripture is whether it has the power, in each new age, to evoke life, to strike fire, to convey the stark reality of God's hunger to be known.¹⁵

Not only is Wink willing to rely on "virtually any scrap of papyrus," but at times he is also willing to rely on mystical experiences. In *Engaging the Powers*, after describing several of his dreams in great detail, Wink states,

I cite these dreams, not to expose myself, but to indicate that the transformative process is not something we initiate. God initiates it in us. We do not grit our teeth and try to become better. We simply cooperate and pay attention – in this case, by recording the dreams that God provided and reflecting on them as part of my spiritual discipline. And this is but one of the myriad of ways God is prompting a new reality.¹⁶

¹⁴Clinton E. Arnold, *Power and Magic: The Concept of Power in Ephesians in Light of its Historical Setting* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 50.

¹⁵Wink, *Unmasking the Powers*, 7.

¹⁶Wink, *Engaging the Powers*, 280.

In addition to Wink's excessively broad epistemological base, Wink's view of God amounts to pantheism.¹⁷ This pantheism shines through clearly in *The Powers That Be* when he writes, "The whole universe is a spirit-matter event, and the self is coextensive with the universe."¹⁸ As Noll explains, this pantheism results in Wink's failing to distinguish God from Satan and the holy angels from the powers.¹⁹ It also results in an overestimation of the power of the principalities and powers, not to mention an underestimation of the power of God. Additionally, Wink argues for an open view of the future and an open view of God.²⁰ When reflecting on the evils of German Nazism, Wink suggests, "In such a time God may appear to be impotent. Perhaps God is."²¹

Identity of the Principalities and Powers

Considering Wink's worldview assumptions, it is not surprising that his interpretation of the principalities and powers is much closer to those offered by G. B.

¹⁷Several scholars have observed and critiqued Wink's pantheism. Duane A. Garrett, *Angels and the New Spirituality* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 213; Robert Cook, "Devils and Manticores: Plundering Jung for a Plausible Demonology," in *The Unseen World: Christian Reflections on Angels, Demons and the Heavenly Realm*, ed. Anthony N. S. Lane (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 175; Stephen F. Noll, *Angels of Light, Powers of Darkness: Thinking Biblically about Angels, Satan and Principalities* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998), 25; and Knud Jørgensen, "Spiritual Conflict in Socio-Political Context," in *Deliver Us from Evil: An Uneasy Frontier in Christian Mission*, ed. A. Scott Moreau and others (Monrovia, CA: World Vision, 2002), 217.

¹⁸Wink, *The Powers that Be*, 184.

¹⁹Noll, *Angels of Light, Powers of Darkness*, 25.

²⁰Wink argues that God is limited by human freedom as well as the freedom of the principalities and powers. In making this argument, Wink identifies the principalities and powers as institutions and systems. Wink, *Engaging the Powers*, 301, 310-11; Idem, *The Powers That Be*, 192, 196.

²¹Wink, *The Powers That Be*, 312.

Caird, Hendrik Berkhof, and Henrich Schlier than the interpretations offered during the early church, the medieval period, and the Reformation. Indeed, in *Naming the Powers* Wink recognizes these three men as “pioneers” with respect to the principalities and powers.²²

In *Naming the Powers*, the first book of Wink’s trilogy on the principalities and powers, Wink offers a broad, foundational definition that sets the tone for the entire trilogy. It is worth quoting in full:

I will argue that the ‘principalities and powers’ are the inner and outer aspects of any given manifestation of power. As the inner aspect they are the spirituality of institutions, the ‘within’ of corporate structures and systems, the inner essence of outer organizations of power. As the outer aspect they are political systems, appointed officials, the ‘chair’ of an organization, laws – in short, all the tangible manifestations which power takes. Every Power tends to have a visible pole, and outer form – be it a church, a nation, or an economy – and an invisible pole, and inner spirit or driving force that animates, legitimates, and regulates its physical manifestation in the world. Neither pole is the cause of the other. Both come into existence together and cease to exist together. When a particular Power becomes idolatrous, placing itself above God’s purposes for the good of the whole, then that Power becomes demonic.²³

²²Wink, *Naming the Powers*, 35.

²³*Ibid.*, 4. Wink offers similar definitions in other places. Wink, *Unmasking the Powers*, 4; *idem*, *Engaging the Powers*, 3, 6. Many scholars from various theological traditions agree with Wink’s “two-poled” definition of the principalities and powers. See Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen, “Principalities, Powers, and Gender Relations: Some Reflections for Patient Revolutionaries,” *Cruce* 31 (1995): 11-12; Mouw, *Politics and the Biblical Drama*, 89; Rene C. Padilla, *Mission between the Times* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 50-52; Tambasco, “Principalities, Powers and Peace,” 120; and, Robert E. Webber, *The Church in the World: Opposition, Tension, or Transformation?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 24-25. Other scholars place more emphasis on the distinction between the “visible pole” and the “invisible pole” without separating the two poles. See Michael Green, *I Believe in Satan’s Downfall* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1981), 85; and Stephen Charles Mott, “Biblical Faith and the Reality of Social Evil,” *Christian Scholar’s Review* 9 (1980): 229, 231. Still others focus almost exclusively on the visible, physical manifestation of the principalities and powers. See John H. Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 145; William Stringfellow, *An Ethic for Christians and Other Aliens in a Strange Land* (Waco, TX: Word, 1973), 78; David

Wink's insistence that the principalities and powers consist of both a "visible pole" and an "invisible pole" is a crucial aspect of his definition. However, while he tries to emphasize the necessity of both poles, he eventually gives precedence to the physical manifestation of the principalities and powers. Towards the end of *Naming the Powers* he writes,

These 'Powers' do not, then, on this hypothesis, have a separate, spiritual existence. *We encounter them primarily in reference to the material or 'earthly' reality of which they are the innermost essence. . . .* None of these 'spiritual' realities has an existence independent of its material counterpart. None persists through time without embodiment in cellulose or in a culture or a regime or a corporation or a megalomaniac.²⁴

Thus, while Wink criticizes Liberation theology for completely identifying the principalities and powers with structures, Wink himself essentially does just that in the end.²⁵ Breuninger insightfully notes, "What is clear is how his method determines his

Little, "Principalities and Powers and the Christian Ethic," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 13 (1958): 21; and Stephen McCutchen, "Church, State, Principalities, Powers," *Theology Today* 33 (1976): 244. Finally, there are scholars who give absolutely no thought to the spiritual, invisible aspect of the principalities and powers. See James E. Atwood, "Gun Control: Wrestling with the Principalities and Powers," *Church and Society* 87 (1997): 74-81; and Eileen W. Lindner, "Midst Powers and Principalities: Robert Wunthrow's Insights on American Christianity," *Mid-Stream* 31 (1992): 129-38.

²⁴Wink, *Naming the Powers*, 105.

²⁵For Wink's criticism of Liberation theology, see Wink, *Naming the Powers*, 6, 15. Several scholars also argue that despite his insistence on the necessity of both the "visible pole" and the "invisible pole," Wink basically ends up identifying the principalities and powers with structures. Arnold, *Powers of Darkness*, 196; Garrett, *Angels and the New Spirituality*, 209; Thomas A. Noble, "The Spirit World: A Theological Approach," in *The Unseen World: Christian Reflections on Angels, Demons and the Heavenly Realm*, ed. Anthony N. S. Lane (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 211; Hwa Yung, "A Systematic Theology That Recognises the Demonic," in *Deliver Us from Evil: An Uneasy Frontier in Christian Mission*, ed. A. Scott Moreau and others (Monrovia, CA: World Vision, 2002), 11; and Sydney H. T. Page, *Powers of Evil: A Biblical Study of Satan and Demons* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 240.

results, indeed, even dictates a conclusion he seeks to debunk. To limit the existence of the powers to their physical actualization is, paradoxically, a form of materialistic reductionism he sets out to deflate in his theology of the powers.”²⁶

Because he believes the principalities and powers always have a physical manifestation, Wink offers numerous examples of possible manifestations. In *Unmasking the Powers* Wink mentions economies, militarism, propaganda, education, language, ideologies, rules, roles, values, the legal system, politics, sports, religion, and families.²⁷ In *Engaging the Powers* Wink mentions buildings, portfolios, personnel, trucks, fax machines, corporate culture, and collective personality.²⁸ In *The Powers That Be* Wink mentions businesses, corporations, schools, denominations, bureaucracies, and sports teams.²⁹

²⁶Breuninger, “Where Angels Fear to Tread,” 41.

²⁷Wink, *Unmasking the Powers*, 5.

²⁸Wink, *Engaging the Powers*, 3.

²⁹Wink, *The Powers That Be*, 4. Those whose interpretation largely aligns with that of Wink offer other possible manifestations. Rene Padilla focuses on the consumer society. Padilla, *Mission between the Times*, 52. Green mentions illness, historical situations, nature, the law, Christians, sin, the state, and death. Michael Green, *I Believe in Satan’s Downfall* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1981), 86-90. Stringfellow mentions institutions, ideologies, images, movements, causes, corporations, bureaucracies, traditions, methods, routines, conglomerates, races, nations, idols, the Pentagon, Ford Motor Company, Harvard University, the Hudson Institute, Consolidated Edison, the Diners Club, the Olympics, the Methodist Church, the Teamsters Union, capitalism, Maoism, humanism, Mormonism, astrology, the Puritan work ethic, science, white supremacy, patriotism, sports, sex, profession, discipline, technology, money, and the family. Stringfellow, *An Ethic for Christians and Other Aliens in a Strange Land*, 78. Arnold identifies several other commonly proposed manifestations by those who align with Wink. He mentions capitalism, socialism, nationalism, social patterns, cultural norms, group habits. Arnold, *Powers of Darkness*, 167.

Regardless of the particular manifestation, Wink argues that the principalities and powers were created good, are now fallen and demonic, and are in need of redemption. In *The Powers That Be* Wink insists, “The Powers are good. The Powers are fallen. The Powers must be redeemed.”³⁰ This redemption is possible, according to Wink, because “Nothing is outside the redemptive care and transforming love of God.”³¹ Additionally, Wink argues, “The Jesus who died at the hands of the Powers died every bit as much for the Powers as he died for people.”³²

Despite the possibility of redemption, Wink argues that the principalities and powers present an ongoing threat to God’s people. In its most comprehensive manifestation, this threat takes the form of what Wink calls “the Domination System.” In *Engaging the Powers* he explains,

I use the expression ‘the Domination System’ to indicate what happens when an entire network of Powers becomes integrated around idolatrous values. And I refer to ‘Satan’ as the world-encompassing spirit of the Domination System. Do these entities possess actual metaphysical *being*, or are they the ‘corporate personality’ or ethos or gestalt of a group, having no independent existence apart from the group? I leave that for the reader to decide. . . . I prefer to regard them as the impersonal spiritual realities at the center of institutional life.³³

³⁰Wink, *The Powers That Be*, 31. Also see Walter Wink, “All Will Be Redeemed: How Can We Oppose Evil Without Becoming What We Hate?” *The Other Side* 28 (1992): 20.

³¹Wink, *The Powers That Be*, 33.

³²Wink, *Engaging the Powers*, 82. Among those who largely agree with Wink’s interpretation, there is consensus that the principalities and powers are fallen, but there is disagreement about whether or not the principalities and powers can be redeemed. Richard Mouw, *Politics and the Biblical Drama*, 89; Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 147-50; Stringfellow, *An Ethic for Christians and Other Aliens in a Strange Land*, 80; Webber, *The Church in the World*, 31; and Stephen Charles Mott, “The Use of the Bible in Social Ethics,” *Transformation* 1 (1984): 26.

³³Wink, *Engaging the Powers*, 9.

Wink goes on to state, “The Domination System is what obtains when an entire network of Powers becomes hell-bent on control,” and he insists the New Testament uses words like “world” and “flesh” to refer to the Domination System.³⁴

Several aspects of Wink’s interpretation of the principalities and powers warrant critique. First, as Duane Garrett points out, “An obvious but somewhat superficial criticism of Wink is that his view of the spirits does not conform to the Bible’s.”³⁵ This criticism is “somewhat superficial” because Wink himself would probably concede the point. Nevertheless, it is important to note that Wink has proposed a reinterpretation of the biblical text that conforms neither to the New Testament nor the majority of interpretations throughout church history, both of which view the principalities and powers as personal, spiritual beings.

A second critique relates to Wink’s worldview assumptions. Wink has allowed his worldview, instead of biblical exegesis, to determine his interpretation of the principalities and powers. Gailyn Van Rheenen makes this point when he, after describing the interpretation that culminated in Wink’s work, questions, “One wonders why these Western theologians were forced to find a new paradigm for interpreting spiritual powers in the Bible. Could they not have interpreted the passages literally as personal spiritual beings? Or were their interpretations determined more by a secular mindset than by biblical studies?”³⁶

³⁴Ibid., 49.

³⁵Garrett, *Angels and the New Spirituality*, 208.

³⁶Gailyn Van Rheenen, “Modern and Postmodern Syncretism in Theology and

Third, as Garrett observes, “Wink frequently modifies New Testament words to reflect more appropriately his understanding of the gospel.”³⁷ A prime example of Wink’s modification of biblical and theological terms is his concept of “the Domination System.”³⁸ After defining the term, and without argumentation, Wink simply states, “The Domination System is thus equivalent to what the Bible so often means by the terms ‘world,’ ‘aeon,’ and ‘flesh.’”³⁹ From this point on, Wink consistently replaces John’s references to the “world” and Paul’s references to the “aeon” with “the Domination System.”⁴⁰ Each time this replacement takes place, the argument under consideration is flawed because Wink has failed to justify the replacement.

Fourth, Wink commits the error of illegitimate totality transfer.⁴¹ In the first volume of his trilogy, Wink chronicles all of the terms he associates with the principalities and powers.⁴² After presenting the semantic field for each of these terms,

Missions,” in *The Holy Spirit and Missions Dynamics*, ed. C. Douglas McConnell (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1997), 180.

³⁷Garrett, *Angels and the New Spirituality*, 211.

³⁸Wink, *Engaging the Powers*, 9.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 49.

⁴⁰For examples of Wink’s replacement of “world” and “aeon” with “the Domination System,” see Wink, *Engaging the Powers*, 59, 62.

⁴¹D. A. Carson acknowledges the term “illegitimate totality transfer,” but he prefers the term, “Unwarranted adoption of an expanded semantic field.” He defines the error as follows: “The fallacy in this instance lies in the supposition that the meaning of a word in a specific context is much broader than the context itself allows and may bring with it the word’s entire semantic range.” D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 60-61.

⁴²Wink, *Naming the Powers*, 13-35.

Wink concludes, “Unless the context specifies . . . we are to take the terms for power in their most comprehensive sense.”⁴³ He also concludes that since “these terms are to a degree interchangeable . . . we are to take the terms for power in their most comprehensive sense.”⁴⁴ Wink even argues that the term “principalities and powers” should be used “generically for all manifestations of power.”⁴⁵

The problem with this line of argumentation is that Wink has overstepped sound hermeneutical principles. Carson warns against the error of applying a word’s entire semantic range to a passage without allowing for the contextual limitations.⁴⁶ Arnold rightly criticizes Wink for this hermeneutical error: “Because one term may have five different applications does not mean that all five applications may be used simultaneously.”⁴⁷

Proposed Response of the Church

Wink acknowledges the impact his interpretation has on his praxis:

As long as these Powers were thought of personalistically – that is, as long as they were themselves reduced to the categories of individualism and imagined as demonic beings assaulting us from the sky – their institutional and systemic dimension was mystified, and belief in the demonic had no political consequences. But once we recognize that these spiritual forces are *the interiority of earthly*

⁴³Ibid., 39. It should be noted that Arnold criticizes Wink’s work here, stating, “Wink’s monograph is seriously flawed by never taking into account the relevance of the magical tradition for a more accurate understanding of the first-century view of the ‘powers.’” Arnold, *Power and Magic*, 50.

⁴⁴Wink, *Naming the Powers*, 99-100.

⁴⁵Ibid., 107.

⁴⁶Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 60.

⁴⁷Arnold, *Power and Magic*, 49; idem, *Powers of Darkness*, 200.

institutions or structures or systems, then the social dimension of the gospel becomes immediately evident.⁴⁸

In light of Wink's misguided interpretation of the principalities and powers, it is not surprising that his proposed response both goes beyond and contradicts Scripture. What is surprising, according to Arnold, is the fact that "Wink's interpretation of the powers is already wielding significant influence on evangelical thinkers, especially those working in the area of social ethics."⁴⁹

Wink's proposed response begins with the church preaching to the principalities and powers. When discussing Ephesians 3 in *Naming the Powers*, Wink insists, "The church's task is articulated here as preaching to the Powers." He goes on to insist that this preaching must address both the material and spiritual aspects of the principalities and powers.⁵⁰ In *Engaging the Powers*, Wink insists that this preaching is equivalent to exposing the corrupt nature of the principalities and powers. He argues, "Exposing the delusional system is the central ascetical task in our discernment of the Powers. For the Powers are never more powerful than when they can act from concealment."⁵¹

⁴⁸Wink, *Engaging the Powers*, 77. Wink makes a similar observation elsewhere. See Wink, "All Will Be Redeemed," 18.

⁴⁹Arnold, *Powers of Darkness*, 198.

⁵⁰Wink, *Naming the Powers*, 89, 110.

⁵¹Wink, *Engaging the Powers*, 88. Later Wink argues that in confronting the principalities and powers the church "is to unmask their idolatrous pretensions, to identify their dehumanizing values, to strip from them the mantle of respectability, and to disenfranchise their victims." *Ibid.*, 164.

Wink celebrates the notion that “the church . . . is but one among many groups that struggles to humanize the Powers,” as well as idea that “God fortunately is not solely dependent on the church.”⁵² Among those also used by God to struggle against the principalities and powers, Wink lists atheists, Jews, Muslims, addicts, convicts, and whores.⁵³ Regardless of who is struggling against the principalities and powers, Wink insists that the goal is always redemption.⁵⁴ This redemption involves recognizing the necessity of the principalities and powers, opposing the actions of the principalities and powers, and challenging the principalities and powers to return to their divine task.⁵⁵

The next aspect in Wink’s proposed response to the principalities and powers involves social action and social ethics.⁵⁶ These concepts are primarily developed in *Engaging the Powers*, and subsequently in *The Powers That Be*. Wink advocates economic equality and feminism while decrying patriarchy.⁵⁷ Above all, Wink derides

⁵²Ibid., 167-68.

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Wink, “Principalities and Powers,” 20.

⁵⁵Wink, *The Powers That Be*, 34-35. The “divine purpose” of the principalities and powers is providing order and structure to God’s creation.

⁵⁶In the first book of his trilogy, Wink argues, “Evangelism is *always* a form of social action. . . . The converse is equally true: social action is always evangelism.” Wink, *Naming the Powers*, 117.

⁵⁷Wink, *Engaging the Powers*, 113, 118, 129; idem, *The Powers That Be*, 65-81. Interestingly, Wink admits, “Despite its susceptibility to manipulation by the rich and powerful, democracy is the best system yet devised for preserving the rights of individuals while seeking the welfare of all.” Idem, *Engaging the Powers*, 171. Also interesting is Wink’s insistence that Paul was not responsible for the following passages that are frequently used to repress women: 1 Cor 14:33b-36, Eph 5:21-33, 1 Tim 2:8-15, 5:3-16, and Titus 2:3-5. Idem, *Engaging the Powers*, 130-34.

the prevalence of violence in Western culture, and he urges Christians to practice nonviolent resistance in the face of the principalities and powers.⁵⁸ He even states, “Jesus’ teachings about nonviolent direct action and love of enemies are . . . the acid tests of true Christianity.”⁵⁹ Wink holds up Ghandi and Martin Luther King, Jr. as examples of nonviolence, and he cautions, “If we are to make nonviolence effective, we will have to be willing to suffer and be killed as soldiers in battle.”⁶⁰

Finally, Wink’s proposed response gives significant attention to prayer. This response is developed principally in *Engaging the Powers*. Wink argues, “The act of praying is itself one of the indispensable means by which we engage the Powers. It is, in fact, that engagement at its most fundamental level, where their secret spell over us is broken and we are reestablished in a bit more of that freedom which is our birthright and

⁵⁸Wink, *Engaging the Powers*, 13, 126, 157. This emphasis on nonviolence is also found in *The Powers That Be*. Wink, *The Powers That Be*, 7-8.

⁵⁹Wink, *Engaging the Powers*, 263.

⁶⁰Wink, *The Powers That Be*, 116, 118. Those who generally accept Wink’s interpretation of the principalities and powers advocate similar responses to the principalities and powers. Van Leeuwen advocates gender equality. Van Leeuwen, “Principalities, Powers, and Gender Relations,” 16. Mouw writes about the political implications of interpreting the principalities and powers in a structural sense. Mouw, *Politics and the Biblical Drama*, 7. Stringfellow goes so far as to state, “The biblical topic is politics.” Stringfellow, *An Ethic for Christians and Other Aliens in a Strange Land*, 14-15. Green and Webber mostly discuss leftist, social issues. Green, *I Believe in Satan’s Downfall*, 99-107; and Webber, *The Church in the World*, 13. Writing from a Mennonite perspective, Yoder emphasizes nonviolent resistance and revolutionary subordination. Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 90-93, 163-92. Tambasco suggests that national security is not ultimate, economic justice is vital, and ecology is important. Tambasco, “Principalities, Powers and Peace,” 130-31.

potential.”⁶¹ In light of Wink’s insistence that both the future and God are open, he maintains that prayer “visualizes” and “envisages” the future into existence.⁶²

Wink’s view of prayer is certainly unorthodox. He argues, “The fawning etiquette of unctuous prayer is utterly foreign to the Bible. Biblical prayer is impertinent, persistent, shameless, indecorous. It is more like haggling with an oriental bazaar than the polite monologues of the churches.”⁶³ In *The Powers That Be* Wink states:

Praying is rattling God’s cage and waking God up and setting God free and giving this famished God water and this starved God food and cutting the ropes off God’s hands and the manacles off God’s feet and washing the caked sweat from God’s eyes and then watching God swell with life and vitality and energy and following God wherever he goes. When we pray, we are not sending a letter to a celestial White House, where it is sorted among piles of others. We are engaged, rather, in an act of re-creation, in which one little sector of the universe rises up and becomes translucent, incandescent, a vibratory center of power that radiates the power of the universe.⁶⁴

Three critiques are in order. First, just as Wink’s interpretation was determined by his faulty worldview assumptions, his response has been determined by his faulty interpretation. Wink, of course, sees no problem with his worldview assumptions and his interpretation of the principalities and powers. He does, however, recognize the connection between his interpretation of the principalities and powers and his response to the principalities and powers. He writes, “Once we recognize that these spiritual forces are *the interiority of earthly institutions or structures or systems*, then the

⁶¹Wink, *Engaging the Powers*, 297.

⁶²Ibid., 198-99.

⁶³Ibid., 301.

⁶⁴Wink, *The Powers That Be*, 186.

social dimension of the gospel becomes immediately evident.”⁶⁵ In light of the previous critique of Wink’s interpretation of the principalities and powers, Wink’s proposed responses are subsequently flawed.

Second, while Wink rightly emphasizes prayer, his pantheism combined with his open view of God has resulted in an unbiblical view of prayer. Wink argues that prayer is a means by which God’s people believe the future into existence by empowering, awakening, and enlightening God.⁶⁶ In making this argument, Wink has drifted far from the humble, reverent, penitent, prayer Jesus taught his disciples in Matthew 6:9-13.

Third, Wink’s emphasis on social and political issues is highly subjective. Garrett explains,

Wink’s approach makes it dangerously easy for him to demonize political viewpoints with which he disagrees. Throughout the books, he constantly champions leftist causes. Ecological activism, feminism, nuclear disarmament, promotion of gay rights, and so forth are for him all aspects of legitimate Christian work. . . His notion of powers finally becomes highly pliable to the individual’s political viewpoint.⁶⁷

Historical Justification for Approach

As was seen in the discussion of Wink’s worldview assumptions, Wink is not overly concerned with finding historical justification or precedent for his interpretation of and approach to the principalities and powers. For the most part Wink mocks the ancient

⁶⁵Wink, *Engaging the Powers*, 77.

⁶⁶Ibid., 198-99; idem, *The Powers that Be*, 186.

⁶⁷Garrett, *Angels and the New Spirituality*, 210.

worldview and its interpretation of the principalities and powers.⁶⁸ At the same time, however, Wink tries to argue that demythologization and depersonification of the principalities and powers were already taking place in the ancient world.⁶⁹ It seems that Wink is willing to argue both sides of the issue. On the one hand, he mocks the ancient worldview when it plainly contradicts his proposals. On the other hand, he tries to redefine and reword the ancient worldview itself so that it supports his proposals. Arnold offers the following critique of Wink's inconsistency:

In seeking to navigate this middle course between the reductionist view of the liberation theologians (human structures and institutions) and traditional theology (spiritual beings) (p. 15), Wink not only seems to be imposing a post-Enlightenment mind-set on the first-century writers, but he winds up with a rather confusing view of the first century.⁷⁰

C. Peter Wagner

In an article titled "Spiritual Warfare and Evangelism," Charles Lawless offers this summary of the origins of the spiritual warfare movement:

Frank Peretti's *This Present Darkness* . . . quickly popularized the topic of spiritual warfare in North America after its publication in 1986. Somewhat contemporaneous with the publication of Peretti's works, C. Peter Wagner (Donald A. McGavran Professor of Church Growth at Fuller Theological Seminary) began to research and write about the worldwide prayer movement. His interest in prayer led him to become a leader of the growing spiritual warfare movement. It was evident by 1989 . . . that the spiritual warfare movement had gained an official hearing from evangelical leaders in addition to its growing popular constituency. The establishment of the A.D. 2000 United Prayer Track and the Spiritual Warfare Network under Wagner's leadership further strengthened the movement.⁷¹

⁶⁸Wink, *Unmasking the Powers*, 5, 172.

⁶⁹Wink, *Naming the Powers*, 82, 103; idem, *Engaging the Powers*, 4.

⁷⁰Arnold, *Power and Magic*, 50.

⁷¹Charles Lawless, "Spiritual Warfare and Evangelism," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 5 (2001): 28.

These events coincided with the second of what C. Peter Wagner sees as three phases of his scholarly career. In phase one Wagner studied church growth under Donald A. McGavran. In phase two Wagner studied spiritual principles for church growth under John Wimber. In phase three Wagner has focused primarily on the New Apostolic Reformation.⁷² During the second phase of his scholarly career, as a leader of the growing Church Growth Movement, Wagner became the leading voice for the spiritual warfare approach to the principalities and powers.⁷³

Worldview Assumptions

Several of Wagner's worldview assumptions and presuppositions are worth noting because they impact his interpretation of and approach to the principalities and powers. First, as early as 1986 Wagner identified with the "third wave."⁷⁴ In *Spiritual Power and Church Growth* he explained, "I myself am not a Pentecostal or a charismatic. While not a Pentecostal, I do consider myself a part of the 'third wave.'"⁷⁵ Wagner made

⁷²C. Peter Wagner, ed., *The New Apostolic Churches* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1998), 14.

⁷³Clinton E. Arnold, *Three Crucial Questions about Spiritual Warfare* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 145-46.

⁷⁴Wagner explained what he meant by the term "third wave" in *How to Have a Healing Ministry without Making Your Church Sick*: "I describe the Pentecostal movement as the first wave of the powerful movement of God's spirit in the twentieth century, the charismatic movement as the second wave, and then I see a third wave in which the Holy Spirit is manifesting the same kind of power in our traditional evangelical churches that we have seen in the first two waves, without requiring us to abandon our particular distinctive or traditions. In other words, without making our churches or denominations sick." C. Peter Wagner, *How to Have a Healing Ministry without Making Your Church Sick* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1988), 8.

⁷⁵C. Peter Wagner, *Spiritual Power and Church Growth: Lessons from the Amazing Growth of Pentecostal Churches in Latin America* (Altamonte Springs, FL:

his connection with the third wave more clear in *How to Have a Healing Ministry without Making Your Church Sick*.⁷⁶ In this book he offers the following six experiences as reasons he became part of the third wave: a healed cyst on his neck, his church growth research in Latin America, his work with the Church of God, teaching MC510 with John Wimber, teaching the 120 Fellowship Sunday school class, and personally receiving the gift of healing.⁷⁷

It is important to recognize Wagner's involvement in the third wave because, as he notes in *How to Have a Healing Ministry without Making Your Church Sick*, there is a widespread belief in demons within the third wave.⁷⁸ This belief in demons can be found in statements like the following one from Wagner: "There is a subcategory of power encounter that has great potential for accelerating world evangelization and about

Strang Communications, 1986), 13.

⁷⁶ Wagner argues, "Throughout the twentieth century the most prominent new feature to appear on the Christian landscape worldwide has been the Pentecostal/charismatic movement." He claims, "No other nonpolitical, nonmilitaristic human movement in history has grown as rapidly as the Pentecostal/charismatic movement has over the past 40 years." Wagner identifies the Pentecostal movement as wave one and the charismatic movement as wave two, and he insists that the third wave is now present. Wagner, *How to Have a Healing Ministry*, 7-8, 69.

⁷⁷Ibid., 43-56. Wimber was a Quaker pastor who took Wagner's Doctor of Ministry church growth course at Fuller Theological Seminary in 1975. Wagner explains that at the time, "He had already gained a reputation as an effective growth leader in Yorba Linda Friends Church." Almost immediately after Wagner's church growth course began, Wagner asked Wimber to work at the Charles E. Fuller Institute of Evangelism and Church Growth. Within two years, Wimber had to resign because the church he planted, Vineyard Christian Fellowship of Anaheim, demanded all of his attention. Wimber continued to have a relationship with Wagner, as Wagner explains, "Every August he continued to help me teach my Fuller Seminary Doctor of Ministry course called Church Growth II." Ibid., 47-48.

⁷⁸Ibid., 59.

which Christian leaders seem to know relatively little. I refer to breaking the power of territorial spirits.”⁷⁹

More troubling than Wagner’s participation in the third wave, however, is Wagner’s epistemological base. Instead of relying on Scripture alone, Wagner repeatedly relies on subjective experience.⁸⁰ In doing so, he bases his approach to spiritual warfare in general and the principalities and powers in particular on subjective feelings instead of the written Word of God.⁸¹ To be sure, Wagner maintains that he holds a high view of

⁷⁹Ibid., 196.

⁸⁰Wagner’s reliance on and appeal to subjective leadings will be the focus here. However, in the absence of biblical support, Wagner has too much confidence in the reliability of non-canonical works. He argues that Paul’s confrontation with Artemis in Acts 19:21-41 ought to be interpreted as strategic-level spiritual warfare. His argument is based on the fact that a non-canonical work (*Acts of John*) describes the apostle John engaging in what Wagner sees as strategic-level warfare with Artemis. Since John’s experience took place after that of Paul, Wagner interprets the canonical account of Paul’s ministry in Ephesus in light of the non-canonical account of John’s ministry in Ephesus. At this point, Wagner refers to Ramsay MacMullen’s *Christianizing the Roman Empire* where MacMullen cites the non-canonical *Acts of John*. See C. Peter Wagner, *Confronting the Powers: How the New Testament Church Experienced the Power of Strategic-Level Spiritual Warfare* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1996), 213.

⁸¹It is true that many evangelicals speak of God’s “leading,” and by this they are referring to subjective feelings. However, Wagner tends to base his argument for strategic-level spiritual warfare on God’s subjective leading. He then tries to find biblical warrant for the direction he feels the Holy Spirit leading. Wagner’s reliance on and appeal to the subjective leading of the Holy Spirit over Scripture can be seen in several places. In “Spiritual Warfare” Wagner claims, “As we begin moving into the 1990s, I sense, along with many other Christian leaders, that the Holy Spirit is saying, ‘Prepare for warfare.’” C. Peter Wagner, “Spiritual Warfare,” in *Territorial Spirits: Insights on Strategic-Level Spiritual Warfare from Nineteen Christian Leaders*, ed. C. Peter Wagner (Chichester, England: Sovereign World Limited, 1991), 3. In *Warfare Prayer* Wagner states, “Around 1980, I began sensing from God that I needed to concentrate on the spiritual dimensions of church growth.” He also states, “I myself feel that God may be calling, equipping and enabling a relatively small number of Christian leaders to move out in frontline, strategic-level spiritual warfare.” Idem, *Warfare Prayer: How to Seek God’s Power and Protection in the Battle to Build His Kingdom* (Ventura, CA: Regal,

Scripture, and he professes to believe in the inerrancy of Scripture.⁸² Nevertheless, he also argues, “God has things to tell us that are not in the Bible.”⁸³ Wagner also argues that the objective written Word of God and the subjective spoken Word of God are equally authoritative.⁸⁴

More than one scholar has offered criticism of Wagner’s tendency to rely on subjective experience.⁸⁵ Robert Priest has been at least partly responsible for two of the

1992), 39, 58. In *Breaking Strongholds in Your City* Wagner insists, “We are acutely aware that spiritual mapping, along with strategic-level spiritual warfare, are relatively new innovations being introduced into the body of Christ. We happen to feel that we are being led by the Holy Spirit.” Idem, ed., *Breaking Strongholds in Your City: How to Use Spiritual Mapping to Make Your Prayer More Strategic, Effective and Targeted* (Ventura, CA: 1993), 19-20.

⁸²C. Peter Wager, *Churches that Pray: How Prayer Can Help Revitalize Your Church and Break Down the Walls Between You and Your Community* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1993), 63.

⁸³Ibid.

⁸⁴Wagner, *Confronting the Powers*, 52.

⁸⁵The following quotes are criticisms of Wagner’s reliance on experience in the form of subjective feelings as well as unverifiable anecdotes. Writing about Wagner and his colleagues, Thomas Pratt argues, “Because of their new worldview and their experience of the Holy Spirit the authors have come to denounce the historical-critical method in favor of experience.” Thomas D. Pratt, “The Need to Dialogue: A Review of the Debate on the Controversy of Signs, Wonders, Miracles and Spiritual Warfare Raised in the Literature of the Third Wave Movement,” *Pneuma* 13 (1991): 22. Chuck Lowe has offered one of the most devastating critiques of the spiritual warfare approach to the principalities and powers. He points out, “Undoubtedly the bulk of the argument for SLSW derives from empirical data,” and he cautions, “Arguments from experience are admissible, but more careful selection and sober evaluation of the data are necessary before the case study evidence can be persuasive.” Chuck Lowe, *Territorial Spirits and World Evangelisation: A Biblical, Historical, Missiological Critique of Strategic-Level Spiritual Warfare* (Sevenoaks, Kent: OMF International, 1998), 27, 113. Michael Reid criticizes the spiritual warfare movement as a whole for advocating a “working hypothesis” as “divine truth,” and he believes, “experiential evaluation has usurped the authority of the scripture.” Michael S. B. Reid, *Strategic Level Spiritual Warfare: A*

most significant critiques of Wagner's epistemology. In an article co-written with Thomas Campbell and Bradford Mullen, Priest criticizes Wagner and his colleagues for relying on demonic interviews, practitioners of animistic religion, anecdotes, pragmatism, subjective feelings, and personal revelations as an epistemological foundation.⁸⁶ In another article, Priest offers the following criticism:

Since Christians have had the Bible for nearly 2,000 years, how is it that Wagner is able to discover so many new truths about the demonic? The answer, quite simply, is that he is drawing on new sources – sources other than God's special revelation, the Bible – for discovering new information about demons. Pivotal to the development and defense of his new ideas is an epistemology which relies on extra-biblical sources (e.g., demons, former occultists, pagan religious beliefs, personal experiences) for acquiring new information about the nature of demonic power – information which *sola scriptura* does not give.⁸⁷

Also problematic, and related to Wagner's reliance on experience and anecdotes, is his seemingly uncritical commitment to pragmatism. Wagner confesses, "I am a theoretician, but I am one of those who has a bias toward theories that work."⁸⁸

Modern Mythology? (Fairfax, VA: Xulon, 2002), 259-61. Other critiques and cautions are offered by A. Scott Moreau, "A Survey of North American Spiritual Warfare Thinking," in *Deliver Us from Evil: An Uneasy Frontier in Christian Mission*, ed. A. Scott Moreau and others (Monrovia, CA: World Vision, 2002), 269; John H. Orme, "Identificational Repentance and Strategic Spiritual Warfare: A Hermeneutical Case Study," in *The Holy Spirit and Mission Dynamics*, ed. C. Douglas McConnell (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1997), 148; and David Greenlee, "Territorial Spirits Reconsidered," *Missiology* 22 (1994): 513.

⁸⁶Robert J. Priest, Thomas Campbell, and Bradford A. Mullen, "Missiological Syncretism: The New Animistic Paradigm," in *Spiritual Power and Missions: Raising the Issues*, ed. Edward Rommen (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1995), 25-55.

⁸⁷Robert J. Priest, "Spiritual Warfare, Epistemology, and the Missiological Community," in *The Holy Spirit and Mission Dynamics*, ed. C. Douglas McConnell (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1997), 140.

⁸⁸Wagner, *Warfare Prayer*, 13.

Later in the same work Wagner states, “I am a very pragmatic person in the sense that the theories I like best are the ones that work.”⁸⁹ This commitment to pragmatism impacted Wagner’s decision to embrace the third wave, and Wagner admits that his commitment to pragmatism impacted his interpretation of and approach to the principalities and powers.⁹⁰

A final aspect of Wagner’s worldview that must be critiqued is his appeal to and acceptance of animistic beliefs and practices. Not only do Wagner and his colleagues appeal to the fact that animistic people often have a belief in territorial spirits, but they also fall into the danger of what Paul Hiebert called a Christianized form of animism by making the demonic the focus of spiritual warfare.⁹¹ To his credit, Wagner

⁸⁹Ibid., 28. Wagner makes a similar comment in *Confronting the Powers* when he states, “By nature find myself more goal oriented than process oriented. Application seems more important to me than theory. The theories I like the best are, frankly, the ones that work.” Wagner, *Confronting the Powers*, 47.

⁹⁰Wagner, *How to Have a Healing Ministry*, 14, 196. Additionally, Lowe sees this uncritical commitment to pragmatism as the latest development in a long history of pragmatic approaches to church growth. He writes, “For several decades . . . church leaders have been preoccupied with concrete measures designed to increase effectiveness in ministry: techniques such as emotive hymns, prolonged altar calls, bigger parking lots, homogeneous units, management principles, personality assessments and marketing techniques.” Lowe, *Territorial Spirits and World Evangelisation*, 10. The critique offered in this dissertation is not directed against pragmatism itself. Instead, it is intended to highlight Wagner’s seemingly uncritical devotion to pragmatism.

⁹¹Wagner recognizes the fact that he is frequently criticized for working from an animistic paradigm, yet he maintains that Christians ought to learn from the beliefs of animistic peoples. Wagner, *Confronting the Powers*, 64-66. Tissa Weerasingha argues that most pagans know there are territorial spirits, and she concludes that this knowledge lends credibility to the spiritual warfare approach to the principalities and powers. Tissa Weerasingha, “Spiritual Warfare in Sri Lanka,” *Urban Mission* 13 (1995): 54. Paul Hiebert, “The Flaw of the Excluded Middle,” in *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 199-200.

recognizes and attempts to address this criticism; unfortunately, he merely tears down a straw-man definition of animism to deflect this criticism.⁹²

With respect to Wagner's appeal to animistic beliefs and practices, Lowe argues that animism should not be used to bolster the arguments and interpretations of those within the spiritual warfare movement. He explains, "There are two problems with invoking animism in support of demon territoriality. For one, territoriality plays a subordinate role in animism. For the other, animism is not a reliable foundation for Christian theology."⁹³

With respect to Wagner's emphasis on the demonic, Reid also laments,

The focus has shifted away from the eternal victory obtained by Jesus Christ when he defeated the enemy at Calvary (Col. 2:15) and is now firmly fixed on Satan and his demonic host. . . . In parallel with this elevation of Satan by the main protagonists in SLSW, there has been a corresponding demotion in respect to God, who is reduced to a position of passive attendance awaiting the initiative of man to act.⁹⁴

Identity of the Principalities and Powers

Wagner cautiously entered the longstanding debate about the nature of the principalities and powers when he wrote, "A part of power evangelism, not too well

⁹²Wagner's discussion of animism focuses only on the belief that supernatural beings exist. Most of his critics agree that supernatural beings exist. Wagner says nothing about the particular beliefs about those beings held by animistic peoples or about attempt to control those beings by animistic peoples. Wagner, *Confronting the Powers*, 64-65.

⁹³Lowe, *Territorial Spirits and World Evangelisation*, 111.

⁹⁴Reid, *Strategic Level Spiritual Warfare*, 261. Wagner would reject Reid's criticism and argue that he shares Reid's concerns. However, his definition of strategic-level spiritual warfare does focus on the demonic instead of the victory secured by Christ. For Wagner's definition of strategic-level spiritual warfare, see Wagner, *Warfare Prayer*, 18.

known as yet, deals with the territorial assignment given by the enemy to high ranking evil spirits in the demonic hierarchy. Certain ‘powers of the air’ (Eph. 6:12) may be in charge of certain geographic regions.”⁹⁵ Later, Wagner equated the angelic beings of Daniel 10 with the principalities and powers of Ephesians 6, and he was willing to assert, “The most powerful are *principalities* or *princes*.”⁹⁶

Wagner continued to write about the principalities and powers, and he also began elaborating on the connection between territorial spirits and world evangelization.⁹⁷ He insisted, “I see territorial spirits chiefly in terms of their alleged ability to prevent the spread of the gospel,” and he reasoned that if his theory were true, the receptivity of people groups around the world could be dramatically changed overnight.⁹⁸ Wagner and his colleagues further developed the theory of territorial spirits in *Wrestling with Dark Angels*. Here Wagner maintained that Ephesians 6:12 was the biblical starting point for territorial spirits, and he looked to passages like Deuteronomy 32:8, Daniel 10:10-21, Joshua 24:14, Judges 3:7, 2 Kings 17:30-31, and Jeremiah 50:2 to

⁹⁵Wagner, *Spiritual Power and Church Growth*, 40. After this statement, Wagner went on to retell the often told story of a missionary who was serving in a town that sat on the border between Uruguay and Brazil. The missionary had no evangelistic success on the Uruguay side of the border but did have evangelistic success on the Brazilian side of the border. Wagner concludes, “God showed him that on the Brazilian side the ‘strong man’ had been bound, but not on the Uruguayan side.” *Ibid.*, 40-41.

⁹⁶Wagner, *How to Have a Healing Ministry without Making Your Church Sick*, 202-04.

⁹⁷He confessed ignorance as to the number of territorial spirits, but he confidently explained, “Demons can and do attach themselves to objects, to houses, and other buildings, to animals, and to people.” C. Peter Wagner, “Territorial Spirits and World Missions,” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 25 (1989): 279.

⁹⁸*Ibid.*, 278, 280.

bolster his argument.⁹⁹

Wagner's writing about the principalities and powers and territorial spirits culminated in a series of six books focusing on the principalities and powers. The first book of the series is titled *Warfare Prayer*, and in this book Wagner articulated his interpretation of the principalities and powers. He stated, "I hold the position that the principalities and powers are, to be very specific, evil spirits or demons."¹⁰⁰ He reasoned that the territorial authority of a hierarchy of evil spirits was the only explanation for the fact that three billion people were still living in spiritual darkness, but he stopped short of enumerating that hierarchy.¹⁰¹

While Wagner's work was often on the cutting edge of this debate, he was by no means the only author promoting this interpretation of the principalities and powers.¹⁰² Two other authors who contributed to this debate were Cindy Jacobs and Charles Kraft, and a brief examination of their writing shows that others shared Wagner's views.

The following quote from Jacobs reflects the position of many in the spiritual

⁹⁹Wagner, "Territorial Spirits," in *Wrestling with Dark Angels: Towards a Deeper Understanding of the Supernatural Forces in Spiritual Warfare*, ed. C. Peter Wagner and F. Douglas Pennoyer (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1990), 78, 79.

¹⁰⁰Wagner, *Warfare Prayer*, 96.

¹⁰¹*Ibid.*, 63.

¹⁰²Many authors equated the principalities and powers with the popular concept of territorial spirits. See Timothy Warner, *Spiritual Warfare: Victory over the Powers of this Dark World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1991), 134-35; John Dawson, *Taking Our Cities for God: How to Break Spiritual Strongholds* (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma, 2001), 102-03; Tom White, "A Biblical Perspective," in *Behind Enemy Lines: An Advanced Guide to Spiritual Warfare*, ed. Charles H. Kraft and Mark White (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant, 1994), 154; and John Robb, "How Satan Works at the Cosmic Level," in *Behind Enemy Lines: An Advanced Guide to Spiritual Warfare*, ed. Charles H.

warfare movement:

Satan's representatives position themselves at his command over geographic regions. . . . Most people, unaware of Satan's devices, fall prey in some measure to the influence of these territorial spirits. The evil spirits use various means to take dominion over the population of their regions, such as moral decay and addictions. Territorial spirits work to 'brainwash' citizens from having the mind of Christ and thus neutralize the power of the Kingdom of God.¹⁰³

Jacobs went on to emphasize the fact that territorial spirits frequently influence governmental leaders, and she specifically stated that Prince of Persia was behind the persecutions of Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, as well as the tyrannical dictatorship of Saddam Hussein.¹⁰⁴

Charles Kraft has also written extensively on the principalities and powers. He views territorial spirits as one of five types of cosmic spirits, the other four being institutional spirits, vice spirits, nature-household-cultural item spirits, and ancestor spirits.¹⁰⁵ Elsewhere Kraft argues that Ephesians 6 presents a hierarchy of demonic beings, and he even suggests that these demonic beings have a sort of "force field" power.¹⁰⁶ He offers the following explanation for the origin of territorial authority: "Territories and organizations can be consciously or even unconsciously dedicated to the

Kraft and Mark White (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant, 1994), 168.

¹⁰³Cindy Jacobs, *Possessing the Gates of the Enemy: A Training Manual for Militant Intercession* (Grand Rapids: Chosen, 1994), 226.

¹⁰⁴*Ibid.*, 226-28.

¹⁰⁵Charles H. Kraft, "Contextualisation and Spiritual Power, in *Deliver Us From Evil: An Uneasy Frontier in Christian Mission*, ed. A. Scott Moreau and others (Monrovia, CA: World Vision, 2002), 305.

¹⁰⁶Charles H. Kraft and David M. Debord, *The Rules of Engagement: Understanding the Principles that Govern the Spiritual Battles in Our Lives* (Colorado

kingdom of God or the kingdom of Satan.”¹⁰⁷

While there is debate within the spiritual warfare movement about the precise nature of the principalities and powers, there is general agreement on several issues. First, the principalities and powers “are fallen spiritual beings that operate in Satan’s domain opposing the redemptive purposes of God.”¹⁰⁸ Second, as was stated above, the principalities and powers can generally be equated with the concept of territorial spirits. Third, while most authors are hesitant to propose a specific hierarchy, they do agree on the fact that the principalities and powers exist in a hierarchy.¹⁰⁹ Fourth, believers can and should seek to discern the existence of and even the names of specific territorial spirits.¹¹⁰

Springs: Wagner Publications, 2000), 103, 108.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., 110. Kraft also offers in depth descriptions of the principalities and powers as well as territorial spirits in an article that is found in a book Kraft helped edit. Charles H. Kraft, “Spiritual Power: Principles and Observations,” in *Behind Enemy Lines: An Advanced Guide to Spiritual Warfare*, ed. Charles H. Kraft and Mark White (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant, 1994).

¹⁰⁸Thomas B. White, “Understanding Principalities and Powers,” in *Territorial Spirits: Insights into Strategic-Level Spiritual Warfare and Intercession*, ed. C. Peter Wagner (Chichester, England: Sovereign World Limited, 1991), 60; Wagner, *Confronting the Powers*, 63; and Vernon J. Sterk, “Territorial Spirits and Evangelization in Hostile Environments,” in *Territorial Spirits: Insights into Strategic-Level Spiritual Warfare and Intercession*, ed. C. Peter Wagner (Chichester, England: Sovereign World Limited, 1991), 154.

¹⁰⁹For example, see Robb, “How Satan Works at the Cosmic Level,” 172; White, “Understanding Principalities and Powers,” 62.

¹¹⁰The following authors advocate this practice: Richmond Chiundiza, “High Level Powers in Zimbabwe,” in *Territorial Spirits: Insights on Strategic-Level Spiritual Warfare from Nineteen Christian Leaders*, ed. C. Peter Wagner (Chichester, England: Sovereign World Limited, 1991), 122-23; and Sterk, “Territorial Spirits and Evangelization in Hostile Environments,” 160-61.

Returning to Wagner as the primary spokesperson of the spiritual warfare approach to the principalities and powers, critics offer two major objections to Wagner's interpretation of the principalities and powers. First, many scholars are highly skeptical about the concept of territorial spirits. Lowe insists, "The Bible does not portray demons as geographically specific."¹¹¹ Likewise, Robert Lightner argues that the Bible does not support the concept of territorial spirits.¹¹² Similarly, Mike Taylor completely dismisses the concept of territorial spirits. He writes, "The concept of 'territorial spirits' is essentially a pagan notion, and the Bible exposes pagan beliefs of this kind as fallacious. The reason that the Bible does not reveal anything to us about 'territorial spirits' is simply that they do not exist."¹¹³

Arnold is also cautious on the issue of territorial spirits, but he is more open to the concept than some of his conservative colleagues. He admits that the New Testament is quiet on the issue of regional and city spirits.¹¹⁴ He writes, "Jesus says nothing about these higher-level spirits. Neither does the Book of Acts contain explicit teaching about them. Paul's references to the 'principalities and powers' say nothing about regional or

¹¹¹Lowe, *Territorial Spirits and World Evangelisation*, 29. In light of Scripture's silence, Lowe also urges great caution with respect to demonic taxonomies. Ibid.

¹¹²Robert Lightner, *Angels, Satan, and Demons: Invisible Beings that Inhabit the Spiritual World* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 156.

¹¹³Mike Taylor, "Bringing in the Kingdom," *Evangel* 11 (1993), 80. Taylor goes on to credit Frank Peretti for the popularization of the concept of territorial spirits. Ibid., 79. Charles R. A. Hoole also argues that the notion of territorial spirits is pagan. Charles R. A. Hoole, "Territorial Spirits: An Indian Perspective," *Stulos Theological Journal* 5 (1997): 67.

¹¹⁴Arnold, *Three Crucial Questions about Spiritual Warfare*, 156.

city spirits.”¹¹⁵ Nevertheless, based on Daniel 10 and the book of Revelation, Arnold is open to the concept of territorial spirits.¹¹⁶ It should be noted, however, that his discussions about territorial spirits do not approximate the speculations often found in the writings of Wagner and his colleagues.

Another objection to Wagner’s interpretation of the principalities and powers relates to Wagner’s own terminology. In *Confronting the Powers*, Wagner distinguishes between ground-level, occult-level, and strategic-level spiritual warfare, and he implies that believers battle different types of spirits at each level of spiritual warfare.¹¹⁷ Writing about Wagner’s distinctions, Lowe observes, “While this seems clear enough in theory, in practice it is difficult to find examples of such spirits without blurring the distinctions.”¹¹⁸ Specifically, Lowe notes that in defense of strategic-level spiritual warfare and territorial spirits, Wagner appeals to Susan Garrett and Ramsay MacMullen. The problem, as Lowe points out, is that Garrett’s work deals primarily with what

¹¹⁵Ibid.

¹¹⁶Ibid., 159.

¹¹⁷Wagner offers this definition of strategic-level spiritual warfare: “*Strategic-level spiritual warfare* describes confrontation with high-ranking principalities and powers such as Paul writes about in Eph 6:12. These enemy forces are frequently called ‘territorial spirits’ because they attempt to keep large numbers of humans networked through cities, nations, neighborhoods, people groups, religious allegiance, industries or any other form of human society in spiritual captivity.” According to Wagner, “*Ground-level spiritual warfare* involves casting demons out of people.” Additionally, Wagner claims, “*Occult-level spiritual warfare* deals with demonic forces released through activities related to Satanism, witchcraft, Freemasonry, Eastern religions, New Age, shamanism, astrology, and many other forms of structured occultism.” Wagner, *Confronting the Powers*, 21-22. Further treatment of strategic-level spiritual warfare can be found in the following section.

¹¹⁸Lowe, *Territorial Spirits and World Evangelisation*, 16-17.

Wagner has termed “occult” level spirits, and MacMullen’s work deals primarily with what Wagner has termed “ground” level spirits.¹¹⁹ Thus Wagner ignores his own definitions in his attempt to argue for the concept of territorial spirits.¹²⁰

Proposed Response of the Church

As stated above, in *Warfare Prayer* Wagner divides spiritual warfare into three levels.¹²¹ While he offers brief suggestions for both ground-level and occult-level spiritual warfare, Wagner’s focus is clearly on responding to the principalities and powers through strategic-level spiritual warfare.¹²² In developing this approach to spiritual warfare, Wagner was particularly influenced by two men: Argentinean pastor

¹¹⁹Ibid., 17; Susan Garrett, *The Demise of the Devil: Magic and the Demonic in Luke’s Writings* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989); Ramsay MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire: A.D. 100-400* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984).

¹²⁰To his credit, after making sharp distinctions between the three levels of warfare and the three types of spirits, Wagner admits that he intends on ignoring these distinctions. Wagner, *Warfare Prayer*, 19. At other times, however, Wagner maintains that these distinctions are highly important. In a commentary on Acts he writes, “Strategic-level spiritual warfare is significantly different from ground-level spiritual warfare . . . and occult-level spiritual warfare.” C. Peter Wagner, *The Book of Acts: A Commentary* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2008), 53.

¹²¹Wagner, *Warfare Prayer*, 16-18.

¹²²For Wagner’s suggestions on ground-level and occult-level spiritual warfare, see Wagner, *Warfare Prayer*, 16-18. For other works on what Wagner terms “ground-level spiritual warfare,” see John P. Newport, *Demons, Demons, Demons* (Nashville: Broadman, 1972); and Merrill F. Unger, *What Demons Can Do to Saints* (Chicago: Moody, 1977). For other works on what Wagner terms “occult-level spiritual warfare,” see John Warwick Montgomery, *Principalities and Powers: A New Look at the World of the Occult* (New York: Family Library, 1975); Kurt E. Koch, *Between Christ and Satan* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1972); Lester Sumrall, *Supernatural Principalities and Powers* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1983); Merrill F. Unger, *Demons in the World Today: A Study of Occultism in the Light of God’s Word* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1971); idem, *The Mystery of Bishop Pike: A Christian View of the Other Side* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1971).

Omar Cabrera and American fiction author Frank Peretti.¹²³ Originally, Wagner stressed the importance of power encounters in general, but he quickly began to emphasize the need for what he termed strategic-level spiritual warfare.¹²⁴

Wagner defines strategic-level spiritual warfare as contending with territorial spirits, and he claims to derive this definition from Ephesians 6.¹²⁵ In discussing strategic-level spiritual warfare, Wagner consistently maintains that the practice is merely a tool to be used in obtaining the ultimate goal of world evangelization. He writes, “I do not believe that we should see spiritual warfare as an end in itself. . . . God’s highest priority is evangelism. . . . My intent in warfare prayer is directly proportional to its effectiveness in enhancing evangelism.”¹²⁶ Not only does Wagner insist his chief interest is evangelism, but he also insists believers should exercise caution with respect to strategic-level spiritual warfare. This caution is needed because, “We have no biblical examples of the 12 apostles or any other first-century Christian leaders who challenged the devil to a direct power encounter as Jesus did.”¹²⁷

¹²³Wagner, *Spiritual Power and Church Growth*, 41-42. Idem, *How to Have a Healing Ministry without Making Your Church Sick*, 197-98; idem, *Warfare Prayer*, 11, 13, 19.

¹²⁴Wagner, *Spiritual Power and Church Growth*, 127-28.

¹²⁵Wagner, *Warfare Prayer*, 18.

¹²⁶Ibid., 19-20. For similar comments about spiritual mapping, see Wagner, *Warfare Prayer*, 158; Wagner, *Breaking Strongholds in Your City*, 17, 25. For similar comments about spiritual warfare in general see Wagner, *Confronting the Powers*, 156-57.

¹²⁷Wagner, *Warfare Prayer*, 56.

While Wagner consistently tries to put the focus on evangelism, and while he initially admitted that there was little historical precedent for the practice of strategic-level spiritual warfare, the cumulative effect of his writing is a virtual insistence on the necessity of strategic-level spiritual warfare. In other words, despite all of his words of caution, Wagner makes many statements that seem to insist upon the necessity of strategic-level spiritual warfare. For example, he writes,

I affirm and participate in promoting social programs, education, pro-life demonstrations, strong police forces and sound legislation. I believe in evangelistic crusades and the Four Spiritual Laws. But these social and evangelistic programs will never work as well as they could or should by themselves if Satan's strongholds are not torn down. This is the real battle, and our weapon is prayer. Warfare prayer.¹²⁸

For Wagner, the first step in strategic-level spiritual warfare involves the identification of specific territorial spirits. In "Territorial Spirits" Wagner admits that the practice of discerning the names of territorial spirits is common.¹²⁹ In "Twenty-One Questions," Wagner explains, "Occasionally practitioners can cite cases where demonic

¹²⁸While this quote does not explicitly mention strategic-level spiritual warfare, Wagner's reference to warfare prayer is made in the context of a discussion about the necessity of strategic-level spiritual warfare. Ibid., 65. In *Breaking Strongholds in Your City* Wagner emphasizes the necessity of strategic-level spiritual warfare by insisting, "God has given us a *mandate* for intelligent, aggressive spiritual warfare [italics mine]." Wagner, *Breaking Strongholds in Your City*, 50. In *Praying with Power* Wagner writes, "My chief personal interest lies with strategic-level spiritual warfare. This seems to me to be the level that promises the greatest payoff for world evangelization." Wagner, *Praying with Power: How to Pray Effectively and Hear Clearly from God* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1997), 61. In *The Book of Acts* he argues, "It is my view that sound missiological strategy will take responsible, but aggressive, action to bind demonic strongmen, principalities, powers, territorial spirits, or whatever they might be called, who are serving Satan by keeping large populations as well as geographic areas in spiritual darkness." Wagner, *The Book of Acts*, 366.

¹²⁹Wagner, "Territorial Spirits," 83-84.

forces have been removed without learning names, either proper or functional. At the same time, most will affirm that if the name is discovered, the subsequent deliverance is notably facilitated.”¹³⁰ In *Confronting the Powers*, Wagner makes the bold assertion, “If we are going to do warfare prayer and confront the powers of darkness in the invisible world, it is essential that we have accurate information about the nature and function of these powers.”¹³¹

While not all advocates of strategic-level spiritual warfare agree with Wagner’s desire to discern the names of territorial spirits, most agree with the proposed method of discerning those names: spiritual mapping.¹³² In the first of Wagner’s six book series on strategic-level spiritual warfare, he tentatively spoke about a new area of research known as spiritual mapping.¹³³ By the third book of the same series, a book devoted to the role of spiritual mapping in strategic-level spiritual warfare, Wagner wrote, “We in the A.D. 2000 Movement are no longer discussing whether we *should* do spiritual mapping. We are now concentrating our energies on *how to do it well*.”¹³⁴ In

¹³⁰Wagner, “Twenty-One Questions,” in *Behind Enemy Lines: An Advanced Guide to Spiritual Warfare*, ed. Charles H. Kraft and Mark White (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant, 1994), 135.

¹³¹Wagner, *Confronting the Powers*, 40.

¹³²John Dawson argues that having names is not necessary, but he stops short of discouraging the attempt to discern names. Dawson, *Taking Our Cities for God*, 118. Sterk is skeptical about any names supposedly revealed by territorial spirits themselves, but he does encourage believers to address territorial spirits with their actual names “if and when they are known.” Sterk, “Territorial Spirits and Evangelization in Hostile Environments,” 159, 162.

¹³³Wagner, *Warfare Prayer*, 150.

¹³⁴Wagner, *Breaking Strongholds in Your City*, 12.

the same book Wagner defined spiritual mapping: “An attempt to see our (fill in the region to be mapped) as it really is, not as it appears to be.”¹³⁵

The process of spiritual mapping is usually focused on an unreached area, and it involves gathering information about the status of Christianity, prevailing social bondages, worldview and allegiances, spiritual opposition, the evolution of current circumstances, and the potential for spiritual breakthroughs.¹³⁶ When that process is finished, the church is ready to engage in warfare prayer against the principalities and powers.¹³⁷

Early on, Wagner cautioned against four dangers at this stage: engaging in meaningless, formulaic rhetoric, underestimating the enemy, expecting power without prayer, and overemphasizing power.¹³⁸ Unfortunately, many of Wagner’s colleagues failed to heed these cautions, and many of Wagner’s colleagues have consistently emphasized the necessity of aggressive, violent binding of the principalities and powers.¹³⁹ Also troubling is Wagner’s insistence that warfare prayer is more effective

¹³⁵Ibid., 14. Other scholars contributed to the concept of spiritual mapping. George Otis, Jr. was a pioneer and practitioner of spiritual mapping, and his book *Informed Intercession* represents one of the most important contributions to spiritual mapping. George Otis, Jr., *Informed Intercession: Transforming Your Community Through Spiritual Mapping and Strategic Prayer* (Ventura, CA: Renew, 1999).

¹³⁶Otis, *Informed Intercession*, 132.

¹³⁷Ibid.

¹³⁸Wagner, “Territorial Spirits,” 86-87.

¹³⁹John Robb describes warfare prayer as “spiritual violence,” “aggressive and violent,” and “essential.” John Robb, “Strategic Prayer,” in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, 3rd ed., ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1999), 147. Ed Silvano insists, “It always takes a power

when done on location instead of at a distance.¹⁴⁰

Once this binding has taken place, another aspect of strategic-level spiritual warfare is identificational repentance. Wagner discusses this practice in *Warfare Prayer* and *Praying with Power*.¹⁴¹ Additionally, Dawson has written extensively about the practice of identificational repentance.¹⁴² Other authors who advocate identificational repentance include Jacobs and Kraft; they describe a process of identifying the corporate sins of a group of people, claiming and applying the blood of Jesus, and symbolically and vicariously repenting of those corporate sins.¹⁴³ Like the practice of warfare prayer, it is argued that identificational repentance will break the power of territorial spirits and enable unbelievers to respond to the gospel.¹⁴⁴

Even critics of strategic-level spiritual warfare have recognized strengths of the practice.¹⁴⁵ Nevertheless, there are strong criticisms directed toward the spiritual warfare

encounter of some sort to establish the Church for the first time, because the Church has to displace the existing satanic structure.” Ed Silvano, *That None Should Perish: How to Reach Entire Cities for Christ Through Prayer Evangelism* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1994), 128. Also see Dawson, *Taking Our Cities for God*, 102; and Carlos Annacondia, *Listen to Me Satan: Keys for Breaking the Devil’s Grip and Bringing Revival to Your World* (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2008), 35, 144.

¹⁴⁰Wagner, *The Book of Acts*, 389.

¹⁴¹Wagner, *Warfare Prayer*, 125-41. Idem, *Praying with Power*, 95-118.

¹⁴²For Dawson’s view of identificational repentance, see Dawson, *Taking Our Cities for God*, 142-48.

¹⁴³Jacobs, *Possessing the Gates of the Enemy*, 235-36; Kraft, *The Rules of Engagement*, 112-13.

¹⁴⁴Weerasingha, “Spiritual Warfare in Sri Lanka,” 55.

¹⁴⁵Lowe notes that missions strategists are now considering the reality of

approach to the principalities and powers.¹⁴⁶ First, many scholars have pointed to the novelty of strategic-level spiritual warfare. The historical aspect of strategic-level spiritual warfare will be dealt with in the following section. Second, and related to the novelty of strategic-level spiritual warfare, many scholars are troubled by the fact that a novelist (Peretti) was so influential on the development of strategic-level spiritual warfare.¹⁴⁷ Orme concludes that by relying on subjective feelings and pragmatism, “the strategic level spiritual warfare movement is in danger of departing from Antiochean hermeneutics.”¹⁴⁸

demons, prayer meetings are vibrant and crowded, and Christians are rediscovering a passion for missions. Lowe, *Territorial Spirits and World Evangelisation*, 12. Garrett notes that Christians have begun to recognize prayer as a prerequisite for evangelism, the importance of holiness, the need for bold proclamation of the gospel, and the demonic nature of paganism and sin. Garrett, *Angels and the New Spirituality*, 216. Lawless notes that more Christians recognize the reality of demons and spiritual warfare, understand that the Great Commission is binding on the church, believe in the necessity of prayer, value research, and emphasize unity within the body of Christ. Charles Lawless, “Spiritual Warfare and Missions,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 9 (2005): 37-38.

¹⁴⁶Space permits a full presentation of these critics, but the major criticisms of strategic-level spiritual warfare will be mentioned. For a comprehensive critique of strategic-level spiritual warfare, see Lowe’s book *Territorial Spirits and World Evangelisation*.

¹⁴⁷Thomas McAlpine, *Facing the Powers: What Are the Options?* (Monrovia, CA: MARC, 1991), 46, 51. Peter Gardella, “Spiritual Warfare in the Fiction of Frank Peretti,” in *Religions of the United States in Practice*, ed. Colleen McDannell (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 2:328-39. Taylor, “Bringing in the Kingdom,” 79. Roger S. Greenway, “Missions as Spiritual Warfare: An Historical Sketch of Recent Thinking,” *Urban Missions* 13 (1995): 24. For a critique of Peretti’s theology and worldview, see Robert A. Guelich, “Spiritual Warfare: Jesus, Paul and Peretti,” *Pneuma* 13 (1991): 33-64.

¹⁴⁸Orme, “Identificational Repentance and Strategic Spiritual Warfare,” 160. “Antiochean hermeneutics” is often contrasted with “Alexandrian hermeneutics.” The former is a method of interpretation that considers grammar, context, and authorial intent. The latter is a method of interpretation that prefers an allegorical approach to the Bible.

Third, as Garrett explains, “The sheer amount of attention this movement gives to devils is troubling. This comes out in their desire to be able to name demons in power encounters.”¹⁴⁹ Garrett terms this demonic obsession the “Protestant angelphilia,” and he is right to criticize the spiritual warfare approach’s fascination with all things demonic.¹⁵⁰

Fourth, several scholars are concerned that Wagner and his colleagues are flirting with animism in their desire to exercise power over territorial spirits. Garrett argues that strategic-level spiritual warfare often descends to the level of pagan superstition.¹⁵¹ Moreau agrees, and insists, “The emphasis on discerning and *naming* demons before we can have power of them is approaching a form of Christian animism.”¹⁵² Lawless also warns that strategic-level spiritual warfare leans toward animism in its attempt to manipulate and control territorial spirits.¹⁵³

Fifth, by focusing on the demonic, Wagner and his colleagues have unintentionally diminished the importance of Christ and his victorious death on the cross.

Clement of Alexandria and Origen are often associated with the Alexandrian approach, while John Chrysostom and Theodore of Mopsuestia are often associated with the Antiochean approach. For more on this issue, see William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L Hubbard, Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1993), 37-40.

¹⁴⁹Garrett, *Angels and the New Spirituality*, 222.

¹⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 205.

¹⁵¹*Ibid.*, 217.

¹⁵²A. Scott Moreau, “Gaining Perspectives on Territorial Spirits,” in *Deliver us From Evil: An Uneasy Frontier in Christian Mission*, ed. A. Scott Moreau and others (Monrovia, CA: World Vision, 2002), 266-67.

¹⁵³Lawless, “Spiritual Warfare and Missions,” 39.

Arnold rightly questions, “Why do we need to find the name of a territorial ruler if we are in union with a Lord who has been exalted high above every conceivable power, regardless of its name or title?”¹⁵⁴ Lowe simply notes, “The Bible does not call us to attack ruling demons . . . for God has already defeated them in Christ.”¹⁵⁵

Sixth, Wagner and his colleagues are often criticized for their offensive approach to spiritual warfare.¹⁵⁶ Arnold warns, “I can find no scriptural evidence suggesting that we have the right or authority to ‘serve notice,’ ‘evict,’ or ‘bind’ spirits over cities, regions, or nations.”¹⁵⁷ Again, Garrett is helpful in commenting,

We can easily get excited over how great it would be to strike down some demon, but our real spiritual victories come simply in developing greater integrity, compassion, and knowledge of God. . . . Genuine victories come when we persevere in faith despite hardship or disappointment, when we pray for our enemies, when we learn how to be compassionate and generous to those in need, and when we keep ourselves unspotted by the world.¹⁵⁸

Historical Justification for Approach

Unlike Wink, who is not overly concerned with finding historical justification for his interpretation of and response to the principalities and powers, Wagner is

¹⁵⁴Arnold, *Three Crucial Questions about Spiritual Warfare*, 163.

¹⁵⁵Lowe, *Territorial Spirits and World Evangelisation*, 45.

¹⁵⁶Moreau, “A Survey of North American Spiritual Warfare Thinking,” 120-23. Lightner, *Angels, Satan, and Demons*, 156, 181. Scott Souza, “Is It War, Or Is It Life?” *Reformation and Revival* 4 (1995), 59. Steven Fernandez, “The Deliverance Model of Spiritual Warfare,” *Reformation and Revival* 4 (1995): 105.

¹⁵⁷Arnold, *Three Crucial Questions about Spiritual Warfare*, 164.

¹⁵⁸Garrett, *Angels and the New Spirituality*, 195.

concerned about finding historical justification for his position.¹⁵⁹ Interestingly, in *Warfare Prayer* he admitted that there is no New Testament or first century example of Christian leaders challenging the demonic powers to a direct power encounter.¹⁶⁰ However, in *Confronting the Powers* Wagner goes to great lengths to provide historical precedent for strategic-level spiritual warfare. He cites five examples of strategic-level spiritual warfare in the book of Acts alone. These include Peter and Simon Magus (Acts 8:9-25), Peter and Herod (Acts 12:1-25), Paul and Bar-Jesus (Acts 13:4-12), Paul and the Python Spirit (Acts 16:16-24), and Paul and Artemis (Acts 19:11-41).¹⁶¹ Wagner also cites four examples of strategic-level spiritual warfare in the early church period and the medieval period, including Gregory the Wonderworker, Martin of Tours, Saint Benedict, and Boniface.¹⁶²

The most thorough critique of Wagner's historical examples comes from Arnold. In *Three Crucial Questions about Spiritual Warfare* he argues convincingly against all of Wagner's historical examples.¹⁶³ Writing about the New Testament he writes, "We do not find Jesus, John, Peter, James, or Paul ever attempting to take on a

¹⁵⁹Wagner sets up his argument by offering the following principles for probing history: "Not everything that happens is recorded. . . . Not everything written has been preserved. . . . Not everything preserved has been found. . . . Not everything found is available. . . . Not everything available is interpreted in the same way." Wagner, *Confronting the Powers*, 92-94.

¹⁶⁰Wagner, *Warfare Prayer*, 56.

¹⁶¹Wagner, *Confronting the Powers*, 163.

¹⁶²Ibid., 103-12.

¹⁶³Arnold, *Three Crucial Questions about Spiritual Warfare*, 171-73.

territorial spirit.”¹⁶⁴ Writing about the early church he writes, “I have found no mention of or even allusion to anything close to praying against territorial spirits.”¹⁶⁵

Arnold’s arguments against Wagner’s historical examples are convincing, but another aspect of Wagner’s historical argumentation deserves critique. As mentioned above, Wagner specifically defines three categories of spiritual warfare.¹⁶⁶ However, when offering historical examples of strategic-level spiritual warfare, Wagner only produces historical examples of power encounters in general, ground-level spiritual warfare, and occult-level spiritual warfare. Most of Wagner’s references to Gregory the Wonderworker, Martin of Tours, Saint Benedict, and Boniface refer to power encounters in general and not to what Wagner has defined strategic-level spiritual warfare.¹⁶⁷

When Wagner refers to Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Cyprian, he is citing examples of what he has termed ground-level spiritual warfare, not strategic-level spiritual warfare. The same can be said for Wagner’s references to the book of Acts. These stories refer to what he has already defined as occult-level and ground-level spiritual warfare, not strategic-level spiritual warfare.¹⁶⁸ Lowe rightly concludes that there is little support for Wagner’s approach to the principalities and powers.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁴Ibid., 165.

¹⁶⁵Ibid., 169.

¹⁶⁶Wagner, *Warfare Prayer*, 16-18.

¹⁶⁷Wagner, *Confronting the Powers*, 103-12.

¹⁶⁸Ibid., 115-16, 156-213.

¹⁶⁹Lowe, *Territorial Spirits and World Evangelisation*, 130.

Clinton Arnold

In recent years, several scholars have written about the principalities and powers from a conservative perspective; however, the leading voice is Arnold.¹⁷⁰ He is a graduate of Biola College, Talbot Theological Seminary, and the University of Aberdeen. Currently, he serves as Professor of New Testament Language and Literature and Chair of the New Testament Department at Talbot School of Theology at Biola University.¹⁷¹ In one of his more popular works about the principalities and powers, *Powers of Darkness*, Arnold laments, “Regrettably, the Christian community has not been well served with material dealing with a biblical perspective on demons, principalities and powers, and the nature of the church’s conflict with the powers of evil.”¹⁷² *Powers of Darkness*, combined with several of Arnold’s other scholarly works, is representative of the conservative approach to the principalities and powers.

Worldview Assumptions

David Powlison explains the importance of worldview with respect to spiritual warfare:

If deadly rationalism saps spiritual vitality on the one hand, the exorcistic mentality spawns mutant spiritualities on the other. Both the disenchanting world of modern rationalism and the charmed world of premodern spiritism are wrong. Liberals often graft Christian elements onto an underlying naturalistic worldview, creating a

¹⁷⁰ Among those who largely agree with Arnold, three of the most prominent are Garrett, Lightner, and Page. See Garrett, *Angels and the New Spirituality*; Lightner, *Angels, Satan, and Demons: Invisible Beings that Inhabit the Spiritual World*; and Page, *Powers of Evil*.

¹⁷¹ Clinton E. Arnold, “Clinton E. Arnold” [on-line]; accessed November 6, 2009; available from http://www.talbot.edu/faculty/faculty_profiles/profile.cfm?n=clinton_arnold; Internet.

¹⁷² Arnold, *Powers of Darkness*, 15.

hybrid religion perhaps acceptable to modern minds. Similarly, the deliverance mentality often grafts Christian elements onto an underlying demonic and superstitious worldview, creating a hybrid perhaps acceptable to premodern minds. But the biblical Christian faith needs to stand alone; it should not be grafted onto any other worldview.¹⁷³

Arnold shares Powlison's desire to be faithful to what Powlison describes as "the biblical Christian faith."¹⁷⁴ Thus, Arnold begins with two worldview assumptions that positively impact his interpretation of and response to the principalities and powers.

First, Arnold is willing to submit his beliefs about the principalities and powers to the teaching of Scripture without resorting to reinterpretation or demythologization.¹⁷⁵ This willingness can be seen in quotes like this one from *Powers of Darkness*: "Evil imposes itself upon us and those we love. And if we want help from the Bible for dealing with the problem of evil, we must be willing to take seriously what the Bible takes seriously: the intense involvement in life of a figure named Satan and his powers of darkness."¹⁷⁶ Additionally, Arnold argues that the teaching of Jesus was the "single most important factor in the thinking and writing of Paul," and he insists, "What the apostle

¹⁷³David Powlison, *Power Encounters: Reclaiming Spiritual Warfare* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 25.

¹⁷⁴For similar comments from Arnold, see Arnold, *Powers of Darkness*, 13-17.

¹⁷⁵For other scholars who are willing to submit their beliefs about the principalities and powers to the teaching of Scripture without resorting to reinterpretation or demythologization, see Garrett, *Angels and the New Spirituality*; Tremper Longman, III and Daniel Reid, *God Is a Warrior* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995); Page, *Powers of Evil*; Lowe, *Territorial Spirits and World Evangelisation*; Chuck Lawless, *Discipled Warriors: Growing Healthy Churches that are Equipped for Spiritual Warfare* (Grand Rapids; Kregel, 2002); and Lightner, *Angels, Satan, and Demons*.

¹⁷⁶Arnold, *Powers of Darkness*, 11. Just a few pages later, Arnold encouraged believers to look to the Bible for truth about the principalities and powers and for direction about how to respond to the principalities and powers. *Ibid.*, 15-16.

Paul has to say about the powers of darkness should be formative for our thinking as Christians.”¹⁷⁷ In contrast to his willingness to submit his beliefs to the teaching of Scripture, Arnold points to those who, since the Enlightenment, have attempted to “demythologize” the Bible’s teaching about the principalities and powers.¹⁷⁸

The second formative aspect of Arnold’s worldview, and a direct result of his commitment to the truthfulness of Scripture, is Arnold’s openness to the supernatural world. As the subsequent section will show, Arnold argues that Paul had personal, evil, spiritual beings in mind when he wrote about the principalities and powers. Because Arnold does not automatically exclude the possibility of supernatural explanations, he simply takes Paul at face value and accepts the fact that the principalities and powers are personal, evil, spiritual beings.¹⁷⁹ This openness to supernatural explanations is shared by other scholars who advocate a conservative approach to the principalities and powers. For example, Everett Ferguson states, “I find it easier to believe that demons are a literal reality and still exist.”¹⁸⁰ Whatever the specific reason behind one’s openness to supernatural explanations, this openness does have an impact on one’s interpretation of and response to the principalities and powers.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁷Ibid., 75, 87.

¹⁷⁸Ibid., 89.

¹⁷⁹Ibid., 16, 19, 89-90, 93.

¹⁸⁰Everett Ferguson, *Demonology of the Early Christian World* (New York: Edwin Mellen, 1984), 171.

¹⁸¹Another scholar who agrees with the conservative interpretation of the principalities and powers is Gregory Boyd. He criticizes Bultmann and Schlier and Berkof for their anti-supernaturalism. However, his warfare worldview and open theism

Identity of the Principalities and Powers

Arnold argues, “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.”¹⁸² This being true, the only question Arnold is concerned with is what Paul actually believed about such evil spirits, and this is the question he sets out to answer in his four major works devoted to the principalities and powers.¹⁸³

Following the example of the Reformers and conservatives from the nineteenth and twentieth century, Arnold argues that Paul viewed the principalities and powers as personal, evil, spiritual beings.¹⁸⁴ In part, he bases this argument on the prevalent beliefs about the principalities and powers in the ancient world.¹⁸⁵ Writing about the ancient

taint an otherwise helpful treatment of the principalities and powers. Gregory A. Boyd, *God at War: The Bible and Spiritual Conflict* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), 59-60, 274-76.

¹⁸²Arnold, *Powers of Darkness*, 89.

¹⁸³These four works are Arnold, *Powers of Darkness*; idem, *Three Crucial Questions about Spiritual Warfare*; idem, *Power and Magic: The Concept of Power in Ephesians in Light of its Historical Setting* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992); and idem, *The Colossian Syncretism: The Interface between Christianity and Folk Belief at Colossae* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996).

¹⁸⁴Arnold’s list of terms that fall under the category of “the principalities and powers” is a helpful resource. Unlike Wink, who is willing to include every New Testament reference to “power” in his treatment of the principalities and powers, Arnold focuses on the references that refer to personal, evil, spiritual beings. This list, found at the back of *Powers of Darkness*, includes principalities (rulers), powers (authorities), dominions (powers), thrones, angels (messengers), world rulers (powers), spiritual hosts (spiritual forces), rulers, elemental spirits (basic principles), and demons.

¹⁸⁵In dealing with the ancient world, Arnold considers the Old Testament, the classical era before the New Testament age, the Hellenistic era, magical beliefs,

world, Arnold argues, “The belief in spirits crossed all religious, ethnic and geographic boundaries.”¹⁸⁶ Arnold also shows how the major cultural and religious influences of Paul’s time tended to interpret the principalities and powers as personal, evil, spiritual beings.¹⁸⁷ Thus, he insists, “*Principalities and powers* surface throughout Paul’s letters as the spirit beings he saw as hostile to God’s people.”¹⁸⁸

Additionally, Arnold argues that the principalities and powers were created by Christ, have rebelled against God, and are now defeated enemies because of Christ’s victorious death on the cross.¹⁸⁹ Nevertheless, as Arnold explains, the principalities and powers continue to scheme and work against God’s people.¹⁹⁰ This opposition takes the form of tempting believers, promoting false teaching, inflicting physical malady,

astrology, Jewish beliefs, pagan beliefs, the intertestamental period, and Greco-Roman demonology. Arnold, *Powers of Darkness*, 23-24, 26-27, 48, 53-70, 90-93.

¹⁸⁶Ibid., 19.

¹⁸⁷Ibid., 23-24, 26-27, 48, 53-70, 90-93.

¹⁸⁸Ibid., 199. Also see Longman and Reid, *God Is a Warrior*, 138; and Page, *Powers of Evil*, 244. Some theologians from earlier periods of church history interpreted some references to the principalities and powers as references to holy, angelic beings. Arnold argues that when Paul uses the terminology of the principalities and powers to refer to spiritual beings, he always refers to evil spiritual beings. After discussing the principalities and powers in Ephesians, he argues, “We may conclude about this list of ‘powers’ that they are to be understood as evil and angelic in character. They cannot be interpreted as good or as both good and evil since the author makes them enemies of Christ through his allusion to Ps 110:1. This is also consistent with the other references to the ‘powers’ in the letter, where they can only be understood as evil (6:11, 12, 16; 2:2; 4:8, 27).” Arnold, *Power and Magic*, 56.

¹⁸⁹Arnold, *Powers of Darkness*, 16, 81, 100, 104-08, 111, 144. Also see Longman and Reid, *God Is a Warrior*, 139; Lowe, *Territorial Spirits and World Evangelisation*, 51, 56.

¹⁹⁰Arnold, *Powers of Darkness*, 127.

hindering the mission of the church, assailing the purity of the church, and destroying pastors.¹⁹¹

Like Calvin and Luther before him, Arnold encourages silence where Scripture is silent, and he observes Paul's silence on the following issues: "An explanation of the angelic rebellion and fall," "the names of the angelic powers," "the order within the angelic hierarchy," "the activities of certain demons and how they are thwarted," and, "territories ruled by evil angels."¹⁹² He is also hesitant to associate the principalities and powers with the power structures of this world. Arnold urges caution here, primarily because, "The bulk of what Paul had to say about the powers had to do primarily with their influence on individuals and the church."¹⁹³ He also argues that identifying the principalities and powers with structures is reductionistic since the two categories are "ontologically distinct."¹⁹⁴ Despite this hesitation, Arnold is willing to admit that the

¹⁹¹Ibid., 127-37, 184-85, 191-92.

¹⁹²Ibid., 98-99. Garrett also cautions against the temptation of reading an angelic or demonic hierarchy into Paul's references to the principalities and powers. Garrett, *Angels and the New Spirituality*, 125. Likewise, Page argues that Paul is not concerned with rank or specific activity. Page, *Powers of Evil*, 245. Lowe's comments are similar to those offered by Garrett and Page. Lowe, *Territorial Spirits and World Evangelisation*, 43.

¹⁹³Arnold, *Powers of Darkness*, 183. Earlier in *Powers of Darkness* Arnold writes, "Paul was primarily concerned with the health and well-being of his churches. Consequently he spent little time reflecting on the influence of the powers over the world at large. He did not, for instance, explain how the powers of darkness exert their control over Roman Caesars, the economy or the diplomatic relationships among various Roman provinces. . . . What has been preserved for us, however, are his letters to churches." Ibid., 126.

¹⁹⁴Ibid., 195-96.

principalities and powers can work through structures because they can work through the people who control structures.¹⁹⁵

Proposed Response of the Church

Arnold's interpretation of the principalities and powers directly impacts his proposed response to the principalities and powers. He explains,

There is no doubt Paul envisioned the work of evil spirits to extend beyond their hostile influence on individuals and the church. In Paul's letters, however, the emphasis is clearly on their malevolent activity in preventing people from becoming Christians and hindering their growth in Christian virtue. The major issue of concern for Paul, therefore, is not so much the relevance of the powers with regard to social justice, but their implications on salvation history and Christian behavior. In Paul's eyes the powers unleash their greatest hostility when they hinder the proclamation of the gospel. They use the flesh and, indeed, the structures of the world to blind people from discovering the truth about God's redemptive work in the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul's concept of ministry included no injunction for Christians to work toward reforming the social or political order.¹⁹⁶

Arnold's interpretation of the principalities and powers forces him to reject the social reforms proposed by Wink, and his commitment to Scripture forces him to reject the strategic-level spiritual warfare proposed by Wagner.¹⁹⁷ Commenting on Ephesians 6, Arnold explains, "The nature of spiritual warfare, as Paul portrayed it here, is primarily

¹⁹⁵Ibid., 202.

¹⁹⁶Ibid., 201.

¹⁹⁷Arnold does not *completely* reject *all* aspects of Wagner's approach to the principalities and powers. For example, he cautiously admits that territorial spirits may exist. Arnold, *Three Crucial Questions about Spiritual Warfare*, 151-60. He is willing to accept "spiritual mapping" as promoted by George Otis, Jr. Ibid., 176. He is also willing to accept "identificational repentance" if it is carried out only among the people of God. Ibid., 177-85. However, he insists, "God has not given us the responsibility of directly engaging territorial spirits. It is therefore not necessary for us to discern them, name them, and try to cast them out." Ibid., 185.

concerned with Christian conduct and spreading the gospel – not with exorcism or eradicating structural evil.”¹⁹⁸

Thus, instead of working to reform the social order or engaging in strategic-level spiritual warfare, Arnold focuses his response on the individual believer and the local church. This response has both an offensive component, spreading the gospel, and a defensive component, Christian conduct. Writing about the defensive component of spiritual warfare, Arnold explains, “Spiritual warfare is therefore resistance. It is a defensive posture. It involves recognizing the supernatural nature of temptation and being prepared to face it.”¹⁹⁹ Writing about the offensive component of spiritual warfare, Arnold explains, “Spiritual warfare is not only defensive; it also takes the offensive. Paul called the soldiers of Christ to advance on enemy territory by proclaiming the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.”²⁰⁰

Before individuals concern themselves with either of these responses, however, Arnold argues that they must know Christ.²⁰¹ He writes, “True freedom comes from identification with Jesus’ death – freedom from sin, freedom from death, and freedom from the grip of the principalities and powers.”²⁰² Not only must individuals know Christ, but, as Arnold points out, they must know who they are in Christ. Arnold

¹⁹⁸Arnold, *Powers of Darkness*, 154.

¹⁹⁹*Ibid.*, 154.

²⁰⁰*Ibid.*, 156-57.

²⁰¹*Ibid.*, 82, 115, 119, 121, 151.

²⁰²*Ibid.*, 114.

explains that this is because “Satan consistently seeks to have us believe a lie about Christ and his redemptive work.”²⁰³

Once a believer is secure in his or her identity in Christ, he or she is able to effectively stand against the principalities and powers. This is the defensive aspect of Arnold’s proposed response, and it is based on Paul’s fourfold admonition to “stand” in Ephesians 6.²⁰⁴ According to Arnold, standing is primarily about the character and morality of God’s people. He explains, “First and foremost, God has called his people to integrity, purity, and holiness.”²⁰⁵

Arnold is not alone in his interpretation of Paul’s command to “stand.” Several of his colleagues have similarly defined standing against the principalities and powers. In *Angels and the New Spirituality*, Garrett notes, “Genuine victories come when we persevere in the faith despite hardship and disappointment, when we pray for our enemies, when we learn how to be compassionate and generous to those in need, and when we keep ourselves unspotted by the world.”²⁰⁶ Lowe also argues that believers are to stand defensively, and he discourages an aggressive, offensive approach because Christ has defeated the principalities and powers.²⁰⁷ Lawless emphasizes the importance of standing against the principalities and powers, and he connects this concept with

²⁰³Ibid., 132.

²⁰⁴Ibid., 154.

²⁰⁵Arnold, *Three Crucial Questions about Spiritual Warfare*, 186.

²⁰⁶Garrett, *Angels and the New Spirituality*, 195.

²⁰⁷Lowe, *Territorial Spirits and World Evangelisation*, 60-63.

Paul's admonition to put on the armor of God.²⁰⁸ He insists, "Biblical spiritual warfare is *not* about knowing Satan – it is about so knowing God and walking with Him that we readily recognize the counterfeit offers of the Enemy. Putting on the armor is about making disciples through teaching."²⁰⁹

In addition to his call for a defensive stand, Arnold urges believers to respond offensively by proclaiming the gospel. He writes,

Spiritual warfare is not only defensive; it also takes the offensive. Paul called the soldiers of Christ to advance on enemy territory by proclaiming the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Just as Christ bound the strong man in order to plunder his house, so too the body of Christ plunders Satan's kingdom by proclaiming the promise of divine rescue to captives in the kingdom of darkness.²¹⁰

Lawless agrees with Arnold's suggestion that believers respond to the principalities and powers offensively through evangelism. He writes, "The proclamation of the gospel is itself an act of warfare against Satan's kingdom."²¹¹

Whether believers respond offensively or defensively, Arnold consistently stresses the importance of prayer. In *Powers of Darkness* he writes, "If Paul were to summarize the primary way of gaining access to the power of God for waging successful

²⁰⁸Lawless, *Disciplined Warriors*, 16, 30, 53.

²⁰⁹Ibid., 55. Lawless makes similar statements throughout *Disciplined Warriors*. Ibid., 73, 214. In "Spiritual Warfare and Evangelism" Lawless laments that little attention has been paid to the necessity of personal holiness in the believer's stand against the principalities and powers. Lawless, "Spiritual Warfare and Evangelism," 36.

²¹⁰Arnold, *Powers of Darkness*, 156-57. Also see Arnold, *Three Crucial Questions about Spiritual Warfare*, 185, 188-89.

²¹¹Lawless, *Disciplined Warriors*, 74. Lawless develops this idea when he stresses the importance of pastors as equippers and leaders in evangelism. Lawless explains: "Pastors/teachers are to be equippers, and Satan does not want the church to be

spiritual warfare, he would unwaveringly affirm that it is through prayer.²¹² In *Three Crucial Questions about Spiritual Warfare*, Arnold writes, “The heart and essence of spiritual warfare at any level is prayer.”²¹³

A criticism that can be leveled against the conservative approach to the principalities and powers is the tendency to focus on individual believers instead of the church. To be sure, Arnold talks about the role of the church in spiritual warfare, and he warns of the danger of individualism. In fact, Arnold boldly declares, “Today’s church needs a stronger sense of the mutuality of the body of Christ. The Western church, in particular, is guilty of an ‘individualistic Christianity.’”²¹⁴

Unfortunately, as argued in the introduction of this dissertation, in *Powers of Darkness* Arnold never develops a comprehensive program for the church’s stand against the principalities and powers. This lack of emphasis on the church can be seen in

equipped. Thus, he targets the equippers so that their lives lack credibility – and so that no one will listen as they challenge people to be faithful.” Ibid., 115.

²¹²Arnold, *Powers of Darkness*, 158.

²¹³Arnold, *Three Crucial Questions about Spiritual Warfare*, 187. Lowe also emphasizes the importance of prayer. Lowe, *Territorial Spirits and World Evangelisation*, 64. Lawless also agrees wholeheartedly with Arnold’s emphasis on the primacy of prayer in responding to the principalities and powers. He writes, “The believers were to pray: Keep alert in battle, always in prayer; Pray for all believers; Pray for effective evangelism.” Lawless, *Disciplined Warriors*, 56.

²¹⁴Arnold, *Powers of Darkness*, 159. Arnold also rightly states, “If Paul were to summarize the primary way of gaining access to the power of God for waging successful spiritual warfare, he would unwaveringly affirm that it is through prayer. Prayer is given much greater prominence in the spiritual warfare passage than any of the other implements. Prayer is also the only spiritual piece of armor that is not given a corresponding physical weapon.” Ibid.

Arnold's final summary and proposal, most of which is directed to the individual believer:

Here is a suggestive summary of the relevance of Paul's teaching on the powers of darkness stated in a prescriptive way for the church today. . . . Re-evaluate your own world view in light of Scripture. . . . Reflect on where the powers may influence you. . . . Know who you are in Christ. . . . Receive and appropriate God's enabling power. . . . Resist the evil one. . . . Join God's people in the redemptive mission.²¹⁵

The same criticism can be levied against Arnold's other works. For example, in *Power and Magic* Arnold focuses on Paul's letter to the Ephesians, and he argues that a unique contribution of this letter is Paul's emphasis on the church's battle against the principalities and powers.²¹⁶ He even argues, "The topic of the church has been considered the primary theme of Ephesians by some interpreters. If it is not the chief theme of the epistle, it is certainly very important to the writer."²¹⁷ Despite recognizing the centrality of the church in the book of Ephesians, Arnold does not develop a comprehensive proposal for the church's stand against the principalities and powers.²¹⁸

²¹⁵Ibid., 210-17.

²¹⁶Arnold, *Power and Magic*, 64.

²¹⁷Ibid., 158.

²¹⁸This emphasis on individuals instead of the church can be found in the writings of many of Arnold's colleagues. Ferguson has written a helpful work titled *Demonology of the Early Christian World*. Unfortunately, he focuses his conclusions and applications on the individual Christian instead of the church. These conclusions include Ferguson's suggestion that believers recognize the reality of the demonic realm and prepare themselves for the wiles of their demonic opponents. Ferguson, *Demonology of the Early Christian World*, 150, 172-73. Lightner's book *Angels, Satan, and Demons* is a thoroughly biblical work, but its application is directed to the individual believer. He concludes, "Each one of us must 'resist the devil' personally." Lightner, *Angels, Satan, and Demons*, 161. Thus, Erwin Van Der Meer's observation that most works on spiritual warfare have been focused, not on the church, but on the individual, is both accurate and regrettable. Erwin Van Der Meer, "Reflections on Spiritual Mapping," *Africa Journal of*

Historical Justification for Approach

While Wink is more concerned about reinterpretation than finding historical precedent for his interpretation of the principalities and powers, and while Wagner searches in vain to find historical precedent for his interpretation of the principalities and powers, Arnold and his conservative colleagues are more concerned with sound exegesis. This is not to say Arnold is unconcerned with historical precedent. To the contrary, Arnold is certainly pleased when history confirms his exegesis.²¹⁹ However, this confirmation is secondary to his desire to get at the meaning of the biblical text.

A good example of Arnold's commitment to exegesis first and historical confirmation second is found in *Powers of Darkness*. Arnold devotes the majority of the book to exegeting Paul's teaching about the principalities and powers, but he also gives a substantial amount of space to the first century beliefs about the principalities and powers.²²⁰ Similarly, Arnold's treatments of Ephesians and Colossians offer excellent examples of the grammatical-historical approach to interpretation, but they also contain

Evangelical Theology 20 (2001): 61. It should be noted that Lawless avoids this mistake in *Disciplined Warriors*. However, this book addresses spiritual warfare in general, and does not focus specifically on the principalities and powers. Among those whose work focuses more closely on the principalities and powers, Lawless' emphasis on the church is missing.

²¹⁹In *Three Crucial Questions about Spiritual Warfare*, Arnold asks the question, "Are we called to engage territorial spirits?" After explaining the issue, Arnold focuses on the notion of territorial spirits and the practice of strategic-level spiritual warfare. In dealing with both issues, Arnold looks to Scripture first. However, in writing about these issues, he also takes history into consideration. His conclusion is that history supports his positions on territorial spirits and strategic-level spiritual warfare. Arnold, *Three Crucial Questions about Spiritual Warfare*, 15-74.

²²⁰Arnold, *Powers of Darkness*, 87-161, 19-75.

in depth descriptions about the historical setting of the New Testament.²²¹ Garrett and Lowe are two other scholars who display a supreme concern for exegesis without neglecting the importance of historical confirmation.²²²

Summary

In summary, not only does Wink's worldview force him to reinterpret the principalities and powers, but it also leads him to propose an unbiblical response.

Writing about Wink's interpretation and proposed response, O'Brien rightly comments, "It fails to do justice to the historical context of the New Testament in which belief in the spiritual realm was widespread, it does not adequately account for explicit statements about these powers in Paul and other New Testament writers, and it is seriously flawed both theologically and hermeneutically."²²³

Wagner is honest when he writes, "Does our worldview influence our hermeneutics or how we interpret the Bible? Of course it does."²²⁴ Unfortunately, Wagner's worldview assumptions, particularly his epistemological base, have led him to go beyond Scripture in both his interpretation of and response to the principalities and powers. Consequently, Lowe's conclusion is correct: "From all angles – biblical theological, historical, sociological, or empirical – there is little to commend either the

²²¹Arnold, *Power and Magic*. Idem, *The Colossian Syncretism*.

²²²Garrett, *Angels and the New Spirituality*, 50-101, 190-233. Lowe, *Territorial Spirits and World Evangelisation*, 29-102.

²²³Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 469.

²²⁴Wagner, *Confronting the Powers*, 76-77.

theory of territorial spirits or the practice of warfare prayer.”²²⁵ Lowe candidly admits, however, “While the theory and practice of SLSW are indefensible, the proposal at least highlights the recent laxity in the evangelical practice of spiritual warfare. The solution is not to be found in formulating a new technique, but in returning to longstanding, but recently overlooked, theology and practice.”²²⁶

The work of Arnold represents an attempt to correct “the recent laxity in the evangelical practice of spiritual warfare,” as well as an attempt to return to “longstanding, but recently overlooked, theology and practice.”²²⁷ Arnold accepts the New Testament’s teaching about the principalities and powers at face value, and he limits his proposed response to those that are actually proposed by Scripture: knowing Christ, proclaiming the gospel, practicing holiness, and persisting in prayer. Unfortunately, by emphasizing the individual’s role in standing against the principalities and powers, Arnold and his colleagues have failed to emphasize the church’s role in standing against the principalities and powers. The following chapter reinforces the conservative interpretation of the principalities and powers while also emphasizing the centrality of the church in standing against the principalities and powers.

²²⁵Lowe, *Territorial Spirits and World Evangelisation*, 130.

²²⁶*Ibid.*, 129.

²²⁷These quotations come from Lowe’s proposal at the end of *Territorial Spirits and World Evangelisation*. In the context, he is not referring to Arnold or Arnold’s work; however, Arnold’s work is the best example of what Lowe is writing about. Lowe, *Territorial Spirits and World Evangelisation*, 129.

CHAPTER 4

BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE PRINCIPALITIES AND POWERS

The previous two chapters have described various approaches to the principalities and powers. The most biblical approach, and the approach with the most historical precedent, is the conservative approach. This chapter will interact with the writings of scholars who advocate the conservative approach, but it will primarily engage the New Testament passages that mention the principalities and powers. In doing so, this chapter will show that, according to the New Testament, the principalities and powers are personal, evil, spiritual beings who seek to destroy the church. Additionally, this chapter will argue that the church is called to stand against the principalities and powers.¹

Passages

Several delimitations and presuppositions should be made clear. First, the primary focus of this chapter will be the Pauline references to the principalities and powers; however, this chapter will also interact with non-Pauline passages as well as passages that do not explicitly mention the principalities and powers. Table 1 presents the passages and terms that will be considered in this chapter. Second, because the

¹Arnold talks about the necessity of a corporate stand, but he never fully develops the concept. Clinton E. Arnold, *Powers of Darkness: Principalities and Powers in Paul's Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992), 210-17; idem, *Power and Magic: The Concept of Power in Ephesians in Light of its Historical Setting* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 64, 158.

passages in focus are broader than the topic at hand, this chapter will not cover every issue in every passage. Finally, this chapter will approach Scripture with a belief in the inerrancy and the authority of the biblical text.

Terms	Forms	Passages	Meaning
ἀρχή	ἀρχαὶ ἀρχὴν ἀρχῆς ἀρχαῖς ἀρχάς	Rom 8:38, Col 1:16 1 Cor 15:24 Eph 1:21, Col 2:10 Eph 3:10 Eph 6:12, Col 2:15	rulers
ἐξουσία	ἐξουσίαν ἐξουσίας ἐξουσίαις ἐξουσίαι ἐξουσιῶν	1 Cor 15:24 Eph 1:21, 6:12, Col 2:10, 15 Eph 3:10 Col 1:16 1 Pet 3:22	authorities
δύναμις	δυνάμεις δύναμιν δυνάμειως δυνάμεων	Rom 8:38 1 Cor 15:24 Eph 1:21 1 Pet 3:22	powers
κυριότης	κυριότητος κυριότητες κυριότητα	Eph 1:21, 2 Pet 2:10 Col 1:16 Jude 8	dominions
θρόνος	θρόνοι	Col 1:16	thrones
κοσμοκράτωρ	κοσμοκράτορας	Eph 6:12	world rulers
πνευματικός	πνευματικά	Eph 6:12	spirit forces
ἄρχων	ἄρχόντων	1 Cor 2:6, 8	rulers
στοιχείον	στοιχεῖα στοιχείων	Gal 4:3, 9, Col 2:8 Col 2:20	elemental spirits
ἄγγελος	ἄγγελοι ἄγγέλων ἄγγέλους	Rom 8:38, 2 Pet 2:10 Col 2:18, 1 Pet 3:22, 2 Pet 2:4 Jude 6	angels
δαιμόνιον	δαιμονίους δαιμονίων	1 Cor 10:20 1 Cor 10:20, 21, 1 Tim 4:1	demons
δόξα	δόξας	2 Pet 2:10, Jude 8	glorious ones

Table 1. The principalities and powers – terms and passages²

²This table was developed from the following two sources: Frederick William Danker, ed. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian*

Clear Passages

In his short article titled “Principality,” Barry Smith defines the principalities and powers as “a class of spiritual being . . . most often evil.”³ He then refers to the following seven passages, all of which mention the principalities and powers: Romans 8:37-39, 1 Corinthians 15:20-28, Ephesians 1:15-23, 3:1-13, 6:10-20, and Colossians 1:13-20, 2:8-20. While there are other New Testament passages that mention the principalities and powers, Smith has selected six passages that generate only modest debate among scholars who advocate a conservative approach to the principalities and powers.⁴ This section will engage these passages and argue that they present the principalities and powers as personal, evil, spiritual beings that oppose the church.

Romans 8:37-39. After describing the order of salvation (Rom 8:28-30) and applying the doctrine of salvation (Rom 8:31-36), Paul concluded,

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels (ἄγγελοι) nor rulers (ἄρχαι), nor things present nor things to come, nor powers (δυνάμεις), nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom 8:37-39)

Literature, 3rd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000); and Arnold, *Powers of Darkness*, 218. The non-Pauline passages in this table are italicized. Although this chapter will consider Rom 13 and Titus 3, these references are not included in this table.

³Barry D. Smith, “Principality,” in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freedman (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 1084.

⁴Because many of the scholars who advocate the conservative approach to the principalities and powers believe that these seven passages clearly refer to personal, evil, spiritual beings, the section is titled “Clear Passages.” This title is not intended to suggest that there is no debate about the nature or activity of the principalities and powers in Rom 8:37-39, 1 Cor 15:20-28, Eph 1:15-23, 3:1-13, 6:10-20, and Col 1:13-20, 2:8-20. Rather, it is intended to reflect the fact that a significant number of scholars agree that these seven passages refer to personal, evil, spiritual beings.

Luther and Calvin disagreed about the identity of the ἄγγελοι, ἄρχαι, and δυνάμεις of Romans 8. Calvin thought all three terms referred to holy angels.⁵ Luther thought all three terms referred to evil angels.⁶ In recent years, many conservative commentators have interpreted the ἄρχαι and δυνάμεις of Romans 8 as demonic beings.⁷ James Boice explains this interpretation of the often paired terms ἄγγελοι and ἄρχαι: “Paul is deliberately introducing contrasting terms in these verses: four pairs, with two single terms thrown in. If that is his pattern, the contrast in this pair must be between good and bad angels.”⁸ Because of both the immediate context and Paul’s usage of the

⁵John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, in vol. 19 of *Calvin’s Commentaries*, trans. John Owen (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 330.

⁶Martin Luther, *Lectures on Romans*, trans. Jacob A. O. Preus, in *Luther’s Works*, ed. Hilton C. Oswald (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1972), 25:78.

⁷Craig Keener argues that many ancient Jewish writers used these terms to refer to demonic beings, and he insists that this interpretation makes the most sense in the context of Romans 8. Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 432. While not conservative, William Barclay also admitted that the ancient Jewish usage of these terms favored the demonic interpretation. William Barclay, *The Letter to the Romans*, rev. ed., The Daily Study Bible Series (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975), 117-18. F. F. Bruce argues that the ἄρχαι (rulers) and δυνάμεις (powers) refer to demonic beings, but he also argues that Paul’s reference to “height” and “depth” is a reference to demonic beings. F. F. Bruce, *The Letter of Paul to the Romans*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 171. Douglas Moo also argues that “height” and “depth” may, along with ἄγγελοι (angels), ἄρχαι (rulers), and δυνάμεις (powers), refer to demonic beings. Douglas Moo, *Romans*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 284, 287. James Edwards translates ἄρχαι (rulers) as “demons,” and he interprets ἄγγελοι (angels), ἄρχαι (rulers), and δυνάμεις (powers) as personal, evil, spiritual beings. James R. Edwards, *Romans*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), 226. James Dunn insists that ἄγγελοι (angels), ἄρχαι (rulers), and δυνάμεις (powers) refer to all supernatural beings. James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 38a (Dallas: Word, 1988), 507, 513.

⁸James Montgomery Boice, *Romans*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992),

term elsewhere, Boice also argues that δυνάμεις refers to personal, evil, spiritual beings.⁹ Thus, while there is some debate about whether ἄγγελοι should be interpreted as holy or evil angels, many conservative interpreters view the ἀρχαι and δυνάμεις of Romans 8:37-39 as personal, evil, spiritual beings.

It is essential to note that Paul's comments about the principalities and powers in Romans 8:37-39 are the conclusion of a lengthy soteriological discussion (Rom 8:28-36). Paul discussed the order of salvation, and he mentioned doctrines such as foreknowledge, predestination, calling, justification and glorification (Rom 8:29-30). Paul also applied the doctrine of salvation by insisting on the eternal security of God's people (Rom 8:31-36). With these great soteriological themes providing the immediate context for Paul's reference to the principalities and powers in Romans 8:37-39, it is reasonable to conclude that Paul saw a connection between an accurate understanding of soteriology and an accurate understanding the principalities and powers.

This conclusion is supported by the fact that, according to Romans 8:37-39, the principalities and powers seek to separate the people of God from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Some scholars insist that because good angels would never seek to separate God's people from his love, Paul's reference to ἄγγελοι must be a reference to evil

1002. Also see John F. MacArthur, *Romans 1-8* (Chicago: Moody, 1991), 516; and Everett F. Harrison and Donald A. Hagner, *Romans*, in vol. 11 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, rev. ed., ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 144. Arnold argues that both terms, ἄγγελοι (angels) and ἀρχαι (rulers), refer to evil angels. Arnold, *Powers of Darkness*, 199. Similarly, Thomas Schreiner argues that all three terms, ἄγγελοι (angels), ἀρχαι (rulers), and δυνάμεις (powers), refer to demonic beings. Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 465.

⁹Boice, *Romans*, 1004. Also see MacArthur, *Romans 1-8*, 516; and Harrison

angels.¹⁰ Other scholars argue that ἄγγελοι does refer to holy angels, and Paul was speaking hypothetically as in Galatians 1:8.¹¹ Either way, Paul found it necessary to assure the church at Rome that ἀρχαι and δυνάμεις, and possibly ἄγγελοι, would not be able to separate them from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Paul's reminder is key for two reasons. First, Paul used four plural pronouns when he wrote, "No, in all these things *we* are more than conquerors through him who loved *us*. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate *us* from the love of God in Christ Jesus *our* Lord" (Rom 8:37-39, italics mine). By using these plural pronouns, Paul described the work of the principalities and powers and the security of believers as a corporate issue. In other words, the principalities and powers work to separate the people of God *corporately* from the love of God in Christ Jesus, yet the love of God in Christ Jesus secures the people of God *corporately*.¹²

Second, in light of the eternal plan of God (Rom 8:29-30) and the love of Christ (Rom 8:35, 39), Paul insisted that the principalities and powers would be unable to

and Hagner, *Romans*, 144.

¹⁰Arnold, *Powers of Darkness*, 199; Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Pillar New Testament Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 341.

¹¹Boice, *Romans*, 1002; MacArthur, *Romans*, 516; and Moo, *Romans*, 288. Leon Morris suggests that perhaps ἄγγελοι (angels) does refer to holy angels, and they pose a threat to the people of God because of the fact that some people in the early church were worshipping angels (Col 2:18). Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 341.

¹²In addition to the four plural pronouns Paul used in Rom 8:37-39, the fact that Paul wrote these words in a letter to a *church* reinforces the idea that the

separate God's people from the love of God in Christ Jesus. As Edwards explains, "These powers, however mysterious and menacing, cannot overwhelm God's love. The cross of Christ was the decisive defeat of all mutinous authorities."¹³

1 Corinthians 15:20-28. Towards the end of 1 Corinthians, as he argued for the certainty of the resurrection of the dead, Paul wrote these words:

But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule (*ἀρχὴν*) and every authority (*ἐξουσίαν*) and power (*δύναμιν*). For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For "God has put all things in subjection under his feet." But when it says, "all things are put in subjection," it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all. (1 Cor 15:20-28)

Two major questions arise from this passage. First, who are the *ἀρχὴν*, *ἐξουσίαν*, and *δύναμιν* mentioned in 1 Corinthians 15:24? Not surprisingly, Walter Wink argues that the principalities and powers in 1 Corinthians 15:24 are "every structure of authority, role, office, incumbent, institution, system, nation, ruler, and angel."¹⁴ What is surprising is the number of conservative scholars who lean towards Wink's interpretation. Many of these scholars are not willing to wholly identify the *ἀρχὴν*, *ἐξουσίαν*, and *δύναμιν* of 1 Corinthians 15:24 with structures, but neither are they willing to dismiss the

principalities and powers and the security of God's people is a corporate issue.

¹³Edwards, *Romans*, 226. Also see Arnold, *Powers of Darkness*, 199; and Harrison and Hagner, *Romans*, 140.

¹⁴Walter Wink, *Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New*

possibility that Paul was referring to structures.¹⁵

A more consistent interpretation views the ἀρχήν, ἐξουσίαν, and δύναμιν of 1 Corinthians 15:24 as personal, evil, spiritual beings. This interpretation takes into consideration the plain meaning of other Pauline passages that contain similar groupings of such words (Rom 8:37-39, Eph 1:16-23, 3:1-13, 6:10-20, Col 1:13-20, and Col 2:8-20). As Verlyn Verbrugge argues, “These are terms Paul uses elsewhere to indicate the unseen world of spiritual malevolent forces warring against Christ and his church ever since our Lord’s resurrection.”¹⁶ Sydney Page agrees, and when writing about the ἀρχήν, ἐξουσίαν, and δύναμιν of 1 Corinthians 15:24, notes, “Most scholars understand this to refer to the subjugation of rebellious supernatural powers, and in view of the parallels in Ephesians 1:20-21 and 1 Peter 3:22, this seems likely.”¹⁷

Assuming, then, that the ἀρχήν, ἐξουσίαν, and δύναμιν of 1 Corinthians 15:24 are personal, evil, spiritual beings, the second major question that arises is what does Paul

Testament (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 50-51.

¹⁵Leon Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 211; Craig Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 298; Marion L. Soards, *1 Corinthians*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 333; and David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 710.

¹⁶Verlyn D. Verbrugge, *1 Corinthians*, in vol. 11 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, rev. ed., ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 397.

¹⁷Sydney H. T. Page, *Powers of Evil: A Biblical Study of Satan and Demons* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 241. Arnold agrees with Verbrugge and Page. He prefers to interpret the ἀρχήν, ἐξουσίαν, and δύναμιν of 1 Cor 15:24 as personal, evil, spiritual beings. Arnold, *Powers of Darkness*, 163. Also see Tremper Longman III and Daniel Reid, *God Is a Warrior* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 139.

mean by “destroy” in 1 Corinthians 15:24? Wink tries to maintain the possibility that these structures might someday be redeemed, so he suggests that “destroy” in 1 Corinthians 15:24 means “nullify” or “neutralize.”¹⁸ While his rationale is misguided, his proposed explanation is accurate. In 1 Corinthians 15:24, to “destroy” does not mean to “annihilate,” but rather to “conquer,” to “subjugate,” and to “make inoperative.”¹⁹ This meaning is especially evident when one considers that 1 Corinthians 15:24 is a quotation of Psalm 110:1.²⁰ In Psalm 110:1, David looks forward to the day when Yahweh says to his Lord, “Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.” Clearly, conquest and subjugation are in view here, not annihilation.

It is significant that just like Romans 8, 1 Corinthians 15 discusses the principalities and powers in the context of soteriology and Christology. In the first part of 1 Corinthians 15, Paul offered a succinct summary of the gospel message (1 Cor 15:1-11). Starting in 1 Corinthians 15:12, Paul offered his most lengthy treatment of the resurrection of believers, and he based his argument on the resurrection of Christ (1 Cor 15:12-58). Accordingly, the context of this reference to the principalities and powers is a reminder that the principalities and powers can be understood only in light of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Also noteworthy is the fact that 1 Corinthians 15 presents the principalities and powers as unredeemable enemies of Christ. In verse 24, Paul referred to the ἀρχήν,

¹⁸Wink, *Naming the Powers*, 51-52.

¹⁹Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, 212; and John MacArthur, *1 Corinthians* (Chicago: Moody, 1984), 419.

²⁰Verbrugge, *1 Corinthians*, 397.

ἐξουσίαν, and δύναμιν, and in the very next verse he wrote, “For he [Christ] must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet” (1 Cor 15:25). Again, the allusion to Psalm 110:1 is unmistakable, and it is reasonable to conclude that the ἀρχῆν, ἐξουσίαν, and δύναμιν are unredeemable enemies of Christ whose final defeat is certain.²¹

Ephesians 1:15-23. Arnold explains that Paul’s letter to the church in Ephesus contains “more references to the principalities and powers than any other epistle.”²² The first of these references occurs in the latter part of the first chapter of Ephesians.²³ After a brief introduction (Eph 1:1-2) and a breathtaking description of

²¹ Any attempt to argue for either the redemption of the principalities and powers or the inherent goodness of the principalities and powers is misguided. Wink argues for the possibility of redemption. Wink, *Naming the Powers*, 5. Wesley Carr argues that Paul’s references to the principalities and powers refer to holy angels. Wesley Carr, *Angels and Principalities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 122.

²² Clinton E. Arnold, “Principalities and Powers,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 5, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 467. Ernst Wendland writes, “Any careful reader (hearer) will be struck by the number of words pertaining to ‘power’ in Ephesians; indeed, this lexical field is a prominent feature of the epistle’s total verbal inventory.” Wendland also highlights the three passages to be treated here. He writes, “On several occasions, most significantly near the beginning, middle, and ending of the discourse, namely, at 1:21, 3:10, and 6:12, a noticeable concentration of such terminology appears, here with a connotatively negative force in the unfolding exposition.” Ernst R. Wendland, “Contextualising the Potentates, Principalities and Powers in the Epistle to the Ephesians,” *Neotestamentica* 33 (1999): 199.

²³ Andrew Lincoln argues, “Eph. 1:15-23 constitutes an extended thanksgiving which, like the preceding *berakah*, forms one long sentence. In terms of its overall structure this periscope can be divided into three major elements.” He goes on to describe these three elements as thanksgiving (15-16), prayer report (16-19), and praise (20-23). Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 42 (Dallas: Word, 1990), 47. For similar analysis, see William W. Klein, *Ephesians*, in vol. 12 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, rev. ed., ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 56.

redemption (Eph 1:3-14), Paul wrote these words:

For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule (ἀρχῆς) and authority (ἐξουσίας) and power (δυνάμειως) and dominion (κυριότητος), and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. (Eph 1:15-23)

In verse 21 of this passage Paul refers to the ἀρχῆς, ἐξουσίας, δυνάμειως, and κυριότητος. Against those who suggest that the principalities and powers here refer to structures of earthly existence, Peter O'Brien emphasizes the fact that verse 20 locates the ἀρχῆς, ἐξουσίας, δυνάμειως, and κυριότητος in the "heavenly realms."²⁴ Against those who argue that the principalities and powers here refer to holy angels, O'Brien emphasizes the fact that Paul was alluding to Psalm 110:1 and 8:6 to show that the principalities and powers are the enemies placed under Christ's feet.²⁵ Thus, O'Brien concludes that the ἀρχῆς, ἐξουσίας, δυνάμειως, and κυριότητος of Ephesians 1:21 should be interpreted as evil, hostile, spiritual powers, and his interpretation is shared by many conservative scholars.²⁶

²⁴Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 144. He also argues, "There seems to be no doubt that such spiritual powers can and do work through earthly structures; but to identify them with the structures is reductionistic." Ibid.

²⁵Ibid., 142, 144.

²⁶Ibid., 138-39, 144. For other conservative scholars who share O'Brien's interpretation, see Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, 543; James Montgomery Boice, *Ephesians: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker,

Like O'Brien, Arnold mentions the allusion to Psalm 110:1 and the reference to the heavenly places. He also argues that the context of Ephesians requires the interpreter to view the ἀρχῆς, ἐξουσίας, δυνάμεως, and κυριότητος of Ephesians 1:21 as personal, evil, spiritual beings. He writes:

We may conclude about this list of 'powers' that they are to be understood as evil and angelic in character. They cannot be interpreted as good or both good and evil since the author makes them enemies of Christ through his allusion to Ps 110:1. This is also consistent with the other references to the 'powers' in the letter, where they can only be understood as evil (6:11, 12, 16; 2:2; 4:8, 27).²⁷

Many of the scholars who support a conservative approach to the principalities and powers are hesitant to read a hierarchy into Ephesians 1:21; instead, many of these scholars emphasize the fact that this piling up of terms serves to highlight the ultimate supremacy of Christ.²⁸ Consequently, like Romans 8:37-39 and 1 Corinthians 15:20-28, Ephesians 1:15-23 places the principalities and powers in the context of an exalted Christology.

Additionally, the broader context places the principalities and powers in the context of soteriology. Ephesians 1:3-14 is a stirring description of redemption from

1997), 42; F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 274; John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Ephesians* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1979), 59-60; Arnold, *Power and Magic*, 52; Francis Foulkes, *The Letter of Paul to the Ephesians*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 73; and Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 62-64; Kyle Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 76-77.

²⁷Arnold, *Power and Magic*, 56.

²⁸O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 142; Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 273; James Montgomery Boice and A. Skevington Wood, *Galatians and Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 132;

authoring to accomplishment to application, and Ephesians 2:1-10 is one of the clearest explanations of justification by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Once again, Paul's reference to the principalities and powers displays their subservience to Christ and their inability to thwart the redemptive purposes of God.

A final remarkable aspect of Paul's reference to the ἀρχῆς, ἐξουσίας, δυνάμεως, and κυριότητος in Ephesians 1:15-23 is the corporate emphasis of the passage.

Throughout these nine verses Paul repeatedly uses a corporate "you" in his prayer for the Ephesians. He is not thinking of individual believers in relationship to the Lord of the principalities and powers. Instead, Paul is thinking of the church in relationship to the Lord of the principalities and powers.

This corporate emphasis is made explicit in Ephesians 1:22-23, where Paul explains that not only is Christ the head of all things, including the rebellious principalities and powers, but Christ is also the head of the church. This is a significant connection, as O'Brien explains: "Christ's dominion over the cosmos is for the benefit of believers: God 'gave him to be head over everything to the church.'"²⁹ Elaborating on the importance of Paul's introduction of the church, Snodgrass writes, "With this first occurrence in Ephesians of the word 'church' (*ekklesia*), a subject is introduced that becomes one of the main emphases of the letter. No other letter is so specifically focused

Arnold, *Power and Magic*, 52, 69; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 62; Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, 76; and Klein, *Ephesians*, 60.

²⁹O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 145.

on the theology of the church as Ephesians, and no other letter expresses such a high regard for the church.”³⁰

It is no mere coincidence that Paul’s letter to the Ephesians not only has more references to the principalities and powers than any other New Testament book, but also places the highest emphasis on the importance of the church.³¹ As the next two sections will show, Paul intended for the church to stand against the principalities and powers.

Ephesians 3:1-13. One of the most fascinating statements Paul made about the principalities and powers is found in the third chapter of Ephesians:

For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles – assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God’s grace that was given to me for you, how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God’s grace, which was given me by the working of his power. To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers (ἀρχαῖς) and authorities (ἐξουσίαις) in the heavenly places. This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him. So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory. (Eph 3:1-13)

These verses make it plain that God’s wisdom is somehow made known to the ἀρχαῖς and ἐξουσίαις through the church. What is not made plain is the actual identity of

³⁰Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, 78.

³¹Arnold, “Principalities and Powers,” 467.

these ἀρχαῖς and ἐξουσίαις. However, the fact that Paul located the ἀρχαῖς and ἐξουσίαις in the “heavenly places,” as he did in Ephesians 1:15-23, argues against a structural interpretation. O’Brien rightly comments, “Because of the allusion to ‘the heavenly places’, the interpretation which considers Paul to be asserting that God’s manifold wisdom is made known through the church to the power structures on earth is very strange indeed.”³² Since a structural interpretation is, according to O’Brien, “very strange indeed,” a better interpretation of the ἀρχαῖς and ἐξουσίαις in Ephesians 3:1-13 is that they are personal, spiritual beings.

The question is, are these personal, spiritual beings good or evil? Bruce appeals to 1 Peter 1:12, which reads, “It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look.”³³ Since this verse seems to indicate that the holy angels long to look into matters pertaining to salvation, Boice assumes that Ephesians 3:10 must refer to God’s proclamation of both the mystery of the gospel and his manifold wisdom to the holy angels through the church.³⁴

However, more than one scholar argues that it is more consistent to identify the ἀρχαῖς and ἐξουσίαις of Ephesians 3:10 with the principalities and powers mentioned in

³²P. T. O’Brien, “Principalities and Powers: Opponents of the Church,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 16 (1992): 377.

³³Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 321.

³⁴Boice, *Ephesians*, 106.

Ephesians 1 and 6.³⁵ Snodgrass explains, “The focus in Ephesians on ‘the rulers and authorities’ has to do with evil powers, not good angels or human institutions. This verse should thus be understood in the context of the display of God’s glory even to those who oppose him.”³⁶

Since the principalities and powers in Ephesians 3:10 are to be interpreted as personal, evil, spiritual beings, it is significant that these beings are created by God. This truth will be seen more plainly in Colossians 1:13-20; however, Ephesians 3:9 clearly states that God created all things. Since the ἀρχαῖς and ἐξουσίαις are mentioned in the next verse, it is logical to assume that these beings, though now in rebellion against their creator, were originally created by God.

More important in the context of Ephesians 3:1-13 is the idea that the mystery of the gospel and the manifold wisdom of God are made known to the ἀρχαῖς and ἐξουσίαις through the church. According to Ephesians 3:6, “This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.” Thus, God’s manifold wisdom is displayed in a unified church consisting of both Jew and Gentile.

Commenting on Ephesians 3:10, Boice and Wood note, “The ecclesiological implications of such a verse as this are staggering indeed.”³⁷ Unfortunately, the errant

³⁵Klein, *Ephesians*, 91; O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 246-47. Lincoln suggests looking to 1 Pet 3:19-22 instead of 1 Pet 1:12 for a parallel passage. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 185-86.

³⁶Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, 164.

³⁷Boice and Wood, *Galatians and Ephesians*, 149.

interpretation of the principalities and powers adopted by Wink and his colleagues causes them to miss these staggering ecclesiological implications. Wink suggests that Ephesians 3:10 requires the church to recall the fallen structures of this earth to their divine purpose.³⁸ In *Naming the Powers*, he states, “The church’s task is articulated here as preaching to the Powers.”³⁹ For Wink, this preaching takes the form of political and social activism.

While Arnold rejects Wink’s approach, he insists that the church play a role in making God’s wisdom known to the ἀρχαῖς and ἐξουσίαις. He writes,

The church must hold either an active or a passive role with regard to making known God’s wisdom to the ‘powers.’ The passive role better explains the meaning of this passage. The church is not passive in the sense of failing to resist the influence of the ‘powers,’ but in the sense that it does not act as a dispatched agent to proclaim the message of God’s dominion to the ‘powers.’ The church visibly testifies to God’s wisdom *by its very existence* (author’s emphasis).⁴⁰

Several of Arnold’s colleagues agree that the church makes God’s wisdom known by its existence.⁴¹ O’Brien argues that the existence of a multi-racial, multi-cultural community reminds the principalities and powers of their impotence.⁴² He also explains how the truths expressed in Ephesians 3:1-13 comforted the church in Ephesus:

³⁸Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 164-68; idem, *The Powers that Be: Theology for a New Millennium* (New York: Galilee and Doubleday, 1999), 35

³⁹Wink, *Naming the Powers*, 89.

⁴⁰Arnold, *Power and Magic*, 63.

⁴¹Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, 545; Foulkes, *The Letter of Paul to the Ephesians*, 106; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 186; and Klein, *Ephesians*, 92.

⁴²O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 245, 247.

Troubled by the powers, these Christians have been reminded that the presence of the church, the body of Christ, means that the authority of the rulers has been broken, that they cannot hinder the progress of the gospel, and that all things are to be subject to Christ. Such assurances would surely encourage them as they engage in a spiritual warfare and await the final day.⁴³

Ephesians 6:10-20. Klein argues that Ephesians 6:10-20 “functions as a *peroratio*, a concluding summary that drives home the central message in an emotionally arresting way. . . . The section serves as a climax to everything Paul has said.”⁴⁴ In this concluding, climactic section, Paul wrote,

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers (ἀρχάς), against the authorities (ἐξουσίας), against the cosmic powers (κοσμοκράτορας) over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces (πνευματικά) of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak. (Eph 6:10-20)

⁴³Ibid., 248. Arnold makes a similar observation: “The existence of the church thereby demonstrates to the ‘powers’ that they are in fact powerless to impede the progress of the gospel to the Gentiles and consequently destroy the church, the body of Christ, which they thought they had already once destroyed on the cross.” Arnold, *Power and Magic*, 64. Similarly, Klein argues, “These hostile, supernatural enemies of God who try to thwart his purposes are put on notice that God has accomplished what he set out to do, despite their ongoing evil designs. Against all odds and in the most unlikely of ways, the church exists; all these rulers and authorities can do is marvel at God’s wisdom.” Klein, *Ephesians*, 91.

⁴⁴Klein, *Ephesians*, 161.

In Ephesians 6:12 Paul referred to ἀρχάς, ἐξουσίας, κοσμοκράτορας, and πνευματικά. Paul's references to the devil, to wrestling, to this present darkness, to the πνευματικά of evil, to the evil day, and to the flaming darts of the evil one collectively point to the wicked, sinister nature of the ἀρχάς, ἐξουσίας, κοσμοκράτορας, and πνευματικά.⁴⁵ Consequently, there is little debate among conservative scholars that Paul had personal, evil, spiritual beings in mind.⁴⁶

Additionally, Paul's reference to the heavenly places combined with the fact that Paul attributed personal activity to the principalities and powers, points to the personal nature of the ἀρχάς, ἐξουσίας, κοσμοκράτορας, and πνευματικά.⁴⁷ While he eventually tries to reinterpret this reference to the principalities and powers, even Wink initially admits, "This text is the *locus classicus* for the demonic interpretation of the powers: indeed, no other interpretation except the demonic is possible."⁴⁸

⁴⁵Arnold, *Powers of Darkness*, 154; William Barclay, *The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians*, The New Daily Study Bible (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 188.

⁴⁶O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 467-69; Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 404-05; Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, 263-64; Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, 553; and Foulkes, *The Letter of Paul to the Ephesians*, 179. Even Barclay concedes, "The words which Paul uses – power, authorities, world rulers – are all names for different classes of these evil spirits." Barclay, *The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians*, 210.

⁴⁷Stott argues against a structural interpretation and for a personal interpretation. He argues, "I have not come across a new theorist who takes into adequate account the fact that all three references to the principalities and powers in Ephesians also contain a reference to the heavenly places, that is, the unseen world of spiritual reality. . . . I am not at all denying that they can use structures, traditions, institutions, etc. for good or ill; I am only wishing to avoid the confusion which comes from identifying them." Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, 273-74.

⁴⁸Wink, *Naming the Powers*, 85.

Ephesians 6:10-20 is not a key passage only because of the clarity with which it describes the principalities and powers; it is also a key passage because it is the only Pauline passage that explicitly urges believers to stand and wrestle with the principalities and powers.⁴⁹ Snodgrass describes the nature of this struggle: “The word translated ‘struggle’ occurs nowhere else in the New Testament and is not frequent in other writings. It refers primarily to wrestling, but can be used more generally of a fight or battle.”⁵⁰

C. Peter Wagner uses this reference to believers struggling against the principalities and powers to support his proposal of strategic-level spiritual warfare.⁵¹ In fact, Ephesians 6:12 is the verse Wagner cites when he defines strategic-level spiritual warfare as contending “with an even more ominous concentration of demonic power: territorial spirits.”⁵² However, Ephesians 6:10-20 makes no reference to believers either praying against territorial spirits or engaging in warfare prayer. Snodgrass is right to insist that, in light of Ephesians 6:10-20, strategic-level spiritual warfare and territorial spirits are an unbiblical “wrong turn.”⁵³

⁴⁹ Lincoln comments, “This is the only place in the Pauline corpus where believers are explicitly said to be in a battle against evil spirit powers.” Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 443.

⁵⁰Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, 339.

⁵¹C. Peter Wagner, “Territorial Spirits,” in *Wrestling with Dark Angels: Towards a Deeper Understanding of the Supernatural Forces in Spiritual Warfare*, ed. C. Peter Wagner and F. Douglas Pennoyer (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1990), 78.

⁵²C. Peter Wagner, *Warfare Prayer: How to Seek God’s Power and Protection in the Battle to Build His Kingdom* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1992), 18.

⁵³Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, 352.

In his book *Disciplined Warriors*, Lawless offers a more biblical response to the ἀρχάς, ἐξουσίας, κοσμοκράτορας, and πνευματικά of Ephesians 6:12. He acknowledges the fact that the church is in conflict with the principalities and powers, but instead of strategic-level spiritual warfare Lawless emphasizes what Paul emphasized in Ephesians 6:10-20. He writes, “As a call to action, Ephesians 6:10-20 emphasizes three commands: 1. Be strong (v. 10); 2. put on (v. 11); and 3. stand (vv 11, 14).”⁵⁴ If churches are going to be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might, put on the whole armor of God, and stand against the schemes of the devil, Lawless insists that churches must focus on holiness, prayer, and evangelism.⁵⁵ This is the emphasis of Ephesians 6:10-20. The armor Paul calls the Ephesians to put on is primarily concerned with holiness and obedience (Eph 6:13-17), Paul’s final directive is for the Ephesians to persist in prayer (Eph 6:18), and the purpose of this prayer is that Paul may be bold and Spirit led in proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ (6:19-20).⁵⁶

One frequently neglected aspect of Ephesians 6:10-20 is the undeniable corporate emphasis. Arnold laments,

The spiritual warfare passage is often viewed in individual terms; that is, each individual Christian should pray and ask God for strength to do battle. Paul actually depicted the arming in corporate terms. The whole church is involved in the process of arming. In fact, each believer is responsible for arming other believers. All of Paul’s admonitions in this passage are in the plural. More important, however, is the fact that Paul urged believers to pray ‘for all the saints’ (Eph 6:18). . . . Today’s

⁵⁴Chuck Lawless, *Disciplined Warriors: Growing Healthy Churches that are Equipped for Spiritual Warfare* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002), 53.

⁵⁵Ibid., 55-56, 83.

⁵⁶Like Lawless, Arnold believes that Ephesians 6:10-20 emphasizes holiness, prayer, and evangelism. He describes these activities as a defensive posture and an offensive attack. Arnold, *Powers of Darkness*, 154-60.

church needs a stronger sense of the mutuality of the body of Christ. The Western church, in particular, is guilty of an 'individualistic Christianity.'⁵⁷

While Arnold never fully developed a corporate response to the principalities and powers, his comments are much needed. Individualistic American Christians are likely to interpret Paul's admonitions as directives only for the individual believer. Instead, believers from every culture should realize that Paul's three main admonitions – be strong (Eph 6:10), put on the full armor of God (Eph 6:11), and stand (Eph 6:14) – are indeed all plural.⁵⁸ Consequently, Paul intended for the church as a whole to be strong, to put on the full armor of God, and to stand against the principalities and powers.⁵⁹ In light of the fact that both Ephesians 1:15-23 and Ephesians 3:1-13 emphasized the importance of the church, one is not surprised to find that same emphasis in Ephesians 6:10-20.

Colossians 1:13-20. Towards the beginning of his letter to the church in Colossae, the apostle Paul wrote these words:

He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones (θρόνοι) or dominions (κυριότητες) or rulers (άρχαι) or authorities (ἐξουσίαι) – all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. (Col 1:13-20)

⁵⁷Ibid., 159.

⁵⁸Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, 339. Klein, *Ephesians*, 162.

⁵⁹Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, 339. Klein, *Ephesians*, 163.

Writing about the identity of the ἀρχαί, ἐξουσίαι, κυριότητες, and θρόνοι of Colossians 1:16, Richard Melick notes, “There is a general consensus among scholars that the terms used here refer to spiritual beings.”⁶⁰ While there may be a general consensus among scholars that these terms refer to spiritual beings, there is less consensus that these terms refer to evil spiritual beings. Recent commentators like Keener, MacArthur, and Bruce have followed the precedents of Augustine and Calvin by interpreting the ἀρχαί, ἐξουσίαι, κυριότητες, and θρόνοι of Colossians 1:16 as holy angels.⁶¹

Despite these voices, Arnold appeals to the broad context of Colossians and argues that the principalities and powers in Colossians 1:16 should be interpreted as personal, evil, spiritual beings:

While a few scholars have tried to make a case for interpreting some of these powers as good angels, especially those referred to in Colossians 1:16, the broader context of the letter paints them in a rather dark light. The same ‘principalities’ (*archai*) and ‘authorities’ (*exousiai*) spoken of in Colossians 1:16 are pictured as defeated enemies in 2:15 over which Christ is the head (2:10). It is most likely that Paul intended all of his references to the spirit-powers in Colossians to be understood as the evil powers of darkness.⁶²

⁶⁰Richard R. Melick, Jr., *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman, 1991), 219.

⁶¹Augustine *Enchiridion* 58, trans. J. F. Shaw, in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 3, ed. Philip Schaff (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1887; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 345. John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*, trans. John Pringle, in vol. 21 of *Calvin’s Commentaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 150-52. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, 572. John MacArthur, *Colossians and Philemon* (Winona Lake, IN: B.M.H., 1992), 50. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 63-64.

⁶²Arnold, *Powers of Darkness*, 141-42. O’Brien makes similar comments. Peter T. O’Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 10 (Dallas: 1982), 46.

Melick makes a similar argument. He believes Colossians 2:8-3:4 clearly depicts the principalities and powers as *evil* beings, and he argues that Colossians 2:8-3:4 ought to be used to interpret Colossians 1:13-20.⁶³

In Colossians 1:13-20 Paul made two interesting observations about the ἀρχαί, ἐξουσίαι, κυριότητες, and θρόνοι. First, Paul noted that the principalities and powers were created by Christ, through Christ, and for Christ, and in Christ the principalities and powers, along with all things, hold together (Col 1:16). This fact is significant for three reasons. First, Paul clearly asserts Christ's sovereignty over the rebellious principalities and powers. Arnold declares, "Nowhere in Paul's writings is the sovereignty of the Creator with respect to the powers brought out more clearly and forcefully than in Colossians 1:15-20. . . . Paul can legitimately extol Christ's sovereignty over the powers because Christ created them all."⁶⁴

The fact that the principalities and powers were created by Christ, through Christ, and for Christ is significant for another reason. Paul never described any sort of angelic fall whereby some of the holy angels became demonic principalities and powers. Nevertheless, in light of the fact that the principalities were created by, through, and for Christ, and in light of the fact that the principalities and powers are now evil beings who oppose Christ and his church, one is forced to conclude that at some point in time a group

⁶³Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, 219

⁶⁴Arnold, *Powers of Darkness*, 100. Later in the same work Arnold writes, "This hymn brilliantly affirms the lordship of Christ over the principalities and powers. . . . He not only created them, but he is their life-giving sustainer. History is in his control, and the powers will ultimately be brought to their knees before him." *Ibid.*, 144.

of holy angels rebelled against their creator and became the demonic principalities and powers.⁶⁵

Third, the fact that Jesus Christ is the sovereign creator and sustainer of the principalities and powers is significant because Paul points out that this same Jesus is the sovereign creator and sustainer of the church (Col 1:18). Garland brings out this point when he divides Colossians 1:15-20 into two parts: Colossians 1:15-17 describes Christ as Lord of the principalities and powers, and Colossians 1:18-20 describes Christ as Lord of the church.⁶⁶ Therefore, as has been seen in the previous passages, Paul connected both Christology and ecclesiology to a true knowledge of the principalities and powers.⁶⁷

A second notable aspect of Colossians 1:13-20 is Paul's observation that by the blood of his cross, Jesus Christ has reconciled all things to himself. Two questions arise. Does this reconciliation include the rebellious principalities and powers, and what does Paul mean here by "reconcile?" Wink emphasizes this passage and argues that the ἀρχαι, ἐξουσίαι, κυριότητες, and θρόνοι can be redeemed.⁶⁸ However, in light of Colossians 2:15, which presents the principalities and powers as defeated enemies of Christ, most

Also see David E. Garland, *Colossians and Philemon*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 88; and O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, 47.

⁶⁵Passages in 2 Pet and Jude, discussed below, corroborate this conclusion.

⁶⁶Garland, *Colossians and Philemon*, 81.

⁶⁷Todd Still emphasizes the importance of Christology. Commenting on Col 1:13-20, he observes, "This poetic passage scales Christological heights that only a few other NT texts reach." Todd D. Still, *Colossians*, in vol. 12 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, rev. ed., ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 287.

⁶⁸Wink, *Engaging the Powers*, 65; idem, *The Powers That Be*, 31.

conservative commentators have rejected Wink's position.⁶⁹ Instead, many conservative scholars understand Paul's reference to reconciliation as a reference to subjugation and pacification.⁷⁰ Thus, not only is Christ the creator and sustainer of the rebellious principalities and powers, but by the blood of his cross he is also the victorious conqueror of the rebellious principalities and powers.

Colossians 2:8-20. Melick argues, "Colossians 2:8-3:4 presents the theological heart of the epistle."⁷¹ In the first part of this section, Paul wrote,

See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits (στοιχεῖα) of the world, and not according to Christ. For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule (ἀρχῆς) and authority (ἐξουσίας). In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He

⁶⁹Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, 226-28.

⁷⁰For scholars who take this position, see Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, 573; Arnold, *Powers of Darkness*, 164; Garland, *Colossians and Philemon*, 94; O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, 56; and idem, "Principalities and Powers," 378. Additionally, there are at least two other plausible explanations set forth by conservative scholars. O'Brien suggests that reconciliation in Col 1:20 is implicitly limited to beings that can be reconciled. For O'Brien this limits the passage to the reconciliation of human beings. O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, 54. Historically, this possibility has precedent in the writings of Anselm. Anselm *Why God Became Man* 2.21, ed. Brian Davies and G. R. Evans, trans. Janet Fairweather, in *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 354. Another plausible explanation is offered by Still, who suggests, "Despite claims to the contrary, the *scope* of God's reconciling work in Christ is universal. Be that as it may, reconciliation with God through Christ is not a foregone conclusion. The proclamation and reception of the gospel are the means through which people are reunited with God." Still, *Colossians*, 294.

⁷¹Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, 249.

disarmed the rulers (ἀρχάς) and authorities (ἐξουσίας) and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him. Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels (ἀγγέλων), going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God. If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits (στοιχείων) of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations?" (Col 2:8-20)

In these thirteen verses there are five possible references to the principalities and powers. In verse 8 Paul refers to the στοιχεῖα; in verse 10 Paul refers to the ἀρχῆς and ἐξουσίας; in verse 15 Paul refers to the ἀρχάς and ἐξουσίας; in verse 18 Paul refers to ἀγγέλων; and in verse 2 Paul refers to the στοιχείων.

First, consider the references to the ἀρχῆς, ἀρχάς, and ἐξουσίας in verses 10 and 15. More than one conservative scholar agrees that these terms should be interpreted as personal, evil, spiritual beings.⁷² More enigmatic are the στοιχεῖα and στοιχείων of verse 8 and verse 20. O'Brien explains the three major interpretations of the στοιχεῖα in his commentary on Colossians. The first sees the στοιχεῖα as "principles of religious teaching or instruction."⁷³ The second sees the στοιχεῖα as "elemental parts of the material, visible world."⁷⁴ The third, which O'Brien describes as the majority view, sees the στοιχεῖα as "spiritual beings, regarded as personal and active in the physical and

⁷²Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, 575-76. MacArthur, *Colossians and Philemon*, 112. Boice, *Romans*, 1003. Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, 265. Against these conservative interpretations, N. T. Wright argues for a structural interpretation. N. T. Wright, *The Epistles of Paul to the Colossians and to Philemon*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

⁷³O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, 130.

⁷⁴Ibid., 131.

heavenly elements.”⁷⁵

Wink interprets the *στοιχεῖα* and *στοιχείων* structurally. He argues,

The Powers from which Paul would protect his Colossian correspondents are not evil spirits in the sky, but philosophy, tradition, rules and rituals, food laws and ascetic practices, the basic elements of religion, and even the good angels. None of these Powers is evil in itself. All can be useful aids. . . . They become dangerous only when they become ends in themselves, or divisive, or egocentric, or divert the believer from union with Christ.⁷⁶

Wink’s structural proposal is not far from the position of the Protestant Reformers.

Luther suggested that *στοιχεῖα* and *στοιχείων* referred to the law of God, idolatry, and the religion of the Turk, Jew, and Anabaptist.⁷⁷ Likewise, Calvin interpreted the *στοιχεῖα* and *στοιχείων* of Colossians as religious ceremonies and traditions.⁷⁸

Despite these precedents, many conservative scholars have interpreted the *στοιχεῖα* and *στοιχείων* as personal, evil, spiritual beings.⁷⁹ Arnold offers two convincing reasons for this interpretation. First, he argues that a personal interpretation best fits the context of Colossians. This context includes Colossians 1:16, which refers to *ἀρχαί*, *ἐξουσίαι*, *κυριότητες*, and *θρόνοι*, and Colossians 2:10 and 2:15, which refer to the *ἀρχῆς*, *ἀρχάς*, and *ἐξουσίας*. Based on his argument that the principalities and powers in

⁷⁵Ibid., 131-32.

⁷⁶Wink, *Naming the Powers*, 82.

⁷⁷Martin Luther, *Lectures on Galatians*, ed. and trans. Jaroslav Pelikan, in *Luther’s Works* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1963), 26:362-63, 395.

⁷⁸John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*, 181.

⁷⁹For conservative scholars who view the *στοιχεῖα* as personal, evil, spiritual beings, see Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*,

these passages are personal, evil, spiritual beings, Arnold argues that the context of the epistle demands a personal interpretation rather than a structural interpretation.⁸⁰

Second, Arnold notes that στοιχεῖα and στοιχείων originally referred to spirit beings in “Persian religious texts, magical papyri, astrological texts, and some Jewish documents.”⁸¹ Therefore, in light of the context and lexical background, Arnold offers this conclusion: “The word thus represents still another term in Paul’s reservoir of terminology to refer to the powers of darkness.”⁸²

In *Powers of Darkness*, Arnold explains the significance of the στοιχεῖα: “According to Paul’s analysis, the religious ‘philosophy’ menacing the church at Colossae could ultimately be attributed to the inspiration of ‘elemental spirits’ (*stoicheia*).”⁸³ This position accords with the teaching of 1 Corinthians 10:20-21 and 1 Timothy 4:1. As is discussed below, both attribute false teaching to demons. This position also helps explain Paul’s reference to the worship of ἀγγέλων in verse 18. As

111-12; Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, 253; Garland, *Colossians and Philemon*, 143-44; O’Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, 110; and Still, *Colossians*, 312.

⁸⁰Clinton E. Arnold, Frank S. Thielman, and S. M. Baugh, *Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 86.

⁸¹Ibid.

⁸²Ibid. Also see Clinton E. Arnold, *The Colossian Syncretism: The Interface between Christianity and Folk Belief at Colossae* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 161, 189, 193.

⁸³Arnold, *Powers of Darkness*, 142.

Arnold observes, “The false teaching at Colossae is dangerous precisely because the supernatural opponents, whom Christ died to defeat, inspire it.”⁸⁴

Assuming that Paul’s references to the principalities and powers in Colossians 2:8-20 are references to personal, evil, spiritual beings who inspire false teaching, two truths are worth noting. First, Paul responds to the false teaching at Colossae with sound doctrine, particularly Christology, soteriology, and ecclesiology.⁸⁵ In this passage Paul references the deity of Christ (Col 2:9), the supremacy of Christ (Col 2:10), union with Christ (2:11-12), the new birth and forgiveness (Col 2:13), the victory of the cross (Col 2:14-15), and Christ as head of the church (Col 2:19). As was seen in previous passages, Paul countered the false teaching of the principalities and powers with truth about Christology, soteriology, and ecclesiology.

A second noteworthy truth is found in Colossians 1:13-15, where Paul wrote,

And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, but triumphing over them in him.

Arnold explains the significance of verse 15: “This passage represents the most elaborate

⁸⁴Ibid.

⁸⁵Arnold makes this point: “The powers are seen by Paul as a fundamental factor in the heretical teaching threatening the health of the Colossian church. Paul therefore stresses a cosmic Christology . . . affirming the superior position of Christ in relation to the powers. Christ is also asserted as the ruling ‘head’ over the principalities and powers . . . The cross is seen as the point of decisive defeat. . . . The Colossian believers should therefore not submit themselves to the tenets of the heretical teaching, which were ultimately inspired by the ‘elemental spirits’.” Arnold, “Principalities and Powers,” 467.

description of Christ's defeat of the powers in all the letters attributed to Paul."⁸⁶

O'Brien's summary of the entire passage is helpful and worth quoting in full:

God had forgiven them as Gentiles, along with Paul and other Jewish Christians, all their trespasses. Indeed, he had not only canceled the debt but also destroyed the document on which it was recorded. This he did by blotting out the bond with its damning indictment against us and nailing it to the cross when Christ died. Further, he stripped the principalities and powers, who had kept us in their grip through their possession of this document, divesting them of their dignity and might. God exposed to the universe their utter helplessness leading them in Christ in his triumphal procession. He paraded these powerless 'powers and principalities' so that all the world might see the magnitude of his victory. But these spiritual powers had not been annihilated. In that triumphal procession they were visible. They continue to exist, inimical to man and his interests (Rom 8:38, 39). Nevertheless they are powerless figures unable to harm the Christian who lives under the lordship of Christ.⁸⁷

Governmental Passages

In each of the six passages discussed above, Paul referred to the principalities and powers, and each passage is best understood as a reference to personal, evil, spiritual beings. However, it would be a mistake to assume that all of Paul's references to the principalities and powers must be interpreted as references to personal, evil, spiritual beings. This is the mistake Wink makes when he ignores the context of a particular passage and artificially imposes the broadest possible definition on each reference to the principalities and powers.⁸⁸ Unlike Wink, who mistakenly applies one broad definition to

⁸⁶Arnold, *The Colossian Syncretism*, 277.

⁸⁷O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, 133.

⁸⁸Wink writes, "The language of power pervades the whole New Testament. . . . The language of power in the New Testament is extremely imprecise, liquid, interchangeable, and unsystematic. . . . Despite all this imprecision and interchangeability, certain clear patterns of usage emerge. . . . Because these terms are to a degree interchangeable, one or a pair or a series can be made to represent them all. . . ."

all of Paul's references to the principalities and powers, this dissertation will take context into account and acknowledge that Paul did not always have personal, evil, spiritual beings in mind when he referred to the principalities and powers.

Romans 13:1-7. The doctrinal section of Paul's letter to the Romans comes to an end with the doxology of Romans 11:33-36, and in Romans 12:1 Paul began to apply the great doctrines he has just explained. In Romans 13:1 Paul made specific application to the relationship between believers and their governmental authorities. He wrote,

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities (ἐξουσίαις). For there is no authority (ἐξουσία) except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities (ἐξουσίᾳ) resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers (ἄρχοντες) are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority (ἐξουσίαν)? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed. (Rom 13:1-7)

In this passage Paul made reference to ἐξουσίαις, ἐξουσία, ἐξουσίᾳ, ἄρχοντες, and ἐξουσίαν. There are two factors within the context of this passage that favor a governmental interpretation. First, Paul encourages the church at Rome to be subject to these authorities (Rom 13:5). This idea is in direct contradiction to both Paul's call for struggle against the principalities and powers in Ephesians 6:10-20 and Paul's insistence that believers are no longer under the sway of the principalities and powers in Colossians

Unless the context further specifies, we are to take the terms for power in their most comprehensive sense." Wink, *Naming the Powers*, 99-100.

2:8-20.⁸⁹ Second, Paul encourages the church at Rome to offer taxes, revenue, respect, and honor to those to whom it is owed (Rom 13:6-7). The idea that Paul wanted believers to offer taxes, revenue, respect and honor to either holy or evil angels is odd.⁹⁰

For these reasons, virtually all recent commentators have interpreted the ἐξουσίαις, ἐξουσία, ἐξουσία, ἄρχοντες, and ἐξουσίαν of Romans 13:1-7 as governmental authorities.⁹¹ Additionally, Bruce argues that this particular application fits within the flow of Paul's thought. He notes, "When guide-lines are laid down for the behavior of Christians toward those who are outside their fellowship, it is natural that something should be said about the Christian's relation to the secular authorities – municipal, provincial, or imperial."⁹² Bruce has correctly noted the appropriateness of such a passage, and passages such as Titus 3:1-2 and 1 Peter 2:13 confirm this interpretation. The fact that Paul at times used the terminology of the principalities and powers to refer

⁸⁹Schreiner, *Romans*, 681-82.

⁹⁰Ibid.

⁹¹For some who prefer a governmental interpretation, see Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, 440-41; Barclay, *The Letter to the Romans*, 170-74; Boice, *Romans*, 1639-78; Bruce, *The Letter of Paul to the Romans*, 222-23; Edwards, *Romans*, 304; Moo, *Romans*, 421-22; Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 460; James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 38b (Dallas: Word, 1988), 760; Robert H. Mounce, *Romans*, The NIV Application Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 243; and Harrison and Hagner, *Romans*, 193, 195. Not all commentators advocate the governmental interpretation, however. Arthur Ogle rejects both the angelic/demonic interpretation and the governmental interpretation, and instead argues that the principalities and powers in Romans 13:1-7 refer to the servant leadership of the church. However, he does not explain why Paul would encourage believers to offer taxes and revenue to their servant leaders. Thus, his argument is unconvincing. Arthur B. Ogle, "What is Left for Caesar: A Look at Mark 12:13-17 and Romans 13:1-7," *Theology Today* 35 (1978): 254-64.

⁹²Bruce, *The Letter of Paul to the Romans*, 218.

to governmental authorities in no way diminishes the fact that most of his references to the principalities and powers are references to personal, evil, spiritual beings.

Titus 3:1-2. Andreas Kostenberger notes that Titus 2:1-10 is a household code for the relationships within the believing community, and he suggests that Titus 3:1-2 is the completion of this code.⁹³ In these verses Paul gave instruction for the relationship between believers and government when he encouraged Titus, “Remind them to be submissive to rulers (ἀρχαῖς) and authorities (ἐξουσίαις), to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people” (Titus 3:1-2).

The parallels with Romans 13:1-7 are obvious.⁹⁴ Similar to Paul’s instructions in Romans, the apostle encourages Titus to tell the church to be submissive and obedient to the ἀρχαῖς and ἐξουσίαις (Titus 3:1). In light of Ephesians 6:10-20 and Colossians 2:8-20, it makes little sense to interpret this reference to the principalities and powers as a reference to personal, evil, spiritual beings. Instead, most commentators have viewed the ἀρχαῖς and ἐξουσίαις of Titus 3:1 as governmental rulers and authorities.⁹⁵

⁹³Andreas Kostenberger, *Titus*, in vol. 12 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, rev. ed., ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 620.

⁹⁴*Ibid.*, 621. Walter L. Liefeld, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 354. Risto Saarinen, *The Pastoral Epistles with Philemon and Jude*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2008), 189.

⁹⁵Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, 639; Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 214; Liefeld, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, 349, 354; William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 46 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 444-45;

Corroborating Passages

The passages discussed in this section fall into three categories. First, there are Pauline passages that mention the principalities and powers, but that also give rise to significant debate among conservative scholars (1 Cor 2:6-8, Gal 4:1-11). Second, there are Pauline passages that do not mention the principalities and powers, but that do contribute to Paul's overall beliefs about personal, evil, spiritual beings (1 Cor 10:20-21, Phil 2:5-11, 1 Tim 4:1). Third, there are non-Pauline passages that refer to the principalities and powers (1 Pet 3:18-22, 2 Pet 2:9-11, Jude 5-10). As in the previous discussions of clear passages and governmental passages, the purpose here is not to discuss every issue raised in these passages. Instead, the purpose is to focus on what these passages teach about the principalities and powers.

1 Corinthians 2:6-8. One of the most debated references to the principalities and powers is found toward the beginning of 1 Corinthians. After contrasting God's wisdom with earthly wisdom (1 Cor 1:18-2:5), Paul wrote,

Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers (*ἀρχόντων*) of this age, who are doomed to pass away. But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers (*ἀρχόντων*) of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. (1 Cor 2:6-8)

Scholars typically advocate one of the following three interpretations of the *ἀρχόντων* in 1 Corinthians 2:6-8: the *ἀρχόντων* are personal, evil, spiritual beings; the *ἀρχόντων* are political and religious leaders operating under the influence of personal,

Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin, Jr., *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 317; and Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to*

evil, spiritual beings; or the ἀρχόντων are merely political and religious leaders.⁹⁶

Because the gospels describe the role of human rulers in the crucifixion of Jesus, the majority position among conservative scholars is that in 1 Corinthians 2:6-8 Paul used the term ἀρχόντων to refer to human political and religious leaders.⁹⁷ However, in light of the passages where Paul seems to speak of the principalities and powers as personal, evil, spiritual beings, a significant number of scholars choose to interpret the ἀρχόντων of 1 Corinthians 2:6-8 as human rulers acting under the influence of demonic beings.⁹⁸

Despite the fact that most scholars do not interpret the principalities and powers of 1 Corinthians 2:6-8 as demonic beings, Arnold maintains that Paul was in fact referring to personal, evil, spiritual beings in this passage. He argues, “Paul sees demonic rulers (*archontes*) as ultimately responsible for the death of Christ.”⁹⁹ In *Powers of Darkness*, Arnold bases his interpretation on the following five arguments:

Timothy and Titus, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 769-70.

⁹⁶Soards, *1 Corinthians*, 58. This debate is almost as old as Christianity itself. According to Morris, Origen interpreted the ἀρχόντων as demonic beings while Chrysostom interpreted the ἀρχόντων as human beings. Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, 53.

⁹⁷Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, 457; Craig S. Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 38; MacArthur, *1 Corinthians*, 60-61; and Soards, *1 Corinthians*, 58-59.

⁹⁸Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, 63; Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 94; and, Verbrugge, *1 Corinthians*, 277. Interestingly, Wink also takes this position. He writes, “Both the argument that the *archontes* in 1 Cor. 2:6-8 are human and the argument that they are divine are plausible. . . . The solution that virtually forces itself on us is that both views are correct. Both human and demonic powers are meant.” Wink, *Naming the Powers*, 44.

⁹⁹Arnold, “Principalities and Powers,” 467.

First, Paul used the term ‘ruler’ (*archōn*) elsewhere for Satan. . . . Second, it is more natural to interpret the demonic rulers as being ‘wiped out’ (*katargeō*) than the human rulers. . . . Third, this interpretation best explains Paul’s argument in this passage. . . . Fourth, Paul probably used the word *ruler* for evil angels because it was part of the wide array of terminology for evil spirits in Jewish tradition at the time. . . . Finally, the word ‘ruler’ [*archōn*] was also part of the early Christian vocabulary for the Satanic.”¹⁰⁰

Despite the fact that Arnold, the leading advocate of the conservative approach to the principalities and powers, interprets the ἀρχόντων of 1 Corinthians 2:6-8 as a reference to personal, evil, spiritual beings, the best interpretation is the human one.¹⁰¹ Both the broader context and the specific terminology used point the reader away from interpreting the ἀρχόντων as personal, evil, spiritual beings. Morris’ argument is most convincing:

Throughout this whole passage the contrast is between the wisdom of God shown in the gospel and the wisdom of this world. To introduce now the thought of the wisdom of demonic powers is to bring in an extraneous concept, and one that is out of harmony with v. 9, which clearly refers to humans. . . . It was *the rulers of this age* who are said to have crucified Christ and this same word *rulers, archontes*, is repeatedly used of the Jewish and Roman leaders (Acts 3:17; 4:5, 8, 26; Rom 13:3, etc.). . . . It is explicitly said that they carried out the crucifixion in ignorance . . . but, by contrast, the demons are often said to have known who Jesus was when people did not. . . . Paul habitually ascribes power to the demonic forces, but not ignorance.¹⁰²

1 Corinthians 10:20-21. This passage is one of only two Pauline passages to explicitly mention “demons,” the other being 1 Timothy 4:1. Paul’s reference to demons comes at the end of a long warning about the folly and danger of idolatry (1 Cor 10:1-22).

¹⁰⁰Arnold, *Powers of Darkness*, 102-03.

¹⁰¹Soards, *1 Corinthians*, 58-59.

¹⁰²Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, 53-54. It should be noted that interpreting the ἀρχόντων of 1 Corinthians 2:6-8 as human rulers in no way

Paul concluded this warning with these words: “No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons (δαίμονις) and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons (δαίμωνίων). You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons (δαίμωνίων). You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons (δαίμωνίων)” (1 Cor 10:20-21).

The significance of this passage with respect to the principalities and powers is the connection Paul makes between idolatry and δαίμωνίων. Simply put, Paul believed that δαίμωνίων stood behind pagan idols, or as Arnold argues, “demons animate idolatry.”¹⁰³ Accordingly, for the Corinthians, just like participating in the Lord’s Supper meant participating in Christ, participating in the pagan feasts amounted to participating with δαίμωνίων.¹⁰⁴

The importance of these truths is that they align with what Christians of all ages have believed about the principalities and powers, namely that they inspire and stand behind idols and false religions.¹⁰⁵ These truths also align with Paul’s teaching that the στοιχείον mentioned in Colossians 2:8-20 and Galatians 4:1-11, stand behind heretical doctrine and false religions. In the end, 1 Corinthians 10:20-21 reinforces the truth that,

detracts from the other Pauline passages that speak about the principalities and powers as personal, evil, spiritual beings.

¹⁰³Arnold, *Powers of Darkness*, 97. Also see Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, 474; Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 88; and Verbrugge, *1 Corinthians*, 346.

¹⁰⁴Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, 145; Soards, *1 Corinthians*, 211; Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 473, 481; Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 88; and Verbrugge, *1 Corinthians*, 346.

¹⁰⁵See chapter 2 for a historical perspective on this issue.

in responding to the principalities and powers, the church must be concerned with the proclamation and teaching of sound doctrine.

Galatians 4:1-11. Paul mentions the στοιχείων in only two places, Colossians 2:8-20 and Galatians 4:1-11.¹⁰⁶ In the context of Galatians 4:1-11 Paul is contrasting justification by faith with works of the law (Gal 2:15-3:29). Galatians 4:1-11 reads,

I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything, but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father. In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles (στοιχεῖα) of the world. But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God. Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles (στοιχεῖα) of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more? You observe days and months and seasons and years! I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain. (Gal 4:1-11)

Some scholars interpret the στοιχεῖα as references to the Jewish law or pagan religion, neither of which has the power to result in justification. For example, C. A. Cole argues, “Paul is referring to the elementary stages of religious experience (whether Jewish or Gentile) through which the Galatians have gone in the past.”¹⁰⁷ Some of these

¹⁰⁶Col 2:8-20 was treated as a clear passage because it also contains references to the ἀρχὴ and ἐξουσία. In Gal 4:1-11, however, the only term Paul used to refer to the principalities and powers is the term στοιχεῖα.

¹⁰⁷C. A. Cole, *The Letter of Paul to the Galatians*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 159. For similar arguments from conservative commentators, see Philip Graham Ryken, *Galatians*, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2005), 158; Scott McKnight, *Galatians*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 203-04; MacArthur, *Galatians* (Chicago: Moody, 1987), 105; Richard N. Longenecker,

same scholars, however, admit that it is possible to interpret the στοιχεῖα as personal, evil, spiritual beings, and several suggest that equating the στοιχεῖα with the principalities and powers is the majority position among modern commentators.¹⁰⁸

In his commentary on Galatians, Timothy George offers one of the best discussions of Paul's reference to the στοιχεῖα in Galatians 4:1-11.¹⁰⁹ George acknowledges possible interpretations, and he argues that interpreting the στοιχεῖα as the rudiments of religion presents several hermeneutical problems.¹¹⁰ Most importantly, George argues that the actual word στοιχεῖα is best interpreted as some sort of spiritual being. He notes that the writing of Second Temple Judaism used the term in this manner, and he argues that Paul's reference to "those that by nature are not gods" in verse 8

Galatians, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 41 (Dallas: Word, 1990), 166; Ronald Y. K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 191; and Robert K. Rapa, *Galatians*, in vol. 11 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, rev. ed., ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 605. The view advocated by Cole and those listed here was also the view of the Reformers. Luther argued that στοιχεῖα in Gal 4:3 referred to the law of God and στοιχεῖα Gal 4:8 referred to idolatry and pagan religion. Luther, *Lectures on Galatians*, in *Luther's Works*, 26:362-63, 395. Calvin agreed that Gal 4:8 referred to pagan religion, and he argued that Gal 4:3 referred to "rudiments." John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians*, trans. William Pringle, in vol. 21 of *Calvin's Commentaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 117, 123.

¹⁰⁸Ryken and MacArthur acknowledge the possibility of interpreting the στοιχεῖα as personal, evil, spiritual beings (see previous footnote). Cole and Fung acknowledge that most recent commentators have chosen to equate the στοιχεῖα with Paul's other references to the principalities and powers (see previous footnote).

¹⁰⁹Timothy George, *Galatians*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994).

¹¹⁰George explains, "As we have seen already, the folly of the Galatians did not consist in their lack of intellectual prowess or academic acumen but rather in their

demands such an interpretation.¹¹¹

Not surprisingly, Arnold also interprets the στοιχεῖα of Galatians 4:1-11 as personal, evil spiritual beings. Explaining the relationship between the στοιχεῖα, the Jewish law, and pagan religion in Galatians 4:1-11, Arnold writes, “Both pagan religion and the Jewish law surface here as two systems that Satan and his powers exploit to hold the unbeliever in captivity and re-enslave the believer. As such, they function as two aspects of the world . . . and illustrate how the powers operate in conjunction with the world.”¹¹² Consequently, because of the connection Paul makes between the στοιχεῖα and the rudiments of religion, Galatians 4:1-11 serves as another reminder that as the church stands against the principalities and powers, it must be concerned with proclaiming and teaching the truth of the gospel.

Philippians 2:5-11. Philippians 2:5-11 is a Pauline passage that does not explicitly mention the principalities and powers; however, many conservative

spiritual blindness. . . . Second, contrary to many interpreters, Paul nowhere presented the law as an earlier, undeveloped phase of a progressively unfolding revelation.” Ibid., 296.

¹¹¹Twice Paul said the Galatians were formerly “enslaved.” In verse 3 Paul said the Galatians were “enslaved” to the στοιχεῖα. The parallel phrase is verse 8 where Paul said the Galatians were “enslaved to those that by nature are not gods.” Since the phrases are obviously parallel, and since verse 8 implies a personal interpretation, it is best to interpret the στοιχεῖα of verse 3 as personal beings as well. Ibid., 298, 312.

¹¹²Arnold, *Powers of Darkness*, 132. For other scholars who equate the στοιχεῖα with the principalities and powers, see Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, 529; Boice and Wood, *Galatians and Ephesians*, 65-66; John Stott, *The Message of Galatians*, *The Bible Speaks Today* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1986), 104-06; and Leon Morris, *Galatians: Paul’s Charter of Christian Freedom* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 133.

commentators believe there is an implied reference to the principalities and powers in this passage.

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil 2:5-11)

At the very least, the principalities and powers can be read in Philippians 2:5-11 because Paul insists that every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth will bow before Christ and confess him as Lord (Phil 2:9-10).¹¹³ Going beyond Paul's universal vision, however, some scholars look at Philippians 2:5-11 and see an allusion to Paul's other references to the principalities and powers. Melick and Moises Silva insist that 1 Corinthians 15:24-28 and Ephesians 1:20-23 are parallel passages to Philippians 2:5-11.¹¹⁴ Both contain clear references to the principalities and powers, as well as Christ's victory and supremacy over the principalities and powers.

Assuming the principalities and powers are either generally included in Paul's universal vision or specifically alluded to in Philippians 2:5-11, one critical question must be answered. What does it mean that the principalities and powers will someday

¹¹³Ralph Martin notes, "The cosmic authority of our Lord Jesus Christ is expressed in the triadic phrase, *in heaven and on earth and under the earth*" (author's emphasis). Ralph P. Martin, *The Epistle of Paul to the Philippians*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 110.

¹¹⁴Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, 107. Moises Silva, *Philippians*, 2nd ed., Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 110.

“confess” that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father? Boice explains, “The word that is used in this verse for ‘confession’ (*exomologeo*) more often means ‘to acknowledge’ than it does ‘to confess with thanksgiving.’”¹¹⁵ In light of this definition, Boice goes on to insist, “They will not confess that ‘Jesus Christ is Lord’ with gladness, but they will confess it.”¹¹⁶

With respect to the church’s stand against the principalities and powers, Philippians 2:5-11 is a reminder of two truths. First, the entire passage is a description of the person and work of Jesus Christ. Consequently, in Paul’s mind, the principalities and powers can only be properly understood in relation to the person and work of Christ. Second, the passage is an unequivocal declaration that Christ is supremely sovereign over the principalities and powers.

1 Timothy 4:1-3. Paul’s first letter to Timothy begins with a plea for Timothy to “charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine” (1 Tim 1:3). After briefly elaborating on the importance of sound doctrine (1 Tim 1:3-20), and after giving

¹¹⁵James Montgomery Boice, *Philippians: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 139.

¹¹⁶*Ibid.* In the context of this quote, Boice is referring to the demons as well as human beings who have rejected the gospel. Melick agrees, and argues that the passages “points out that everyone will acknowledge the position of Jesus in the universe.” Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, 107. Garland makes the same argument. He writes, “‘Every tongue [shall] confess’ does not imply a mass conversion occurring at the end of the age. In the context, the confession is not the one that leads to salvation (Ro 10:9) but is simply a public declaration or admission that Jesus is Lord.” David E. Garland, *Philippians*, in vol. 12 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, rev. ed., ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 222.

instructions about prayer and church leadership (1 Tim 2:1-3:16), Paul returned to the topic of false teachers.¹¹⁷ Beginning in chapter four, Paul wrote,

Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons (δαιμονίων), through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. (1 Tim 4:1-3)

Thomas Lea and Hayne Griffin suggest, “It is best to view the term ‘deceiving spirits’ as a reference to the false teachers themselves.”¹¹⁸ However, Towner is right to point out that the participle translated “devoting themselves” (προσέχοντες) has two parallel objects, namely “deceitful spirits” and “teachings of δαιμονίων.”¹¹⁹ Thus, as Liefeld insists, “Paul’s emphasis in 1 Timothy 4 . . . is not so much on the human deceivers as on the supernatural powers that cause people to be deceived. They are called ‘spirits’ and ‘demons,’ and as such have superhuman influence.”¹²⁰

Interpreting the deceitful spirits and δαιμονίων of 1 Timothy 4:1-3 as personal, evil, spiritual beings who inspire and stand behind false doctrine and false religion has biblical support. MacArthur notes that the teaching of this passage is essentially the same as Leviticus 17:7, Deuteronomy 32:17, Psalm 106:36-37, and even 1 Corinthians 10:20-

¹¹⁷ Andreas Kostenberger, *1 Timothy*, in vol. 12 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, rev. ed., ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 532.

¹¹⁸ Lea and Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, 129.

¹¹⁹ Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 290.

¹²⁰ Liefeld, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, 150. Also see Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 290.

21. He explains, “It is fallen angels, those demonic beings, who energize all false religion.”¹²¹

Also significant is the number of scholars who draw parallels between 1 Timothy 4:1-3 and Ephesians 6:10-20. MacArthur, Guthrie, and Mounce all argue that it is the principalities and powers of Ephesians 6:10-20 who carry out the work of deception Paul talked about in 1 Timothy 4:1-3.¹²² Therefore, 1 Timothy 4:1-3 emphasizes the importance of sound doctrine in the church’s stand against the principalities and powers.

1 Peter 3:18-22. While not a Pauline passage, 1 Peter 3:18-22 makes reference to the principalities and powers, and consequently makes a contribution to one’s understanding of the principalities and powers. Writing about this passage, Scott McKnight notes, “Few passages have so many themes and different ideas intertwined. It is no wonder that commentators have shaken their heads in despair!”¹²³ In this difficult passage, Peter wrote these words:

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, in

¹²¹John MacArthur, *1 Timothy* (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 146.

¹²²Ibid., 149; Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 103; and Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 236.

¹²³Scott McKnight, *1 Peter*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 215. Karen Jobes makes a similar observation: “This passage in 1 Peter is the one most debated and written about; from the earliest days of the church, it has been understood in very different ways.” Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 236. Norman Hillyer observes, “Verses 3:18b-4:6 form one of the most obscure and difficult passages in the NT.” Norman Hillyer, *1 and 2 Peter, Jude*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1992), 112. J. Daryl Charles believes this passage is one of the most “difficult and enigmatic passages to interpret.” J. Daryl Charles, *1 Peter*, in vol. 13 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, rev. ed., ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 336.

which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels (ἀγγέλων), authorities (ἐξουσιῶν), and powers (δυνάμεων) having been subjected to him. (1 Pet 3:18-22)

While a myriad of exegetical questions could be brought to this passage, only three are relevant to the topic of the principalities and powers. First, who are the ἀγγέλων, ἐξουσιῶν, and δυνάμεων mentioned in 1 Peter 3:22? Second, who are the “spirits in prison” mentioned in 1 Peter 3:19? Third, what is the relationship between the ἀγγέλων, ἐξουσιῶν, and δυνάμεων mentioned in 1 Peter 3:22 and the “spirits in prison” mentioned in 1 Peter 3:19?

For several reasons, the ἀγγέλων, ἐξουσιῶν, and δυνάμεων mentioned in 1 Peter 3:22 are best understood as personal, evil, spiritual beings. First, ἐξουσιῶν and δυνάμεων are terms Paul used to refer to personal, evil, spiritual beings.¹²⁴ Second, more than one commentator has argued that 1 Peter 3:22 contains an allusion to Psalm 110:1.¹²⁵ Since Psalm 110:1 is clearly speaking about the enemies of Christ, it is best to interpret the

¹²⁴Keener notes that within the first century Jewish worldview, these terms carried the notion of personal, evil, spiritual beings. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, 718. J. Ramsay Michaels argues that Eph 1:22, which refers to the principalities and powers, is in view in 1 Pet 3:22. J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 49 (Waco, TX: Word, 1988), 219. Charles sees a reference to Col 2:14-15, which also refers to the principalities and powers. Charles argues, “The vocabulary of the unseen world utilized by Paul comports precisely with that used in 1 Peter 3:22, which describes Christ as having subjugated every *angelos* . . . *exousia* . . . and *dynamis*.” Charles, *1 Peter*, 340.

¹²⁵Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 146; and Hillyer, *1 and 2 Peter, Jude*, 116.

ἀγγέλων, ἐξουσιῶν, and δυνάμεων of 1 Peter 3:22 as references to evil angels instead of both holy and evil angels.¹²⁶

Finally, interpreting the ἀγγέλων, ἐξουσιῶν, and δυνάμεων of 1 Peter 3:22 as personal, evil, spiritual beings makes the most sense in light of the context of the passage. 1 Peter 3:18-22 is the climax of Peter's discussion of suffering.¹²⁷ Schreiner explains the significance of this fact:

The text circles back to v. 19 emphasizing that angels, authorities, and powers are subjected to Jesus. All three words refer to angels. . . . Trying to discern the hierarchy of angels from the different words lands us in unprovable speculation. The point is that Jesus reigns over all the hostile angelic powers. Contextually it would make little sense to emphasize that Jesus ruled over good angels. The message for Peter's readers is clear. In their suffering Jesus still reigns and rules. He has not surrendered believers into the power of the evil forces even if they suffer until death. Jesus by his death and resurrection has triumphed over all demonic forces, and hence by implication believers will reign together with him.¹²⁸

Moving on, who are the "spirits in prison" mentioned in verse 19? Davids offers five possibilities, but for the purposes of thinking about the principalities and powers, these can be reduced to two.¹²⁹ "Spirits in prison" refers either to human spirits

¹²⁶Several scholars, though, ignore the clear allusion to Ps 110:1 and choose to interpret the ἀγγέλων, ἐξουσιῶν, and δυνάμεων of 1 Pet 3:22 as a reference to the entire angelic creation. See Wayne A. Grudem, *The First Epistle of Peter*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 165-66; Michaels, *1 Peter*, 220; and Hillyer, *1 and 2 Peter, Jude*, 117.

¹²⁷Charles, *1 Peter*, 336.

¹²⁸Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2003), 197.

¹²⁹David's five possibilities are souls of Old Testament believers in a place waiting for Christ, souls of those who died in the flood kept in Hades, fallen angels bound and waiting to hear judgment, the demon offspring of Genesis 6:1ff. waiting for judgment, or fallen angels being preached to by Enoch. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, 138-39.

or to demonic spirits.¹³⁰ For contextual reasons it is best to interpret “spirits in prison” as reference to fallen demonic spirits. First, as Davids insightfully points out, the context of the entire New Testament points toward this interpretation. Davids points out, “‘Spirits’ in the NT always refers to nonhuman spiritual beings unless qualified.”¹³¹ He also notes that, “Although the NT never speaks of anyone’s evangelizing spirits, it does speak of the victory of Christ over spirits.”¹³² In addition to the broad context of the entire New Testament, the narrow context of 1 Peter 3:18-22 also suggests that “spirits in prison” should be seen as personal, evil, spiritual beings. As Charles explains:

In identifying the ‘spirits,’ we have already suggested that a proper interpretation of 3:18-22 must be in accordance with – and not violate – the contextual flow of the writer’s thought. That the work of Christ touches the *angelic world* is by no means tangential to the epistle. The holy angels curiously long to peer into the mysteries that surround redemption (1:12). Moreover, the result of Christ’s work is that angelic powers, not mere mortals, are in submission to Christ (3:22). Finally, readers are admonished to be alert, since ‘your enemy the devil,’ the prince of demons, desires their ruin.¹³³

Finally, what is the relationship between the “spirits in prison” mentioned in verse 19 and the ἀγγέλων, ἐξουσιῶν, and δυνάμεων of verse 22? Simply put, the “spirits in prison” of verse 19 and the ἀγγέλων, ἐξουσιῶν, and δυνάμεων of verse 22 should all be viewed as references to the same personal, evil, spiritual beings. Charles explains not

¹³⁰Grudem notes, “Taken by itself, the phrase *spirits in prison* could refer either to human spirits in hell or to fallen angelic spirits in hell.” He appeals to 2 Pet 2:4 and Jude 6. Grudem, *The First Epistle of Peter*, 158. Also see Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, 718; and Michaels, *1 Peter*, 206.

¹³¹Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, 139-40.

¹³²Ibid., 140-41.

¹³³Charles, *1 Peter*, 339.

only this relationship, but also the importance of 1 Peter 3:18-22 for the church's stand against the principalities and powers. He writes, "The point of Christ's preaching to the spirits, then, the notion of which reaches a climax in v. 22, is to show that Jesus has triumphed over and exposed *the very powers of evil themselves* – forces that are hostile to Christ and Christ's disciples."¹³⁴

2 Peter 2:4-11. As is true of 1 Timothy 4:1-3, false teachers are in view in 2 Peter 2:4-11. After warning the church about the coming of false teachers and insisting upon their inevitable destruction (1 Pet 2:1-3), Peter wrote,

For if God did not spare angels (*ἄγγέλων*) when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment; if he did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; if by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; and if he rescued righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked (for as that righteous man lived among them day after day, he was tormenting his righteous soul over their lawless deeds that he saw and heard); then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment, and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority (*κυριότητος*). Bold and willful, they do not tremble as they blaspheme the glorious ones (*δόξας*), whereas angels, though greater in might and power, do not pronounce a blasphemous judgment against them before the Lord. (2 Pet 2:4-11)

The *ἄγγέλων* mentioned in 2 Peter 2:4 are clearly fallen angels, and Peter mentions them to assure his readers that just as God punished the rebel angels, he will punish the rebel teachers.¹³⁵ The identity of the *δόξας* in verse 10 is more enigmatic. A

¹³⁴Ibid., 340.

¹³⁵Peter H. Davids, *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 225-26; Michael Green, *The Second General Epistle of Peter and the General Epistle of Jude*, The Tyndale New Testament

handful of commentators argue that δόξα would be an inappropriate title for evil angels, so the reference must be to holy angels.¹³⁶ However, because of the contrast with verse 11 and because of the parallel with Jude 5-10, most commentators agree that evil angels are in view in 1 Peter 3:10.¹³⁷ Again, Schreiner explains both the exegetical argument and its practical application:

Verse 11 functions as a contrast with v. 10. The false teachers, as suggested above, had no fear in reviling evil angels. But good angels, on the other hand, even though they were 'stronger and more powerful' than evil angels, did not venture to utter a negative judgment from the Lord against these evil angels. . . . In conclusion, the false teachers did not fear demonic powers. Peter called them 'glories,' not because they were good but simply because they were created by God himself, even though subsequently they fell into sin. Perhaps the teachers did not tremble before them because they disbelieved in their existence. . . . Or they may have ridiculed any idea that human beings should be frightened about the power of spiritual beings.¹³⁸

Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 109; Richard J. Bauckam, *Jude, 2 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 50 (Waco, TX: Word, 1983), 248; Douglas Moo, *2 Peter, Jude*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1996), 100, 102; and Hillyer, *1 and 2 Peter, Jude*, 187.

¹³⁶ Davids, *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude*, 235-36; Green, *The Second General Epistle of Peter and the General Epistle of Jude*, 116; Gene L. Green, *Jude and 2 Peter*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 271; and Hillyer, *1 and 2 Peter, Jude*, 196.

¹³⁷ Moo argues, "Peter is referring to angels. Furthermore, most also agree that *evil* angels are meant." Moo, *2 Peter and Jude*, 121. Bauckam recognizes the parallel with Jude 5-10, but ignores the obvious implication by arguing that the δόξα refer to good angels in Jude and evil angels in 2 Pet. Bauckam, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 261.

¹³⁸ Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 347-48. Bauckam offers a similar application: "The most plausible view is that in their confident immorality the false teachers were contemptuous of the demonic powers. When they were rebuked for their immoral behavior and warned of the danger of falling into the power of the devil and sharing his condemnation, they laughed at the idea, denying that the devil could have any power over them and speaking of the powers of evil in skeptical, mocking terms. They may have doubted the very existence of supernatural powers of evil." Bauckam, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 262.

The importance, then, of 2 Peter 2:4-11, is a caution to the church as it stands against the principalities and powers. It is true that Christians have been freed from the control of the principalities and powers (Col 2:8-20), that Christ is sovereign over the principalities and powers (Eph 1:15-23), that Christ will someday destroy the principalities and powers (1 Cor 15:20-28), and that not even the rebellious principalities and powers can separate believers from the love of God in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:37-39); nevertheless, Christians ought not be arrogantly bold in their approach to the principalities and powers. After all, these are the agents of the devil who “prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour” (1 Pet 5:8).

Jude 1:5-10. Jude begins his letter with the lament that while he intended to write about the salvation that he and his readers shared, he has found it necessary to encourage them to “contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). According to Jude, this was necessary because false teachers had crept into the church. Discussing the certain condemnation of these teachers, Jude wrote,

Now I want to remind you, although you once fully knew it, that Jesus, who saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe. And the angels (ἄγγέλους) who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day – just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which likewise indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire. Yet in like manner these people also, relying on their dreams, defile the flesh, reject authority (κυριότητα), and blaspheme the glorious ones (δόξας). But when the archangel Michael, contending with the devil, was disputing about the body of Moses, he did not presume to pronounce a blasphemous judgment, but said, “The Lord rebuke you.” But these people blaspheme all that they do not understand, and they are destroyed by all that they, like unreasoning animals, understand instinctively. (Jude 5-10)

The ἄγγέλους of Jude 6 is clearly a reference to fallen angels, and several

conservative interpreters argue that Jude is referring to the peculiar events of Genesis 6:1-4.¹³⁹ Regardless of the particular reference in Jude's mind, the point of verse 6 is that just as God punished the ἀγγέλους who did not keep their place, God will punish the false teachers plaguing Jude's readers (Jude 2-4).

Just like 2 Peter 2:10, Jude 8 refers to κυριότηα and δόξας. Many scholars do not view Paul's use of the word κυριότης in 2 Peter 2:10 and Jude 8 as a reference to the principalities and powers.¹⁴⁰ However, most scholars do view Paul's use of the word δόξα as a reference to some kind of spiritual being.¹⁴¹ As was true of 2 Peter 2:10, some of these scholars interpret the δόξας of Jude 8 as holy angels. Davids offers the following argument for this interpretation: "We note first of all that *doxa* is never used elsewhere in Jewish or Christian writings to refer to an evil angels. Nor is it clear that Jude would object to dishonoring such beings."¹⁴²

Despite these arguments, Schreiner argues that the immediate context of Jude

¹³⁹Schreiner writes, "We can be almost certain that Jude referred here to the sin of the angels in Gen 6:1-4. The sin the angels committed, according to the Jewish tradition, was sexual intercourse with the daughters of men. Apparently Jude also understood Gen 6:1-4 in the same way. . . . This is not the place to conduct an exegesis of this disputed text. I would only like to register my opinion that Jude interpreted Gen 6:1-4 correctly." Schreiner, *I, 2 Peter, Jude*, 447-48, 450. Also see Moo, *2 Peter and Jude*, 240. Charles admits the popularity of this position, yet argues that Gen 6:1-4 is not in view in Jude 5-10. J. Daryl Charles, *Jude*, in vol. 13 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, rev. ed., ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 554-55.

¹⁴⁰Green, *Jude and 2 Peter*, 76; Bauckam, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 56-57; and Moo, *2 Peter, Jude*, 244.

¹⁴¹Green, *The Second General Epistle of Peter and the General Epistle of Jude*, 182.

¹⁴²Davids, *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude*, 56-57.

5-10 requires δόξας to be interpreted as personal, evil, spiritual beings. He explains:

The intruders ‘slander celestial beings.’ The NIV interprets the Greek for us here since the text literally says ‘slander glories’ (*doxas*). . . . The notion that angels are the glorious beings is quite plausible. . . . This interpretation fits best with v. 9, where Michael’s struggle with the devil is recounted, and Michael desisted from reviling the devil. Some commentators see a reference here to good angels, arguing that Jude would not be worried about scorn heaped on evil angels. But the parallel with v. 9, where Michael refused to pronounce his own judgment on the devil, suggests that Jude referred to *evil angels* in v. 8. Jude’s argument runs as follows: The intruders insult demons, but the archangel, Michael, did not even presume to blaspheme the devil himself but left his judgment to God.¹⁴³

If the δόξας of Jude 8 are in fact personal, evil, spiritual beings, and if these beings can be equated with the ἀγγέλους of Jude 6, two implications arise. First, like 2 Peter 2:4-11, Jude 5-11 suggests that the principalities and powers did in fact rebel against their creator. Jude describes this fall as not staying “within their own position of authority” and leaving “their proper dwelling” (Jude 6). Second, like 2 Peter 2:4-11, Jude offers a serious caution for those who promote strategic-level spiritual warfare and who desire to engage in direct conflict with the principalities and powers. This caution is obvious when one considers the fact that Jude points to Michael the archangel and his refusal to “pronounce a blasphemous judgment” against the devil himself (Jude 9).

Drama

More than one scholar has systematized the biblical teaching about the principalities and powers by referring to various stages in their existence. For example, in “Principalities and Powers: Opponents of the Church,” O’Brien analyzes the biblical teaching about the principalities and powers by discussing the five stages in the “drama”

¹⁴³Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 456.

of their existence. O'Brien's five stages are "Their original creation," "Their subsequent fall," "Christ's defeat of the powers of evil," "Their continued hostility," and "Their final overthrow."¹⁴⁴ This section will use O'Brien's five stages as an analytical framework, and it will provide a systematic summary of the biblical teaching about the principalities and powers.

Creation

Colossians 1:16 explains, "For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones (θρόνοι) or dominions (κυριότητες) or rulers (ἄρχαι) or authorities (ἐξουσίαι) – all things were created through him and for him." This passage explicitly states that Jesus Christ, the eternal Word of God, created all θρόνοι, κυριότητες, ἄρχαι, and ἐξουσίαι (John 1:1-3). As Carl Henry notes, this accords with Scripture's insistence that God created all angelic beings (Exod 20:11, Neh 9:6, Ps 148:1-5).¹⁴⁵

Henry also notes that as created beings, the principalities and powers are not omnipresent, omniscient, or omnipotent.¹⁴⁶ They were, however, originally good.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴O'Brien, "Principalities and Powers: Opponents of the Church," 380-83. Longman and Reid observe the same five stages, and they insightfully note that "Within the Pauline corpus, these powers are mentioned in a variety of specific contexts, most notable those corresponding to decisive episodes in the story of Christ." Longman and Reid, *God Is a Warrior*, 138.

¹⁴⁵Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1999), 4:232.

¹⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 4:232-33.

¹⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 4:233.

This created goodness is evident in Colossians 1:16 where Paul insisted that the principalities and powers were created *for* Jesus, as well as from God's post-creation declaration that his entire creation was very good (Gen 1:31).¹⁴⁸

Fall

Even if Scripture were silent on the occurrence of an angelic fall, logic would demand such a conclusion. Grudem explains,

When God created the world, he 'saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good' (Gen. 1:31). This means that even the angelic world that God had created did not have evil angels or demons in it at that time. But by the time of Genesis 3, we find that Satan, in the form of a serpent, was tempting Eve to sin (Gen. 3:1-5). Therefore, sometime between the events of Genesis 1:31 and Genesis 3:1, there must have been a rebellion in the angelic world with many angels turning against God and becoming evil.¹⁴⁹

While logic alone would lead one to conclude that at some point in time the created principalities and powers rebelled against their Creator, the New Testament does in fact give some information about the angelic fall. Jude 6 and 2 Peter 2:4 both refer to angels who sinned by leaving their given positions of authority.¹⁵⁰ These corroborating passages clearly refer to an angelic rebellion.¹⁵¹ Additionally, both Jude 6 and 2 Peter

¹⁴⁸Henry explains the significance of the fact that the principalities and powers were created as upright, good beings: "While angels were created holy, they were not, like God, essentially and unconditionally pure. . . . They were subject to a period of moral probation after which those who maintained their integrity were confirmed in holiness and glory." *Ibid.*, 4:234.

¹⁴⁹Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 412.

¹⁵⁰O'Brien, "Principalities and Powers," 381; Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 4:235; and Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 412.

¹⁵¹In addition to Paul's silence about the fall of the principalities and powers, Arnold notes Paul's silence in these areas: "the names of the angelic powers," "the order

refer to the principalities and powers in the context of the angelic fall. Therefore, if the principalities and powers are personal, evil, spiritual beings, it is reasonable to assume that Jude 6 and 2 Peter 2:4 refer to their fall.¹⁵²

Initial Defeat

O'Brien points out, "In most of the New Testament references to the powers of evil there is some mention of God or Christ's supremacy or victory over them."¹⁵³ While this is true, no passage describes the initial defeat of the principalities and powers more clearly than Colossians 2:15. After explaining how God nailed believers' record of debt to the cross, Paul wrote, "He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him" (Col 2:15). According to Paul, this triumph was revealed when, by the great power and might of God, Jesus was raised from the dead and seated in the heavenly places above all principalities and powers (Eph 1:20-21). Likewise, Peter associated the sufferings of Christ with the exaltation of Christ over the rebellious principalities and powers (1 Pet 3:18, 22). Paul concludes that since God "did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all," not even the rebellious principalities

within the angelic hierarchy," "the activities of certain demons and how they are thwarted," and "territories ruled by evil angels." Arnold, *Powers of Darkness*, 98-99.

¹⁵²George Ladd offers the following summary of the first two stages in the drama of the principalities and powers: "They are created beings and like all creation exist for the purpose of serving the glory of God and of Christ. However, part of the angelic world has rebelled against God and has thereby become hostile to the divine purposes. God's sovereign will has permitted Satan and the evil angels to exercise a large area of power over the course of this age. The rebellious state of the world is reflected not only in the fallen condition of humanity but also in the rebellious state of a portion of the angelic world." George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 441.

¹⁵³O'Brien, "Principalities and Powers," 381.

and powers will be able to separate believers from the love of God in Christ Jesus (Rom 32, 38-39).

In light of these passages, scholars are right to point to the death, resurrection, and exaltation of Christ as the decisive victory over the principalities and powers. Hiebert explains, “At the cross Satan stands judged because he put Christ, God incarnate as perfect man, to death. On the cross Jesus bore the sins of the world and triumphed over all the powers of evil.”¹⁵⁴

Struggle

Lawless reminds the church, “Scripture affirms that Satan continues to attack persons who become believers.”¹⁵⁵ Arnold resolves this truth with the victory of Christ:

First, Christ did win a decisive victory over the powers through the cross. . . . Second, a decisive battle frequently determines the outcome of a war. Christ’s victory on the cross forever determined the outcome of Christ’s conflict with the powers of darkness. The war continues, but every battle is a relatively minor skirmish in comparison to the battle won through Christ’s death and resurrection.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴Paul G. Hiebert, “Spiritual Warfare and Worldview,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 24 (2000): 252. For similar comments, see O’Brien, “Principalities and Powers, 381; Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 475; and Arnold, *Powers of Darkness*, 100.

¹⁵⁵Charles Lawless, “Spiritual Warfare and Evangelism,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 5 (2001): 30. Arnold makes a similar observation based on life experience. He observes, “Life experience amply demonstrates to us that Satan and his forces are still quite actively engaged in their malignant activity.” Arnold, *Powers of Darkness*, 122.

¹⁵⁶Arnold, *Powers of Darkness*, 122-23. O’Brien makes a similar statement: “For the time being, however, the triumph of the crucified, risen and glorified Jesus Christ over the principalities and powers is hidden. It is not yet final as far as the world is concerned. . . . Although defeated foes, the principalities and powers continue to exist, inimical to man and his interests. This is a reality even for the believer.” O’Brien, “Principalities and Powers,” 382.

There is good news, according to Arnold, and that good news is that “by virtue of Christ’s victory on the cross and our identification with him, believers share in his present power and authority over the powers.”¹⁵⁷ Therefore, the church must draw on the power that is available through Christ and recognize that the defeated principalities and powers seek to lure the church into sin and prevent the church from proclaiming the liberating gospel of Jesus Christ (Eph 6:10-20).¹⁵⁸ Additionally, the church must understand that the principalities and powers seek to pervert the gospel through false teaching and false religion (Col 2:8-20, Gal 4:1-11, 1 Cor 10:20-21, and 1 Tim 4:1-3).

Arnold rightly explains, “The best way of summarizing the activity of evil spirits is to say that they stand for everything that is contrary to God’s purposes and the welfare of his people.”¹⁵⁹ In this desire to thwart God’s purposes and destroy God’s

¹⁵⁷Arnold, “Giving the Devil His Due,” *Christianity Today* 34 (1990): 18. In this comment Arnold has touched on the purpose of the New Testament passages that mention the principalities and powers. These passages are not included in Scripture to satisfy curiosity or fuel speculation; instead, they are included in Scripture so that the church might recognize the danger and subtlety of temptation and realize what it means to identify with the victorious Christ. For similar arguments, see Peter R. Schemm, Jr., “The Agents of God,” in *A Theology for the Church*, ed. Daniel L. Akin (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2007), 305-06; and Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 475.

¹⁵⁸Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 415; Arnold, *Powers of Darkness*, 121, 127-37, 132, 135; Arnold, “Giving the Devil His Due,” 18; Hiebert, “Spiritual Warfare and Worldview,” 251; and Lawless, “Spiritual Warfare and Evangelism,” 31.

¹⁵⁹Arnold, “Giving the Devil His Due,” 17. Arnold gives some thought to the possibility that the principalities and powers work through the social order and even entire nations. He writes, “Satan and his forces can exert their influence on the social, economic, political, and even religious order within a culture.” *Ibid.*, 17-18. Likewise, O’Brien suggests that the principalities and powers work through the events of history and the structures of earth. O’Brien, “Principalities and Powers,” 383-84. However, both Arnold and O’Brien insist that the principalities and powers affect the society, nations, history, and structures by influencing individuals.

people, the principalities and powers focus their efforts on the church.¹⁶⁰ The role of the church in standing against the principalities and powers does not involve bold confrontations with the principalities and powers (2 Pet 2:4, Jude 6). Instead, the church's stand against the principalities and powers requires the church to be the church. This idea is developed at length in the final chapter.

Final Defeat

Hiebert claims, "A biblical view of spiritual warfare points to the ultimate establishment of the kingdom of God throughout the whole universe."¹⁶¹ This "ultimate establishment of the kingdom of God" will include the subjection of the rebellious principalities and powers. In 1 Corinthians 15:24-25 Paul wrote these words: "Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet." As he reflects on this passage, O'Brien concludes, "The final outcome is certain and their ultimate overthrow has been fixed by God, as 1 Cor. 15:24-28 and the many references in Revelation make plain."¹⁶²

Summary

This chapter has interacted with the biblical passages that refer to the

¹⁶⁰Arnold notes, "Paul was primarily concerned with the health and well-being of his churches. Consequently he spent little time reflecting on the influence of the powers over the world at large. He did not, for instance, explain how the powers of darkness exert their control over the Roman Caesars, the economy or the diplomatic relationships among the various Roman provinces." Arnold, *Powers of Darkness*, 126.

¹⁶¹Hiebert, "Spiritual Warfare and Worldview," 253.

¹⁶²O'Brien, "Principalities and Powers," 383.

principalities and powers. It has argued that the principalities and powers are personal, evil, spiritual beings that actively work to destroy the church by luring it into sin and away from the teaching and proclamation of the gospel. Additionally, this chapter has argued that the church is not called to confront the principalities and powers. Rather, the church is called to draw on the power of Jesus Christ whose death and resurrection brought defeat to the principalities and powers. Moreover, since it is through the church that the mystery of the gospel and the manifold wisdom of God are made known to the rebellious principalities and powers, the church must seek to fulfill the biblical picture of the church. This final idea is the subject of the final chapter.

CHAPTER 5

PROPOSED STRATEGY FOR THE CHURCH'S STAND AGAINST THE PRINCIPALITIES AND POWERS

Three distinct approaches to the principalities and powers developed during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and, unfortunately, each approach failed to provide a comprehensive strategy for the church's stand against the principalities and powers.¹

Advocates of the liberal Protestant approach talked about the role of the church, but their proposed responses were unbiblical because their interpretations of the principalities and powers were fundamentally flawed.² Advocates of the spiritual warfare approach also talked about the role of the church, but neither their focus on the demonic nor their proposal of strategic-level spiritual warfare had any basis in Scripture.³

In contrast to the advocates of the liberal Protestant approach and the

¹These approaches are the liberal Protestant approach, the spiritual warfare approach, and the conservative evangelical approach. The respective leaders of these approaches are Walter Wink, C. Peter Wagner, and Clinton Arnold. These terms and their definitions were discussed, explained, and qualified in chapter one.

²For these criticisms, see Duane A. Garrett, *Angels and the New Spirituality* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 208-13; Sydney H. T. Page, *Powers of Evil: A Biblical Study of Satan and Demons* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 240; and Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 469.

³For these criticisms, see Chuck Lowe, *Territorial Spirits and World Evangelisation: A Biblical, Historical and Missiological Critique of Strategic-Level Spiritual Warfare* (Sevenoaks, Kent: OMF International, 1998), 9, 29, 45, 103, 143; Clinton E. Arnold, *Three Crucial Questions about Spiritual Warfare* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 164; and Michael S. B. Reid, *Strategic-Level Spiritual Warfare: A Modern*

advocates of the spiritual warfare approach, advocates of the conservative approach have rightly interpreted the principalities and powers as personal, evil, spiritual beings.⁴

Nevertheless, these same scholars have, for the most part, failed to emphasize the centrality of the church in standing against the principalities and powers.⁵ Two scholars who have given significant attention to the centrality of the church are Clinton Arnold and Chuck Lawless; however, neither Arnold nor Lawless has offered a comprehensive strategy for the church's stand against the principalities and powers.⁶

Mythology? (Fairfax, VA: Xulon, 2002), 259-60.

⁴Wagner and other advocates of the spiritual warfare approach agree that the principalities and powers are personal, evil, spiritual beings. Unfortunately, they usually equate the principalities and powers with territorial spirits.

⁵This failure to give attention to the church can be seen in several recent works. In *Angels of Light, Powers of Darkness* Stephen F. Noll offers a helpful treatment of angels and demons, but he offers no significant application for the church. Stephen F. Noll, *Angels of Light, Powers of Darkness: Thinking Biblically about Angels, Satan, and Principalities* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998), 202-03. Similarly, in *Power Encounters*, David Powlison discusses the importance of biblical counseling, and he emphasizes truth encounters over power encounters; however, his proposals are primarily focused on the individual. David Powlison, *Power Encounters: Reclaiming Spiritual Warfare* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995). Peter Schemm contributed a chapter titled "The Agents of God," in *A Theology for the Church*. While Schemm's chapter is enlightening, his application is focused on the individual. Peter R. Schemm, Jr., "The Agents of God," in *A Theology for the Church*, ed. Daniel L. Akin (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2007), 336. Two of the more popular works dealing with angelology and demonology are written by Robert Lightner and Sydney Page. In *Angels, Satan, and Demons*, Lightner never mentions the role of the church in response to the principalities and powers, and all of his suggestions for Christian living are directed to the believer as an individual. Robert Lightner, *Angels, Satan, and Demons: Invisible Beings that Inhabit the Spiritual World* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 179-86. Likewise, in *Powers of Evil*, Page ends with four pages of application that fail to emphasize the centrality of the church. Page, *Powers of Evil*, 267-70.

⁶Arnold has dealt specifically with the principalities and powers, and he has recognized the centrality of the church. He has not developed a comprehensive strategy for the church's stand against the principalities and powers. Clinton E. Arnold, *Powers*

Accordingly, this chapter will offer a strategy for the church's stand against the principalities and powers. It will discuss the centrality of the church in the kingdom of God, emphasize the importance and influence of worldview, and describe seven components of the church's stand against the principalities and powers.

The Church in the Kingdom

Fifty years ago, George Ladd rightly insisted, "The Hebrew-Christian faith expresses its hope in terms of the Kingdom of God."⁷ Ladd's kingdom perspective is pertinent to this chapter because a better understanding of the kingdom of God contributes to a better understanding of the church, and a better understanding of the church contributes to a better understanding of the church's stand against the principalities and powers.

The kingdom of God was certainly central in the preaching of Jesus, who, according to Mark 1:14b-15, "came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.'" This is only one of over one hundred occurrences of the word "kingdom" in the gospels.⁸ Ladd explained the meaning of this word: "The *primary* meaning of both

of Darkness: Principalities and Powers in Paul's Letters (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992), 127. Lawless has recognized the centrality of the church with respect to spiritual warfare, and in several places he has proposed corporate strategies for spiritual warfare. He has not offered a strategy that focused specifically on the church's stand against the principalities and powers. Chuck Lawless, *Disciplined Warriors: Growing Healthy Churches that are Equipped for Spiritual Warfare* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002), 13.

⁷George Eldon Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom: Scriptural Studies in the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 14.

⁸Robert Young, *Analytical Concordance to the Bible*, 22nd ed. (Grand Rapids:

the Hebrew word *malkuth* in the Old Testament and of the Greek word *basileia* in the New Testament is the rank, authority and sovereignty exercised by a king. . . . First of all, a kingdom is the authority to rule, the sovereignty of the king.”⁹

Applying this definition of “kingdom” to the concept of the “kingdom of God,” Ladd explained, “When the word refers to God’s Kingdom, it always refers to His reign, His rule, His sovereignty, and not to the realm in which it is exercised.”¹⁰ The influence of Ladd’s definition of the kingdom of God can be seen in the fact that, fifty years later, when evangelical theologians define the kingdom of God, their definitions often echo Ladd’s definition. The following definition of the kingdom offered by Paul Hiebert is typical: “The kingdom is quite simply the reign of God.”¹¹

While Ladd offered a relatively simple definition of the kingdom of God, he also recognized the complexity of the biblical teaching about the kingdom of God. For example, Ladd recognized the biblical tension between the “already” and the “not-yet” with respect to the kingdom of God. He noted, “The Word of God *does* say that the Kingdom of God is a present spiritual reality. . . . At the same time, the Kingdom is an inheritance which God will bestow upon His people when Christ comes in glory.”¹²

Ladd also acknowledged that while the kingdom of God was “active” in the

Eerdmans, 1983), 573-74.

⁹Ibid., 19.

¹⁰Ibid., 20.

¹¹Paul G. Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 278.

¹²Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom*, 16-17.

nation of Israel during the Old Covenant, the kingdom of God “works” through church during the New Covenant.¹³ Ladd explained, “The Kingdom of God is God’s sovereign reign; but God’s reign expresses itself in different stages through redemptive history.”¹⁴ Ladd gave significant attention to the relationship between the kingdom of God and the church. He summarized his argument in five statements: “First, the New Testament does not equate believers with the Kingdom. . . . Second, the Kingdom creates the church. . . . Third, it is the church’s mission to witness to the Kingdom. . . . Fourth, the church is the instrument of the Kingdom. . . . Fifth, the church is the custodian of the Kingdom.”¹⁵

While much of Ladd’s work focused on what the Jesus said about the kingdom of God, it is important to note that the apostle Paul referred to the kingdom of God fourteen times in seven different epistles.¹⁶ Despite these references to the kingdom of

¹³Ibid., 107-22.

¹⁴Ibid., 22. Rene Padilla gave significant attention to the kingdom of God. The following quote from his book *Mission between the Times* expresses the tension between the “already” and the “not-yet” with respect to the kingdom of God. It also hints at the relationship between the kingdom, the church, and the principalities and powers. Padilla wrote, “The Kingdom of God has arrived in the person of Jesus Christ. Eschatology has invaded history. God has clearly expressed his plan to place all things under the rule of Christ. The powers of darkness have been defeated. Here and now, in union with Jesus Christ, man has within his reach the blessing of the new era. However, the Kingdom of God has not yet arrived in all its fullness.” Rene C. Padilla, *Mission between the Times* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 18.

¹⁵George Eldon Ladd, *The Presence of the Future*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 263-73. Ladd’s tremendous influence can once again been seen in the fact that, even today, when evangelical theologians describe the relationship between the kingdom of God and the church, they typically echo the sentiments of Ladd. For example, Hiebert describes the church as the “manifestation of the kingdom” and as the “heart of God’s kingdom.” Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews*, 280, 289.

¹⁶The Pauline references to the kingdom of God include Rom 14:17, 1 Cor 4:20, 6:9, 6:10, 15:24, 15:50, Gal 5:21, Eph 5:5, Col 1:13, 4:11, 1 Thess 2:12, 2 Thess

God, it is clear that Paul centered his attention on the church. While he mentioned the kingdom of God just over a dozen times, Paul made over forty references to the church.¹⁷ Although he referred to the church more than the kingdom, Paul's emphasis on the church is neither surprising nor inconsistent with the teaching of Jesus. In fact, Paul's emphasis on the church is expected in light of the close relationship between the kingdom and the church.

As early as 1959, Ladd recognized the biblical connection between the kingdom of God, the church, and the supernatural powers of evil. In *The Gospel of the Kingdom* Ladd wrote, "God's Kingdom is at work in the world and is engaged in a mortal struggle with evil. The Church is the instrument of this struggle. Conflict must ever be an essential element in the life of the Church so long as This Age lasts. . . . The Church is the community of the Kingdom of God and is to press the struggle against satanic evil in the world."¹⁸ In 1974, Ladd spoke specifically about the kingdom of God, the church, and the principalities and powers. In *A Theology of the New Testament* Ladd wrote,

The Pauline concept of angelic powers, even as the exorcism of demons in the Gospels, which manifested the presence of the Kingdom of God, is no peripheral element or the result of the influence of extraneous religious concepts upon Paul's view. It is rather something that belongs to the solid content of the New Testament faith. This present evil age and the totality of human existence are under bondage to

1:5, 2 Tim 4:1, 4:18.

¹⁷Arnold is right to claim, "Paul was primarily concerned with the health and well-being of his churches." Arnold, *Powers of Darkness*, 126.

¹⁸Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom*, 121. Ladd's subsequent comments indicate that his interpretation of the principalities and powers aligned more closely to that of Clinton Arnold than that of Walter Wink. He wrote, "[The Church is] the focus of a conflict between the Kingdom of God and satanic evil. This is essentially a conflict in the spiritual realm. But these spiritual forces of satanic evil and of God's Kingdom manifest themselves in the areas of human conduct and relationships." *Ibid.*, 122.

these evil powers, and the Kingdom of God can be realized only by their defeat and subjugation.¹⁹

A few evangelical scholars have made a similar observations about the relationship between the kingdom of God, the church, and the principalities and powers. Writing about spiritual warfare in general, Hiebert insists, “A biblical view of spiritual warfare points to the ultimate establishment of the kingdom of God throughout the whole universe.”²⁰ Writing more specifically about the kingdom of God and the principalities and powers, Wells argues,

The Kingdom is his presence in human life and this devolves into two foci in the Gospels: judgment and salvation. The powers of darkness have been overthrown at the Cross and that conquest will be made public throughout the cosmos at the time of the second coming of Christ. To that extent, the coming of the King in human birth marked the beginning of the end of history. It produced Satan’s fall . . . and the emergence of a people formed to manifest the forgiveness, grace, and victory of this Rule.²¹

While Hiebert, Wells, Arnold, and others have given attention to the relationship between the kingdom of God, the church, and the principalities and powers, evangelicals have often ignored the relationship between the kingdom of God, the church, and the principalities and powers.²² A careful study of three relevant New Testament

¹⁹George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 443. Ladd insists that Paul’s references to the principalities and powers are references to personal, spiritual beings, and he notes that these references usually refer to evil beings. *Ibid.*, 441.

²⁰Paul G. Hiebert, “Spiritual Warfare and Worldview,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 24 (2000): 253.

²¹David F. Wells, *Above All Earthly Powers: Christ in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 215.

²²Another scholar who has written on this connection is Robert Webber. He argues, “Christ, who is the victor over the powers of evil, confronts the powers of evil

passages reveals that in order to truly understand the kingdom of God, the church, and the principalities and powers, one must first understand the relationship between these institutions and creatures.

The first relevant passage is Matthew 16:13-20. These verses are well known for Peter's confession that Jesus was "the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt 16:16). After Jesus declared that Peter was blessed because the Father had revealed this truth to him, he said, "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt 16:18).

Scholars will continue to debate Jesus' reference to "this rock" in verse 18.²³ However, Matthew 16:18 plainly teaches that Jesus, whose message centered on the kingdom of God, foresaw that the church would be at the forefront of the struggle between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan.²⁴ Not only does this passage demand the church play a role in successful spiritual warfare, but it also means the church must play a central role in any strategy for standing against the principalities and powers.

that work in the world, through the church." He also argues, "Because the church is the means through which Christ continues to be present in and to the world, the efforts of Satan are now directed against the church." Webber's arguments are solid until he articulates his view of the powers. Webber follows Wink by favoring a structural approach to the principalities and powers. His application mostly refers to politics and economics, and he suggests that the church should expose structural evil and serve as an agent of reconciliation. Robert E. Webber, *The Church in the World: Opposition, Tension, or Transformation?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 31, 41-42.

²³According to James Montgomery Boice, the three most common interpretations of this hotly debated passage are as follows: "this rock" refers to Peter, "this rock" refers to Peter's faith, and "this rock" refers to Jesus. James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of Matthew: The King and His Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 1:305.

²⁴Robert A. Guelich, "Spiritual Warfare: Jesus, Paul and Peretti," *Pneuma* 13

The second relevant passage is Colossians 1:13-20. This passage is important because it refers to the kingdom of God, the church, and the principalities and powers. In verse 13, Paul explains that believers have been transferred from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of Jesus, and in the following verses Paul goes on to describe the supremacy of the King himself. Commenting on these verses, Arnold argues, “Nowhere in Paul’s writings is the sovereignty of the Creator with respect to the powers brought out more clearly and forcefully than in Colossians 1:15-20.”²⁵

In addition to the reality that they had been brought into the kingdom of Jesus, it is significant that Paul wanted the believers at Colossae to understand that their new King was both the sovereign creator of the rebellious principalities and powers and the sovereign head of the church (Col 1:16, 18). Even today, it is important for believers to embrace the truth that their victorious King is both the sovereign creator of the principalities and powers and the sovereign head of the church. Consequently, believers who come to the King for strength to stand against the principalities and powers should expect to receive that strength in the context of the church. After all, the King who exercises sovereignty over the principalities and powers is the same King who rules over his people as head of the church.

A third passage that sheds light on the relationship between the kingdom of God, the church, and the principalities and powers is Ephesians 3:1-13. While this passage makes no explicit reference to the kingdom of God, it does make a direct

(1991): 34-35.

²⁵Arnold, *Powers of Darkness*, 100.

connection between the church and the principalities and powers. In the ongoing struggle between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan, Paul explained that it was through the church that the manifold wisdom of God is made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places (Eph 3:10).

Advocates of the liberal Protestant approach to the principalities and powers have misconstrued this passage and argued that political activism is the means by which the church makes God's manifold wisdom known to the principalities and powers.²⁶ Likewise, advocates of the spiritual warfare approach to the principalities and powers have misconstrued this passage and argued that strategic-level spiritual warfare is the means by which the church makes God's manifold wisdom known to the principalities and powers.²⁷ In contrast to these misguided proposals, Arnold rightly to insist that Ephesians 3:10 asserts that "the very existence of the church testifies of God's wisdom to the rebellious principalities and powers."²⁸ Consequently, Ephesians 3:10 reinforces the truth that the church plays a critical role in the stand against the principalities and powers.

In summary, these three New Testament passages require that in the ongoing struggle between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan, any strategy for standing against the principalities and powers must be centered on the church. First, Jesus foresaw that the church would be at the forefront of the struggle against the powers

²⁶Walter Wink, *Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 89.

²⁷C. Peter Wagner, *Warfare Prayer: How to Seek God's Power and Protection in the Battle to Build His Kingdom* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1992), 16-18.

²⁸Arnold, *Powers of Darkness*, 197; idem, *Power and Magic: The Concept of Power in Ephesians in Light of its Historical Setting* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 63.

of darkness (Matt 16:13-20). Second, Paul insisted that the King of the kingdom of God was both the sovereign creator of the principalities and powers and the sovereign head of the church (Col 1:15-20). Third, Paul argued that the existence of the church revealed the wisdom of God to the principalities and powers (Eph 3:1-13).

A Biblical Worldview

In “Where Angels Fear to Tread,” Christian Breuninger insightfully notes, “Reading the varied terrain of contemporary literature about the powers one is struck with how theological foundations lead to diverse, even contradictory, praxis.”²⁹ Breuninger is right; one’s response to the principalities and powers is dramatically affected by one’s interpretation of the principalities and powers. At a more foundational level, however, one’s interpretation of the principalities and powers is affected by one’s worldview. Thus, in attempting to formulate a biblical response to the principalities and powers, it is important to begin with a biblical worldview.

Hiebert has written extensively about the importance of worldview. In *Transforming Worldviews* he explains,

Let us define ‘worldview’ in anthropological terms as ‘the foundational cognitive, affective, and evaluative assumptions and frameworks a group of people makes about the nature of reality which they use to order their lives.’ It encompasses people’s images or maps of the reality of all things that they use for living their lives. It is the cosmos thought to be true, desirable, and moral by a community of people.³⁰

²⁹Christian Breuninger, “Where Angels Fear to Tread: Appraising the Current Fascination with Spiritual Warfare,” *Covenant Quarterly* 53 (1995): 41.

³⁰Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews*, 25-26. Hiebert offers a simpler definition of worldview when he writes, “Taken together, the assumptions underlying a culture provide people with a more or less coherent way of looking at the world.” *Ibid.*, 28. Hwa Yung offers a similar definition: “A worldview contains assumptions, values and commitments which give order and meaning to life and death and shape our

It is the “assumptions and frameworks” shared by a “community of people” that determine how a group of people will interpret and respond to the principalities and powers. That being the case, every community of believers should seek to ascertain and acquire the biblical worldview.³¹ In *Transforming Worldviews* Hiebert discusses the challenge, the possibility, and the importance of ascertaining and acquiring the biblical worldview. He admits, “In one sense, it is arrogant to claim that there is a biblical worldview. . . . All our attempts to understand what God has revealed in Scripture are partial and biased by our historical and cultural perspectives.”³² Despite these admissions, however, Hiebert argues,

To say that there is no biblical worldview is to deny that there is an underlying unity to the biblical story, to say that the God of Abraham, Moses, David, and Jesus are different gods, that the New Testament is discontinuous with the Old, and that Scripture is simply the record of individuals and ever-shifting beliefs shaped by history and sociocultural contexts. It is to say that there is no single story running from creation to Christ’s return, no underlying unity and dignity of humanity, no universal morals. . . . To understand Scripture, we must seek to understand the worldview themes that underlie the whole.³³

Hiebert is right. The follower of Jesus Christ must seek to ascertain and

understanding of reality.” Hwa Yung, “A Systematic Theology That Recognises the Demonic,” in *Deliver Us from Evil: An Uneasy Frontier in Christian Mission*, ed. A. Scott Moreau and others (Monrovia, CA: World Vision, 2002), 4. Marguerite Kraft defines worldview as “the basic assumptions, values and allegiances of a group of people.” Marguerite Kraft, “Spiritual Conflict and the Mission of the Church: Contextualisation,” in *Deliver Us from Evil: An Uneasy Frontier in Christian Mission*, ed. A. Scott Moreau and others (Monrovia, CA: World Vision, 2002), 277.

³¹This is because adherents of verbal-plenary inspiration believe that the very words of Scripture are both timeless and true. Thus, the truthfulness of the words of Scripture is in no way affected by the accepted worldview of the biblical authors.

³²Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews*, 265.

³³*Ibid.*, 265-66.

acquire the “worldview themes that underlie the whole” of Scripture. With respect to the North American church’s stand against the principalities and powers, two worldview issues are particularly threatening: anti-supernaturalism and individualism.

Anti-supernaturalism

Hiebert argues that naturalism has thoroughly infected North American culture. He writes, “Naturalism is the worldview of the dominant cultural systems of Europe and North America. It is the foundation for the scientific academy, education the legal system, and the news media.”³⁴ In the following quote, he describes the development of Western naturalism:

By the late seventeenth century, the realms of heaven and earth were beginning to move apart in the minds of European intellectuals. God became increasingly unreal, and the material universe became the ultimate reality. . . . God, angels, and demons were relegated to other worlds and religion to heavenly matters. Nature concerned this world, devoid of resident spirit beings. . . . The supernatural domain was relegated to fanciful beliefs, emotions, and morals.³⁵

The result of this development is a naturalistic worldview that completely distinguishes the natural from the supernatural and that totally separates science from faith.³⁶

Subsequently, science has been elevated while faith has been discounted.

³⁴Ibid., 146.

³⁵Ibid., 145.

³⁶Ibid. In *Cultural Anthropology* Hiebert argues, “There is sharp distinction between the natural and supernatural world. . . . Few people, even those who are religious, live with a constant awareness that the world around them is inhabited by spirits that directly influence their everyday experiences.” Paul G. Hiebert, *Cultural Anthropology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 358. Charles Kraft makes a similar argument: “In comparison to other societies, Americans and other North Atlantic peoples are *naturalistic*. . . . Indeed, unlike most of the peoples of the world, we divide the world into what we call ‘natural’ and what we call ‘supernatural.’ And then we largely

In an article about the relationship between worldview and spiritual warfare, Hiebert explains how Western naturalism has impacted the church's approach to the demonic:

The worldview of the West has been shaped since the sixteenth century by the Cartesian dualism that divides the cosmos into two realities – the supernatural world of God, angels and demon, and the natural material world of humans, animals, plants and matter. This has led to two views of spiritual warfare. First, as secularism spread, the reality of the supernatural world was denied. In this materialist worldview the only reality is the natural world which can best be studied by science. For modern secular people, there is no spiritual warfare because there are no gods, angels or demons. There is only war in nature between humans, communities and nations. Some Christians accept this denial of spiritual realities, and demythologize the Scriptures to make it fit modern secular scientific beliefs. Angels, demons, miracles and other supernatural realities are explained away in scientific terms. The battle, they claim, is between good and evil in human social systems. The church is called to fight against poverty, injustice, oppression, and other evils which are due to oppressive, exploitative human systems of government, business and religion. The second view of spiritual warfare emerging out of this dualism is that God, angels and demons are involved in a cosmic battle in the heavens, but the everyday events on earth are best explained and controlled by science and technology.³⁷

With respect to the principalities and powers, Western naturalism and has led to the reinterpretation and demythologization of the demonic. Keith Ferdinando explains,

Many Western interpreters have responded to Biblical demonology with attempts to contextualise it in such a way that it still has something to say within the rationalistic worldview. Such hermeneutical manoeuvres [*sic*] normally entail a reinterpretation of the language of demons such that its referents are understood in terms of tangible realities in the material world. . . . The Pauline vocabulary of 'principalities and powers' has particularly been treated in this way.³⁸

disregard the supernatural.” Charles H. Kraft, *Christianity with Powers: Your Worldview and Your Experience of the Supernatural* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant, 1989), 27.

³⁷Hiebert, “Spiritual Warfare and Worldview,” 246.

³⁸Keith Ferdinando, “Screwtape Revisited: Demonology Western, Africa, and Biblical,” in *The Unseen World: Christian Reflections on Angels, Demons and the Heavenly Realm*, ed. Anthony N. S. Lane (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 105. Michael Green makes a similar comment: “In recent years a substantial debate has arisen about

This reinterpretation and demythologization have even crept into the church. Powlison believes that the modern age numbs people to the reality of spiritual warfare, and he observes, “This modern mentality easily infects Christians. For some professing Christians the devil has about the same practical status as Santa Claus. Perhaps he lingers on as a point of abstract doctrine, but in practice Enlightenment thinking has exorcised him far more effectively than Jesus ever did.”³⁹ Marguerite Kraft agrees and insists, “Even today most Christians in the West and often those non-Western Christians trained in the West or trained by Westerners have limited understanding of spiritual powers.”⁴⁰

Hiebert and his colleagues believe there is great danger in neglecting the reality of the principalities and powers.⁴¹ Ferdinando argues that reinterpreting the principalities and powers not only represents capitulation to naturalism, but also ignores the intent of the original authors and causes serious theodicy problems.⁴² He also insightfully notes,

the nature of these principalities and powers. There has been a tendency to demythologise the concept, and regard them as not as fallen spiritual beings but rather as the structures of earthly existence. . . . This has the double attraction of divesting ourselves of belief in so unfashionable a concept as a hierarchy of angels, good and evil, stretching between man and God; it also enables us to find a good deal more in the New Testament about our very modern preoccupation with social structures.” Michael Green, *I Believe in Satan’s Downfall* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1981), 84.

³⁹Powlison, *Power Encounters*, 23-24.

⁴⁰Kraft, “Spiritual Conflict and the Mission of the Church,” 276.

⁴¹Hiebert believes, “The consequences of this modern dualism have been destructive to the church.” Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews*, 154.

⁴²Ferdinando, “Screwtape Revisited,” 107-08.

The neglect of demonology, or its emasculation through demythologisation, has in fact had serious consequences. In particular it vitiates the important Biblical testimony to the presence of evil forces which attack the church and hinder its mission, thereby leaving the people of God unprepared in the face of powerful adversaries. . . . The absence of serious demonological reflection in the West hinders the development of an adequate response to the rise of exotic theories of the demonic.⁴³

The following warning from Powlison parallels that of Ferdinando:

Downplaying or demythologizing spiritual warfare usually creates a pernicious domino effect. Prayer and worship become hollow forms. God's power and aid are little needed and little expected. Sin becomes psychotherapy or social maladjustment. The Bible becomes a remote object, not the voice of the living God. Evangelism becomes vaguely embarrassing; death to self is distastefully fanatical. Normal life becomes, well, normal.⁴⁴

Instead of reinterpreting or demythologizing the principalities and powers, churches must take seriously what the Bible takes seriously. That means churches must recognize the fact that the Bible unapologetically acknowledges the reality of personal, evil, spiritual beings who actively seek the destruction of the church.⁴⁵ Wayne Grudem correctly argues,

If Scripture gives us a true account of the world as it really is, then we must take seriously its portrayal of intense demonic involvement in human society. Our failure to perceive that involvement with our five senses simply tells us that we have some deficiencies in our ability to understand the world, not that demons do not exist. In fact, there is no reason to think that there is any less demonic activity in the

⁴³Ibid., 130-31.

⁴⁴Powlison, *Power Encounters*, 24.

⁴⁵Page writes, "There is pervasive biblical evidence of belief in the world of spirits." Page, *Powers of Evil*, 290. Edward Murphy argues, "In the Bible the spirit world is real, alive, and everywhere invading daily life. It is portrayed in both the Old and New Testaments but more vividly in the New, where Christ and his followers engage evil supernaturalism intensely and triumph decisively." Edward F. Murphy "World View Clash: A Handbook for Spiritual Warfare," *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 10 (1993): 165. Ferdinando insists, "The worldview implicit throughout the Bible affirms the reality of spirits." Ferdinando, "Screwtape Revisited," 104.

world today then there was at the time of the New Testament. We are in the same time period in God's overall plan for history (the church age or the new covenant age), and the millennium has not yet come when Satan's influence will be removed from the earth. Much of our western secularized society is unwilling to admit the existence of demons – except perhaps in 'primitive' societies – and relegates all talk of demonic activity to a category of superstition. But the unwillingness of modern society to recognize the presence of demonic activity today is, from a biblical perspective, simply due to people's blindness to the true nature of reality.⁴⁶

In addition to the testimony of Scripture, the shared beliefs of most people who have ever lived on earth point to the reality of the demonic.⁴⁷ Caution must be exercised, however, when observing the supernatural beliefs of non-Christian people. Simply put, in responding to Western naturalism there is a danger that churches will move to the other extreme by accepting pagan and animistic beliefs. Breuninger is again insightful when he warns, "As our postmodern society becomes increasingly dissatisfied with the secularizing effects of western rationalism, and as evangelicals come to face the inadequacy of a rationalistic world view, there lies the danger of swinging the pendulum toward a hyper-spiritualism that denies the validity of the material world."⁴⁸

⁴⁶Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 420.

⁴⁷Page argues that science is unable to answer the question of the reality of the principalities and powers. He also notes that belief in the supernatural is found in virtually every place in every time. Page, *Powers of Evil*, 267-68. Arnold makes a similar argument: "On the issue of the actual existence of evil spirits, science is unable to decide the question. . . . Purely naturalistic explanations are not adequate for describing many forms of evil in the world. . . . Those of us in the West need to place our attitude toward the supernatural into the broader sweep of human history. . . . The West also needs to realize that it is only the contemporary society that denies the reality of evil spirits. . . . The naturalistic world view of the West has never convinced the entire populace on the issue of evil spirits." Arnold, *Powers of Darkness*, 177-82.

⁴⁸ Breuninger, "Where Angels Fear to Tread," 37.

Several scholars have offered warnings similar to Breuninger's, and their cautions are worth heeding.⁴⁹ Churches must avoid the danger of anti-supernaturalism that results from the Western naturalistic worldview while also avoiding the danger of a Christianized form of animism that results from the pagan worldview.⁵⁰ In avoiding these dangers, churches must develop and promote what Hiebert has termed "holistic theology." The following quote is Hiebert's three part definition of holistic theology:

On the highest level, this includes a theology of God in cosmic history – in the creation, redemption, purpose, and destiny of all things. . . . On the middle level, a holistic theology includes a theology of God in human history – in the affairs of nations, of peoples, and of individuals. . . . On the bottom level, a holistic theology includes an awareness of God in natural history – in sustaining the natural order of things.⁵¹

It is this sort of worldview that will enable churches to rightly interpret the principalities and powers, to respond biblically to aberrant interpretations of the principalities and powers, and to respond appropriately to the principalities and powers.

⁴⁹Page warns of the danger of appealing to the demonic to excuse sin, accepting superstitious beliefs, and unrestrained speculation. Page, *Powers of Evil*, 269-70. Hiebert cautions, "There is a two-fold danger in this return to an animistic worldview. First, it assigns too much power and authority to unseen spirits and forces in this world and implicitly denies the power and presence of God in everyday affairs, particularly in the lives of Christians" (author's emphasis). Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 225. Powlison warns that an animistic worldview will spawn "mutant spiritualities" and superstitious worldviews. Powlison, *Power Encounters*, 25. Yung cautions that Christians may focus on manipulating spirits through technique. Yung, "A Systematic Theology that Recognises the Demonic," 10. Lawless cautions against overemphasizing power and elevating experience over truth. Charles Lawless, "The Relationship between Evangelism and Spiritual Warfare in the North American Spiritual Warfare Movement, 1986-1997" (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1997), 281.

⁵⁰Paul G. Hiebert, "The Flaw of the Excluded Middle," in *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 199-200.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 198-99.

Individualism

The fact that North American culture is highly individualistic is hardly deniable.⁵² Gailyn Van Rheenen describes Western culture as “a culture where the autonomy and dignity of the individual are stressed,” and he notes that Western culture places more importance on the individual than the group.⁵³ Van Rheenen argues that individualism has impacted every area of Western culture.⁵⁴ He points to the fact that typical Western heroes include the “strutting cowboy” and the “private detective,” and he observes that even team sports keep individual statistics.⁵⁵

Hiebert has written extensively about Western individualism, and he locates its genesis in the shift from God to the self that took place during the Enlightenment.⁵⁶ He explains the influence this shift has had on American culture when he writes,

The individuality and worth of each person is taken for granted. It is assumed that all people have inalienable rights to ‘life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.’ Applied to society, the tress on individualism leads to an idealization of freedom. Communism, socialism, and other economic systems that are thought to restrict the individual are rejected in favor of free enterprise and capitalism. Democracy, in which people have the right to choose their rules, is the ideal form of government. With regard to the individual, the emphasis is on self-realization. On earth, this is

⁵²David Wells argues that individualism is a hallmark of American culture. David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth, Or, Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 138. Writing from a North American perspective, Kraft writes, “We highly value individualism and independence.” Kraft, *Christianity with Power*, 32.

⁵³Gailyn Van Rheenen, *Communicating Christ in Animistic Contexts* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 128.

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Ibid., 128-29.

⁵⁶Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews*, 167.

expressed in a search for identity and praise for the self-made person, in heaven, in the ultimate self-fulfillment of the individual.⁵⁷

Wells suggests that earlier forms of American individualism were based on two ideas: the worth of the individual and the priority of the individual over the group.⁵⁸

Unfortunately, according to Wells, this older individualism has morphed into what has become “expressive individualism.” Wells describes expressive individualism:

The individualism in which you should think for yourself, decide for yourself, provide for yourself, and work to serve others in personal or civic ways has ended up as something rather different. This older individualism has turned inward. Now it is about finding the self for yourself, discovering your inner potential for your own benefit, esteeming yourself, and developing new ethical rules that serve the discovery of . . . the self.⁵⁹

In *Above All Earthly Pow'rs* Wells notes that “expressive individualism” has resulted in both a fascination with therapeutic remedies and in a commitment to the autonomous self.⁶⁰ In light of this fascination and this commitment, Wells suggests that

⁵⁷Ibid., 340.

⁵⁸David F. Wells, *The Courage to Be Protestant: Truth Lovers, Marketers, and Emergents in the Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 69-70.

⁵⁹Ibid., 136-37.

⁶⁰Wells, *Above All Earthly Pow'rs*, 138, 152, 248. Wells also writes about individualism's fascination with therapeutic remedies and commitment to the autonomous self in *No Place for Truth*. He comments, “It is that [transformation] which has turned our individualism into the self movement. When rugged individualism defined the essence of what it meant to be American, Christian faith was choreographed in one way. When the pursuit of satisfaction of the self became the essence of what it meant to be American in the modern world, evangelical faith was choreographed in an entirely different way. Whereas the older kind of individualism sometimes treated theology roughly, the new culture of self dismisses it entirely as irrelevant. That being the case, evangelicalism has increasingly found that the cost of modern relevance has been its own theological evisceration. And, shorn of its theology, evangelicalism has become simply one more expression of the self movement.” Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 138.

the highest perceived value is freedom from all external restraints, religious and moral.⁶¹ Hiebert agrees with Wells' analysis. He writes, "The focus on the autonomous individual led to the belief that people must take the initiative for their own well-being. This position in its own turn led to an emphasis on freedom over control, rights over responsibilities, and the search for self-actualization and a good life defined in terms of comfort, consumerism, and entertainment."⁶²

Individualism has also infiltrated the church.⁶³ Kraft contends that Western Christianity has become an "individualistic, private affair."⁶⁴ Van Rheezen suggests that this infiltration of individualism has "undermined biblical Christianity."⁶⁵ Hiebert's analysis deserves the attention of all American believers:

The effects of self-centeredness on the Western church have been profound. Salvation increasingly has become a personal matter between the self and God that has little to do with the formation of a new community in Christ. Many churches have become little more than religious clubs, organized on the basis of voluntary association and common interests. The relationship between members is no longer seen as a sacrament (ordained of God) or covenant (commitment to a group) but as a contract (based on personal need for self-fulfillment). It should not surprise us,

⁶¹Wells, *The Courage to Be Protestant*, 157. Also see Wells, *Above All Earthly Powers*, 168. Hiebert makes a similar observation: "Private truth is seen as a matter of personal belief and therefore as a matter not of truth and falsehood but of different perceptions of personal truth. Religious truth, feelings, morals, and traditions are relegated to the private domain, where the operative principle is pluralism and respect for the freedom of each person to choose the value he or she will live by. The one requirement imposed on almost everyone is that one must not impose one's religious or moral truth on others." Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews*, 153-54.

⁶²Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews*, 170.

⁶³Wells, *The Courage to Be Protestant*, 11, 12, 158.

⁶⁴Kraft, *Christianity with Power*, 33.

⁶⁵Van Rheezen, *Communicating Christ in Animistic Contexts*, 129.

therefore, that Christians often do not find a congregation to be a true community and drift from church to church.⁶⁶

Evangelical churches in particular have suffered at the hands of American individualism. Wells notes that the acceptance of individualism, as well as the acceptance of individualism's preoccupation with therapeutic remedies and commitment to the autonomous self, has resulted in the uncritical acceptance of marketing strategies, the rise of television ministry, the absence of a robust theology, and the possibility of Christian anonymity.⁶⁷ Wells warns that the church's uncritical acceptance of individualism has also led to the destruction of truth and theology, while Hiebert points to widespread relativism and self-divinization.⁶⁸

With respect to the principalities and powers, however, the most troubling consequence of the church's uncritical acceptance of individualism is the belief that individual believers are competent and equipped to win spiritual battles on their own. Writing about the church's acceptance of individualism, Kraft warns, "This determination to 'go it alone' also makes both Christians and non-Christians very vulnerable to Satan in the deepest recesses of our being."⁶⁹ Instead of an arrogant, "Lone Ranger" approach to spiritual warfare, Kraft urges believers to rely on each other. He writes, "In spite of the individualism of our society, we are not expected to fight all by ourselves. We are to enlist others. . . . We are parts of a body and can only function adequately when we are

⁶⁶Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues*, 223.

⁶⁷Wells, *The Courage to Be Protestant*, 11, 12, 158.

⁶⁸Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 137; Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews*, 228-29.

⁶⁹Kraft, *Christianity with Power*, 33.

supported, encouraged, and equipped by other members of the body.”⁷⁰

Kraft’s warnings and proposals will only be received when Western Christians admit that their individualistic worldviews do not accord with the relational and communal worldview of the Old and New Testaments.⁷¹ Not surprisingly, the elixir for American individualism is found in the clear and bold proclamation of the kingdom of God. Hiebert notes, “The focus on the individual has led to a neglect of the central message that Jesus preached during his ministry on earth, namely the kingdom of God.”⁷² If Hiebert is right, the solution to individualism in the church is the development of a kingdom perspective. Van Rheenen explains that this perspective refuses to reduce the cross to a matter of individual salvation, and instead recognizes that “God in Christ has broken into the world to establish his own sovereignty and defeat the powers of Satan.”⁷³

North American churches will not stand effectively against the principalities and powers until a worldview shift takes place with respect to anti-supernaturalism and individualism. To facilitate this shift, churches must stop focusing on the individual and

⁷⁰Ibid., 174.

⁷¹Hiebert argues, “In contrast to the modern, postmodern, and post-postmodern emphasis on the autonomous and self-fulfilled individual involved in impersonal relationships, the biblical worldview focuses on deep interpersonal relationships and on the priority of the community. . . . The idea of the Cartesian-Kantian autonomous individual is absent in Hebrew thought and biblical teachings.” Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews*, 287. Kraft suggests, “To us, unlike most contemporary peoples and the biblical Hebrews, the individual is the reality and groups are but abstractions made up of collections of individuals. We seem to have little of the sense of corporateness that we see so often in the Old Testament, where the behavior of one person brings blessing or punishment on a whole group.” Kraft, *Christianity with Power*, 32.

⁷²Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews*, 174.

⁷³Van Rheenen, *Communicating Christ in Animistic Contexts*, 131.

start focusing on the kingdom of God. Van Rheezen describes a theology that is much needed in North American churches: “Kingdom theology introduces the reign of God, which equips believers to attack and defeat the powers of Satan. . . . Kingdom theology makes no dichotomy between the natural and the supernatural. . . . while conversion theology is individualistic, kingdom theology is systemic. It aims to Christianize the entire cultural system.”⁷⁴

Standing as the Church

Scripture is clear that the people of God face a formidable enemy in the principalities and powers. These enemies seek to blind God’s people through deception, tempt God’s people with sin, intimidate God’s people through misfortune, accuse God’s people of their transgressions, and invite God’s people to self-worship.⁷⁵ Whatever their mode of attack, however, the principalities and powers are bent on destroying the church. Merrill Unger insisted, “From its very birth . . . the Church of the living God . . . has ever been the object of Satan’s most venomous attacks and the special target of demonic malignity.”⁷⁶ Arnold makes a similar comment: “The best way of summarizing the

⁷⁴Ibid., 140.

⁷⁵Hiebert, “Spiritual Warfare and Worldview,” 251. Writing about spiritual warfare in general, Lawless offers a similar list of attacks. He suggests that our enemies seek to tempt God’s people, prevent God’s people from understanding grace, and cause strife among God’s people. Charles Lawless, “Spiritual Warfare and Evangelism,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 5 (2001): 31.

⁷⁶Merrill F. Unger, *Biblical Demonology: A Study of the Spiritual Forces behind the Present World Unrest* (Wheaton, IL: VanKampen, 1952), 202. Green makes a similar comment in “Principalities and Powers.” He writes, “Nor is it surprising that the attacks of the Enemy are primarily directed against the church, whether through heresy from within or seduction or persecution from without. For in the church, however heavily veiled, the principalities and powers discern the person of their conqueror, the

activity of evil spirits is to say that they stand for everything that is contrary to God's purposes and the welfare of his people."⁷⁷

In light of the certainty of demonic attack, Charles Spurgeon urged the church to look to Christ and face demonic opposition with courage.⁷⁸ While Spurgeon's counsel was sound, a question remains. What exactly is the church supposed to do in the face of demonic attack? Arnold points toward the answer in *Power and Magic*: "The Epistle to the Ephesians provides us with the most detailed Christian response to the 'powers' of all the canonical epistles."⁷⁹

Turning to Ephesians, Ephesians 6:10-20 provides the most specific description of how the people of God are to respond to the principalities and powers.

Lord Christ. The powers of the age to come are already at work in her, frail and fallible though she is. And as such she reminds the principalities and powers of their doom." Michael Green, "Principalities and Powers," in *Territorial Spirits: Insights on Strategic-Level Spiritual Warfare from Nineteen Christian Leaders*, ed. C. Peter Wagner (Chichester, England: Sovereign World Limited, 1991), 190.

⁷⁷Clinton E. Arnold, "Giving the Devil His Due," *Christianity Today* 34 (1990): 17.

⁷⁸He counseled, "If Christ on the cross has spoiled Satan, let us not be afraid to encounter this great enemy of our souls. . . . The result of the battle is certain, for as the Lord our Savior has overcome once, even so shall we most surely conquer in Him." Charles Spurgeon, *Spiritual Warfare in a Believer's Life*, ed. Robert Hall (Lynwood, WA: Emerald, 1993), 20-21.

⁷⁹Arnold, *Power and Magic*, 69. Powlison also points to Paul's letter to the Ephesians and writes, "The leading elements of the classic mode of spiritual warfare are best captured by Ephesians 6:10-20: reliance on the power and protection of God, embracing the Word of God, specific obedience, fervent and focused prayer, and the aid of fellow believers." Powlison, *Power Encounters*, 36. Like Powlison and Arnold, Lawless points to Eph 6 for instruction about responding to the principalities and powers. Lawless also reflects on the rest of Paul's letter to the Ephesians and offers the following three theological premises that undergird Paul's instructions in Eph 6: (1) the centrality of God, (2) the sinfulness of humanity, and (3) the believer's position in Christ. Lawless,

While this passage is best known for Paul's references to the armor of God, Ephesians 6:10-20 is first and foremost a call for the church to "stand" against the principalities and powers. Four times in this passage Paul admonishes the church to stand against their demonic foes.⁸⁰ In commenting on Ephesians 6:10-20, Stott explains the importance of Paul's directive to stand:

This fourfold emphasis on the need to 'stand' or 'withstand' shows that the apostle's concern is for Christian stability. Wobbly Christians who have no firm foothold in Christ are an easy prey for the devil. And Christians who shake like reeds and rushes cannot resist the wind when the principalities and powers begin to blow. Paul wants to see Christians so strong and stable that they remain firm even against the devil's wiles (verse 11) and even *in the evil day*, that is, in a time of special pressure.⁸¹

Stott has rightly emphasized the importance of Paul's command to stand. However, in his treatment of Ephesians 6:10-20, Stott has failed to emphasize the fact that Paul's commands to stand are intended for the church as a whole, not individual Christians.⁸² In Ephesians 6:11 Paul wrote, "Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil."⁸³ In this verse, Paul addressed the

"Spiritual Warfare and Evangelism," 33-35.

⁸⁰Melvin Tinker, "The Phantom Menace: Territorial Spirits and SLSW," *Churchman* 114 (2000): 80.

⁸¹John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, The Bible Speaks Today, ed. John R. W. Stott (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 1979), 275.

⁸²In this particular commentary, Stott does emphasize the importance and centrality of the church. Towards the end of his discussion of Eph 6:10-20 he even notes that the "unity of God's new society" is the "preoccupation of this whole letter." *Ibid.*, 283. Nevertheless, in his treatment of Eph 6:10-20, Stott does not emphasize the corporate nature of standing against the principalities and powers.

⁸³The Greek of Eph 6:11 reads, "ἐνδύσασθε τὴν πανοπλίαν τοῦ θεοῦ πρὸς τὸ δύνασθαι ὑμᾶς στήναι πρὸς τὰς μεθοδείας τοῦ διαβόλου." Clearly Paul has used plural

Ephesians with a plural “you.” Thus his reference is to the church as a whole, not to individuals. Likewise, in Ephesians 6:13, when Paul wrote, “Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm,” he was writing to the church, not individual believers.⁸⁴ Finally, in Ephesians 6:14, Paul instructed the entire church at Ephesus to stand.⁸⁵

A few scholars have noted the importance of Paul’s corporate directives in Ephesians 6:10-20. John Armstrong has argued,

The need is akin to urgent in the face of the damage being done to scores of Christ’s people through recent books and ministries. The place to begin reformation in this arena is by returning to the Scripture, especially to that oft-misused section of Paul’s teaching in Ephesians 6:10-20. It would help if we read the text more carefully. The corporate ‘you’ certainly must be read properly, and the church must again understand that it uses two weapons to engage in the fight: the Word of God and prayer.⁸⁶

Similarly, Tinker has written, “The call in Ephesians 6:10 is for everyone *collectively* to put on the whole armour of God.”⁸⁷

Despite these reminders, conservative scholars have failed to emphasize the corporate nature of standing against the principalities and powers. Likewise, they have failed to develop a comprehensive proposal for the church’s stand against the

forms to refer to the entire church at Ephesus.

⁸⁴The Greek of Eph 6:13 reads, “διὰ τοῦτο ἀναλάβετε τὴν πανοπλίαν τοῦ θεοῦ, ἵνα δυνηθῆτε ἀντιστῆναι ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ πονηρᾷ καὶ ἅπαντα κατεργασάμενοι στήναι.” Again, the corporate reference is undeniable.

⁸⁵Paul instructed the Ephesians to “στήτε.” Again, this is a plural form.

⁸⁶John H. Armstrong, “Spiritual Warfare,” *Reformation and Revival* 4 (1995): 9.

⁸⁷Tinker, “The Phantom Menace,” 79.

principalities and powers. Thus, in the remaining pages of this chapter, such a proposal will be made. In addition to emphasizing the kingdom of God and pursuing a biblical worldview, churches must make the following seven commitments in order to stand against the principalities and powers.⁸⁸

Commit to Being the Church

First, churches must commit to being the church. With respect to the relationship between the church and the principalities and powers, more than one scholar has noted that the key passage is Ephesians 3:8-10.⁸⁹ In this passage Paul wrote,

To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, so that through *the church* the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places [italics mine].

Commenting on this verse, James Boice and A. Skevington Wood note, “The ecclesiological implications of such a verse as this are staggering indeed.”⁹⁰

Unfortunately, advocates of both the liberal Protestant approach and the spiritual warfare

⁸⁸Appendix 1 contains specific and practical suggestions for implementing these seven commitments in a local church.

⁸⁹Other passages that refer explicitly to both the principalities and powers and the church include Eph 1:15-23 and Col 1:15-20. Stott notes the crucial nature of this passage with respect to the principalities and powers: “The major lesson taught by this first half of Ephesians 3 is the biblical centrality of the church.” Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, 126. Commenting on Eph 1, William Barclay makes a similar statement: “The Church . . . is the essential element in the work of Christ.” William Barclay, *The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians*, The New Daily Study Bible (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 107.

⁹⁰James Montgomery Boice and A. Skevington Wood, *Galatians and Ephesians*, The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 149.

approach have misapplied these staggering “ecclesiological implications.”⁹¹ In contrast to the political activism of the liberal Protestant approach or the strategic-level spiritual warfare of the spiritual warfare approach, Arnold explains: “In the context of Ephesians and of Pauline theology as a whole, the passage is merely asserting that the very existence of the church testifies to God’s wisdom.”⁹²

Arnold is right. The very existence of the church proclaims the wisdom of God to the rebellious principalities and powers. That being true, North American churches must repent of their individualistic approach to Christianity. As Arnold insists, “Today’s church needs a stronger sense of the mutuality of the body of Christ. The Western church, in particular, is guilty of an ‘individualistic Christianity.’”⁹³ Instead of the western, individualistic approach to Christianity, North American churches must remember, “The church is central to history. . . . The church is central to the gospel. . . . The church is central to Christian living.”⁹⁴

When North American churches begin to emphasize the fact that the church is central to history, to the gospel, and to Christian living, North American churches will come to realize that the church is also central to victorious spiritual warfare. Martin Luther understood this principle. In *Table Talk* he wrote, “No man should be alone when he opposes Satan. The church and the ministry of the Word were instituted for this

⁹¹See chapter 3 for a discussion of how advocates of these two approaches apply Eph 3:10.

⁹²Arnold, *Powers of Darkness*, 197.

⁹³*Ibid.*, 159.

⁹⁴Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, 126-30.

purpose, that hands may be joined together and one may help another.”⁹⁵

Luther understood that the pertinent question is not, “What should *a believer* do to in response to the principalities and powers?”⁹⁶ Instead, the pertinent question is, “What should *the church* do in response to the principalities and powers?”⁹⁷ Because the church is central in spiritual warfare, and because it is the church that proclaims the wisdom of God to the rebellious principalities and powers, churches must strive to be biblical churches. The alternative is churches that do not line up with the biblical picture of the church, and this alternative is impotent in spiritual warfare. Lawless makes this point: “Churches without a biblical foundation have little to offer a world searching for purpose. They certainly don’t alarm Satan very much.”⁹⁸

North American churches must seek to recover what Lawless calls “the biblical foundation” for the church.⁹⁹ This means North American churches must place more

⁹⁵Martin Luther, *Table Talk*, ed. and trans. Jaroslav Pelikan, in *Luther’s Works* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1959), 54:78.

⁹⁶This is the question Schemm asks at the end of his discussion of angels and demons. He queries, “How then does *a believer* prepare for this battle known as spiritual warfare? What is *his* role in the engagement?” Schemm, “The Agents of God,” 332.

⁹⁷Grudem comes close to this type of thinking when he insists, “Our membership as children in God’s family is the firm spiritual position from which we engage in spiritual warfare.” Unfortunately, he does not develop this idea. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 428.

⁹⁸Lawless, *Discipled Warriors*, 27.

⁹⁹Volumes could be written about what it would mean for North American churches to rededicate themselves to following the biblical picture of the church. Churches would certainly need to recommit themselves to proclamation (Acts 8:4), edification (Acts 11:23), and fellowship (Acts 2:42). Additionally, churches would need to focus on equipping the saints (Eph 4:11-14). Other aspects of the biblical picture of the church could be mentioned, but such a discussion is beyond the scope of this

emphasis on the community than the individual.¹⁰⁰ Additionally, the immediate context of Ephesians 3:10 contains a striking reminder that the church of Jesus Christ is to welcome and include people from every race and culture.¹⁰¹

In seeking to return to the biblical picture of the church, North American churches must seek to eliminate a harmful obsession with technique while also recommitting themselves to theology.¹⁰² Perhaps most importantly, North American churches must once again emphasize holiness.¹⁰³ This biblical characteristic of the church has fallen into disrepute among North American churches for a variety of reasons.

dissertation. This section will focus on the characteristics of biblical churches that are often absent in North American churches.

¹⁰⁰Hiebert argues, “In Scripture the church is a covenant community of faith, a single body with many members. What would the church be like if it were a community? Clearly it would not act as a club, a corporation, or a crowd. Rather, it would be a radical alternative – a covenant community in which the desires of the individual are second to the vision and well-being of the group.” Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews*, 281.

¹⁰¹Writing about the early church’s commitment to diversity, Green notes, “The Church has qualities unparalleled in the ancient world. Nowhere else would you find slaves and masters, Jews and Gentiles, rich and poor, engaging in table fellowship and showing a real love for one another.” Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 20.

¹⁰²Lowe has written about the North American church’s obsession with technique. He laments, “Virtually everything evangelicalism now does is quantified numerically, systematized in small steps, codified in booklets, and standardised through training sessions. Witnessing, conversion, discipleship, quiet times, prayer, finding the will of God, receiving the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues, identifying spiritual gifts, church growth, healing, casting out demons, and evangelising the world by AD 2000: effectiveness in ministry depends on finding and using the right technique.” Lowe, *Territorial Spirits and World Evangelisation*, 148. Wells has written about the “disappearance of theology from the life of the Church.” He has also urged churches to recommit themselves to the task of theology. Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 95, 98.

¹⁰³Lawless refers to Eph 4:17-5:20 and argues that the church must be marked by holiness. Lawless, “Spiritual Warfare and Evangelism,” 36.

One of those reasons is a refusal to follow the advice of Matthew 18:15-20 and 1 Corinthians 5:1-13. These passages contain inspired instruction for how the church should deal with sin. No church can claim to be a biblical church without at least taking these crucial passages into consideration. Unfortunately, Lawless is correct: “Local churches often have few stated standards for church membership, poorly developed discipleship strategies, and little accountability among believers.”¹⁰⁴

Other characteristics of the biblical picture of the church could be discussed. For example, Acts 25:42-47 mentions teaching, fellowship, prayer, and worship, while Acts 4:32-37 emphasizes the generosity of the church. This section has focused on several characteristics of the church that are often absent in a North American context, and the recovery of these characteristics would be a good start. If North American churches want to proclaim the wisdom of God to the rebellious principalities and powers (Eph 3:10), they must recommit themselves to community, diversity, theology, and holiness.

Commit to Teaching Christology

Second, North American churches must commit to teaching Christology, particularly the biblical truth about the person of Christ.¹⁰⁵ Pattermore notes that while

¹⁰⁴Charles Lawless, “Spiritual Warfare and Missions,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 9 (2005): 42.

¹⁰⁵Alister McGrath makes the seemingly obvious yet much needed point that the person of Christ is a crucial aspect of Christianity. He insists, “The person of Jesus Christ is of central importance to Christian theology. Whereas ‘theology’ could be defined as ‘talk about God’ in general, ‘Christian theology’ accords a central role to Jesus Christ.” Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1997), 322.

the New Testament refers to personal, evil, spiritual beings, these beings never receive primary attention. Instead, their significance is found in their relationship to Christ.¹⁰⁶

The fact that virtually all of Paul's references to the principalities and powers occur in the context of Christological discussions is no coincidence.¹⁰⁷ Paul's reference to the principalities and powers in Romans 8:38 served to heighten the Romans' understanding of and security in "the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 8:39). Similarly, when Paul mentioned the principalities and powers in 1 Corinthians 15:24, he was discussing the future reign of Christ. In Galatians 4:3 and 4:8-9, Paul referred to the principalities and powers (elemental spirits) as the former masters of those who now submit to Jesus Christ. As Arnold observes, these references make it plain that Paul thought it was important for "every *believer* to be rooted deeply in sound doctrine, especially Christology"¹⁰⁸ (italics mine). It should also be noted that since Paul's references occur in letters written to churches, Paul thought it was important for every *church* to be "rooted deeply in sound doctrine, especially Christology."

Ephesians has more references to the principalities than any of Paul's other letters. Additionally, Arnold notes, "Ephesians has aptly been described by numerous interpreters as presenting a 'cosmic Christology.'"¹⁰⁹ Thus, one is not surprised that as

¹⁰⁶Ibid.

¹⁰⁷While Eph 6:10-20 contains the most detailed instructions for standing against the principalities and powers, it is the only place Paul referred to the principalities and powers without explicitly referring to Jesus Christ.

¹⁰⁸Arnold, *Powers of Darkness*, 132.

¹⁰⁹Arnold, *Power and Magic*, 124.

Paul made mention of the principalities and powers in Ephesians 1:21 he also extolled the supremacy and the lordship of Christ (Eph 1:20-23). Likewise, Paul's reference to the principalities and powers in Ephesians 3:10 occurred in a remarkable description of the "mystery of Christ" (Eph 3:4). Writing about the close connection between the principalities and powers and Jesus Christ, Breuninger insightfully notes, "It is strategic that Paul opens his letters to Christians in Ephesus . . . with his highest proclamations of cosmic Christology."¹¹⁰ When writing to a church that struggled with their relationship to the principalities and powers, Paul encouraged them to look to the person of Christ.¹¹¹

Like Ephesians, the epistle of Colossians contains a remarkable number of references to the principalities and powers. In *The Colossian Syncretism*, Arnold offers the following explanation for these references:

The Christians in the Lycus Valley continued to fear astral powers, chthonic spirits, and underworld powers that raised problems for them in day-to-day life. . . . For the author of Colossians, this belief with its associated practices represented a misunderstanding of the identity of Christ and his present role in the church.¹¹²

Thus, the crucial question for the Colossians was, "Is Christ adequate or not?" To answer that question, Paul juxtaposed the principalities and powers with Christ. Paul's reference to the principalities and powers in Colossians 1:16 not only emphasizes the fact that Christ created the principalities and powers, but it is also placed in the midst of one of the most stirring Christological confessions of the New Testament.¹¹³

¹¹⁰Breuninger, "Where Angels Fear to Tread," 40.

¹¹¹Ibid.

¹¹²Arnold, *The Colossian Syncretism*, 246.

¹¹³Arnold notes, "In order to restore their confidence in the Lord Jesus, Paul

Additionally, when Paul mentioned the principalities and powers (as well as the elemental spirits) in Colossians 2:8, 2:15, and 2:20, he was detailing the supremacy of Christ. Arnold is correct in concluding, “Paul wanted his readers to entertain no doubt that Christ is superior to the powers they feared and once served.”¹¹⁴

In light of the fact that virtually all of Paul’s references to the principalities and powers occur in the context of weighty Christological discussions, North American churches must be committed to teaching Christology as they stand against the principalities and powers.¹¹⁵ The following recommendation from Spurgeon rings true:

Above all, if we would successfully resist Satan, we must look not merely to revealed wisdom but to Incarnate Wisdom. Here must be the chief place of resort for every tempted soul! We must flee to Him ‘who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption’ (1 Cor. 1:30). He must teach us, He must guide us, He must be our All-in-all. We must keep close to Him in communion. The sheep are never so safe from the wolf as when they are near the shepherd. We shall never be so secure from the arrows of Satan as when we have our head lying on the Savior’s bosom. Believer, walk according to His example, live daily in His fellowship, trust always in His blood, and in this way you shall be more than a conqueror over the subtlety and craft of Satan himself.¹¹⁶

began his letter by including one of the most eloquent and moving pieces of poetic praise of Christ in all of Scripture.” Arnold, *Powers of Darkness*, 143.

¹¹⁴*Ibid.*, 150.

¹¹⁵Several scholars have suggested that believers learn from the temptation of Christ. In light of the close connection between Christ and the principalities and powers in Paul’s letters, this is a lesson that North American churches should learn. For helpful treatments of Jesus’ temptation, see William F. Cook III, “Principles for Spiritual Warfare in Light of Jesus’ Temptations,” *A Journal of Theology and Ministry* 54 (1996): 13-19; and Lawless, “The Relationship between Evangelism and Spiritual Warfare in the North American Spiritual Warfare Movement, 1986-1997,” 241, 258.

¹¹⁶Spurgeon, *Spiritual Warfare in a Believer’s Life*, 28.

Commit to Teaching Soteriology

Third, churches must commit to teaching soteriology, specifically the biblical truth about the work of Christ. McGrath rightly recognizes that Christology cannot be separated from soteriology.¹¹⁷ He writes, “The identity and function of Jesus Christ can, as we noted earlier, be thought of as two sides of the same coin.”¹¹⁸ Additionally, whether one is focusing on Christology or soteriology, it is impossible to miss the New Testament’s emphasis on the cross. Spurgeon rightly insists, “The cross is the ground of Christ’s ultimate triumph.”¹¹⁹

Most of Paul’s references to the principalities and powers are placed in the context of soteriological discussions.¹²⁰ While all of these references are significant, Colossians 2:15 is uniquely significant. In this passage, Paul insisted,

And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to

¹¹⁷McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 317.

¹¹⁸Ibid., 386.

¹¹⁹Spurgeon, *Spiritual Warfare in a Believer’s Life*, 23.

¹²⁰Rom 8 contains a reference to the principalities and powers, and it also contains one of the greatest descriptions of soteriology in the Bible (Rom 8:28-39). In 1 Cor 15 Paul mentioned the principalities and powers as he explained how the resurrection of Christ ensured the future resurrection of believers. In Gal 4 Paul discusses the principalities and powers (elemental spirits) as he explains redemption and adoption. Paul’s reference to the principalities and powers in Eph 1:15 comes on the heels of a majestic description of salvation history (Eph 1:3-14). The salvation of Gentiles is in view in Eph 3 when Paul refers to the principalities and powers (Eph 3:10). Col 1:15 contains a reference to the principalities and powers, and not surprisingly, it comes right after Paul wrote, “He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” (Col 1:13-14)

open shame, by triumphing over them in him. (Col 2:13-15)

Commenting on this passage, Arnold explains, “The high point of his case for the supremacy of Christ over the powers comes at Colossians 2:15. The principalities and powers were defeated at the cross.”¹²¹ Arnold’s use of the word “defeat” is notable, in light of the fact that many scholars cite Colossians 2:15 in support of the *Christus victor* theme.¹²² This theme has also been called the “classic” and “ransom” theory of the atonement, and until Anselm it was the dominant view within the church for a millennia.¹²³ Stott notes that after the *Christus victor* motif was supplanted by the penal-substitution theory of the atonement, it was the Gustav Aulen’s book *Christus Victor* that reminded the church that the cross was a victory over the powers of evil.¹²⁴

More recently, some evangelicals have begun to cautiously re-embrace the *Christus victor* motif. Ladd focused on the sacrificial, vicarious, substitutionary, propitiatory, and redemptive aspects of the atonement, but he also admitted,

Another end achieved by the death of Christ is triumph over the cosmic powers. We have seen that Paul’s worldview includes the concept of an invisible world of both good and evil spirits. People are in bondage not only to the Law, sin and death, but also to this evil spiritual world. One of the purposes of the mission of Christ is to destroy ‘every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has

¹²¹Arnold, *Powers of Darkness*, 144.

¹²²In the previous quote, Arnold is not dealing specifically with the *Christus victor* theme. Instead, he is explaining the meaning and significance of Col 2:15, and in this explanation his word choice alludes to parts of the *Christus victor* theme.

¹²³Bruce Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation: The Doctrine of Salvation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1997), 149.

¹²⁴Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, 228. Stott writes, “Gustav Aulen was right to draw the church’s attention to the cross as victory, and to show that by his death Jesus saved us not only from sin and guilt, but from death and the devil, in fact all evil powers, as well.” *Ibid.*, 229.

put all his enemies under his feet' (1 Cor. 15:24-25). In some unexplained way, the death of Christ constituted an initial defeat of these powers.¹²⁵

Other evangelicals have written about the *Christus victor* theme.¹²⁶ While Ladd was somewhat content to leave the *Christus victor* motif "unexplained," other evangelicals have sought to reconcile the penal-substitutionary theory of the atonement with the *Christus victor* theme.¹²⁷ Yung argued, "The victory of Christ logically flows out of his substitutionary atonement on the Cross. Because the penalty for sin has been paid and judgment averted, sin, Satan and death no longer have any hold over redeemed humanity."¹²⁸ Grudem alludes to one aspect of the *Christus victor* motif when he explains: "Because of Christ's death on the cross, our sins are completely forgiven, and

¹²⁵Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 464-77.

¹²⁶Arnold writes, "The cross of Christ is the pivotal point of salvation history. This is true, not only in the sense that Christ made satisfaction for sin through his blood, but also in the fact that Christ won a decisive victory over the evil powers." Arnold, *Powers of Darkness*, 100. Yung argues, "Evangelical theology has tended to interpret the cross through the penal substitutionary model, and rightly so. However, often it is unconsciously assumed that this model exhausts the meaning of the Cross. Penal substitution may indeed be the basic model for understanding the cross, but it needs to be supplemented by other models as well. In particular, in relation to dealing with demonic powers, the *Christus Victor* model, which stresses Christ's victory over sin, Satan and death, is crucial." Yung goes on to refer to Matt 4:8ff, 2 Cor 4:4, John 12:31, 16:11, 33, Col 2:15, Heb 2:14, 1 John 3:8, and Rev 5:5. Yung, "A Systematic Theology That Recognises the Demonic," 17.

¹²⁷Ladd did recognize that the atonement was triumphant only in light of the fact that it was sacrificial, vicarious, substitutionary, propitiatory, and redemptive. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 464-77. Demarest has suggested that the penal substitutionary theory of the atonement should be held as the central motif of Scripture while the "cosmic victory" theory should be seen as one a complementary aspect of the atonement. Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 176-81.

¹²⁸Yung, "A Systematic Theology that Recognises the Demonic," 18.

Satan has no rightful authority over us.”¹²⁹ Grudem also applies this concept to the relationship between believers and demons. He explains, “The work of Christ on the cross is the ultimate basis for our authority over demons.”¹³⁰

In reconciling these two views of the atonement, Yung and Grudem have essentially repeated the same argument Paul made in Colossians 2:14-15. In verse fourteen Paul insisted that Christ canceled the record of debt that stood against believers by nailing it to the cross (the penal-substitutionary theory). In light of this truth, in verse fifteen, Paul explained that God disarmed and shamed the principalities and powers by triumphing over them through Christ (the *Christus victor* motif).

With respect to the church’s stand against the principalities and powers, a renewed emphasis on the penal-substitutionary theory of the atonement complemented by a recognition of the *Christus victor* theme must be permeate the teaching and proclamation of North American churches. The church will share in the victory of Christ only when its members understand and embrace the atoning work of Christ.¹³¹ Thus, churches must work to instill biblical soteriology in the hearts and minds of their members. When that kind of instruction takes place, entire churches will be able to obey the following charge from Spurgeon:

¹²⁹Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 428.

¹³⁰Ibid.

¹³¹Stott insightfully writes, “The victory of Christians, therefore, consists of entering into the victory of Christ and of enjoying its benefits.” Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, 239. Likewise, Arnold explains, “The overall content of the letter leads us to conclude that the evil powers are powerless toward the Colossian Christians insofar as they recognize and appropriate their authority in Christ.” Arnold, *The Colossian Syncretism*, 279. Also see Arnold, “Giving the Devil His Due,” 19.

Never be afraid when the evil one comes upon you. If he accuses you, reply to him: ‘Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect?’ If he condemns you, laugh him to scorn, crying: ‘Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather hath risen again.’ If he threatens to divide you from Christ’s love, encounter him with confidence: ‘I am persuaded that neither things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.’ If he lets loose your sins upon you, dash the hell-dogs aside with this: ‘If any man sin, *we* have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.’ If death should threaten you, shout in his very face: ‘O death! where is thy sting; O grave! where is thy victory.’¹³²

Commit to Teaching Demonology

Fourth, churches must be commit to teaching demonology. The biblical authors clearly possessed a worldview that acknowledged the reality of personal, evil, spiritual beings.¹³³ Instead of following the Western tendency to demythologize and reinterpret the principalities and powers, North American churches must be committed to teaching biblical demonology.¹³⁴ Arnold rightly insists, “What the apostle Paul has to say about the powers of darkness should be formative for our thinking as Christians.”¹³⁵

When North American churches neglect this area of biblical teaching, they open themselves up to at least four dangers. First, churches that do not teach biblical demonology will struggle to produce a coherent and biblical worldview. Carl Henry makes this point in *God, Revelation and Authority* when he explains,

¹³²Spurgeon, *Spiritual Warfare in a Believer’s Life*, 21.

¹³³Yung, “A Systematic Theology That Recognises the Demonic,” 13.
Ferdinando, “Screwtape Revisited,” 104.

¹³⁴Ferdinando cautions against reinterpreting the principalities and powers. He argues that such reinterpretation involves capitulating to naturalism, ignoring authorial intent, and accepting theodicy problems. Ferdinando, “Screwtape Revisited,” 107-08.

¹³⁵Arnold, *Powers of Darkness*, 87.

Neglect of the doctrine of angels results inevitably not only in distortions and misconceptions of the spirit world, but also affects forces at work in the life of man and in the cosmos. Without a doctrine of angelology it is impossible to give an adequate account of the world of spiritual relationships and conflicts; spirit intelligences stand in important relations not only to God and to each other, but also to man and the world.¹³⁶

Second, churches that do not teach biblical demonology will fail to realize the reality and nature of spiritual warfare. Ferdinando laments, “The neglect of demonology, or its emasculation through demythologisation, has in fact had serious consequences. In particular, it vitiates the important Biblical testimony to the presence of evil forces which attack the church and hinder its mission, thereby leaving the people of God unprepared in the face of powerful adversaries.”¹³⁷ In the place of neglect or demythologization, North American churches must faithfully teach biblical demonology so that they will understand and be prepared for spiritual warfare.¹³⁸

Third, churches that do not teach biblical demonology will tend to produce

¹³⁶In this quote, Henry is speaking broadly of angelology. His subsequent comments reveal that he includes both angels and demons under the broad heading of angelology. Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1999), 6:231.

¹³⁷Ferdinando, “Screwtape Revisited,” 130. Millard Erickson also writes about this danger in *Christian Theology*. He suggests, “Knowledge about evil angels serves to alert us to the danger and the subtlety of temptation that can be expected to come from satanic forces, and gives us insight into some of the devil’s ways of working.” Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 475.

¹³⁸Boice admits that the Bible unashamedly speaks about the principalities and powers, but he maintains that these references are only included in the Bible to prepare the church for spiritual warfare. He writes, “According to the Bible, there are legions of fallen angels who, under the malevolent rule of Satan, are bent on opposing God’s rule and doing his people harm. They comprise a great and terrifying force, as the Bible describes them. But they are described for us not to induce terror but to warn us of danger so that we might draw near to God as the One who alone can protect us.” James Montgomery Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith: A Comprehensive and Readable*

missionaries whose converts will either doubt the reality of supernatural beings or accept a syncretized version of Christianity. Through personal testimony and insightful analysis, Hiebert has warned about the first danger. This is the tragedy of a Western missionary spreading Western naturalism on the mission field.¹³⁹ On the other hand, Climenhaga has written about the danger of syncretized Christianity. This is the tragedy of new believers syncretizing their new Christian beliefs with their old animistic beliefs.¹⁴⁰ Daryl Climenhaga warns, “The issue of spiritual warfare requires that missionaries and the church in North America learn to see the world in terms that include the middle zone of folk religion.”¹⁴¹

Fourth, churches that fail to teach biblical demonology make themselves susceptible to false interpretations of the demonic realm as well as unbiblical responses to the demonic. In recent years, this danger has been realized in evangelicals accepting either the liberal Protestant interpretation of and approach to the principalities and powers or the spiritual warfare interpretation of and approach to the principalities and powers. Ferdinando correctly cautions, “The absence of serious demonological reflection in the West hinders the development of an adequate response to the rise of exotic theories of the

Theology, rev. ed. in 1 vol. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1986), 171.

¹³⁹Hiebert, “The Flaw of the Excluded Middle,” 199-200.

¹⁴⁰He warns, “The excluded middle in missionary evangelism has led to what one researcher calls ‘the African Christian problem’ – a split-level Christianity in which a primal religious base lives on underneath the Christian surface.” Daryl R. Climenhaga, “Contemporary Issues in Mission: A Tentative Assessment,” *Didaskalia* 13 (2001): 33.

¹⁴¹*Ibid.*, 34.

demonic.”¹⁴²

To avoid these dangers, North American churches must be committed to faithfully teaching biblical demonology. This teaching should follow the reserve of the Reformers.¹⁴³ There is no need or place for speculation about the demonic realm, but there is a great need for churches to proclaim the worldview and the teachings of the New Testament. Churches must begin by insisting on the reality of the principalities and powers.¹⁴⁴ The apostle Paul did this by referring to the principalities and powers in several of the letters he wrote to churches. Furthermore, churches must teach believers to stand against the schemes of the principalities and powers.¹⁴⁵ Paul did not want the Corinthians to be outwitted by Satan because they were ignorant of his designs (2 Cor 2:11). Likewise, Paul described the armor of God so that the Ephesians might “stand against the schemes of the devil” (Eph 6:12).

In summary, as North American churches attempt to teach biblical demonology, they should assume the stance of Stephen Pattermore. Writing about the principalities and powers, he explains,

In none of the passages studied do they receive primary focus. Nowhere are they distinguished or defined, or their relationship to one another explained. What is significant in NT usage is not their characteristics, but their relationship: to God and

¹⁴²Ferdinando, “Screwtape Revisited,” 131.

¹⁴³See chapter two for a discussion of the Reformers’ interpretation of and response to the principalities and powers.

¹⁴⁴Yung, “A Systematic Theology That Recognises the Demonic,” 13.

¹⁴⁵Several authors have written about these schemes. See Arnold, *Powers of Darkness*, 191-92; John Franklin and Chuck Lawless, *Spiritual Warfare: Biblical Truth for Victory* (Nashville: LifeWay, 2001), 90-104; and Lawless, “Spiritual Warfare and Evangelism, 31.

Christ on the one hand, and to Christians on the other. As our former slave-owners they are powerful enemies, capable of enslaving us again. But they are subject to God and Christ both as creatures and as defeated foes. The existence or nature of the powers do not form a significant component of early Christian teaching, but rather are part of the assumed background or world-view against which the Christians proclaimed their message.¹⁴⁶

Commit to Praying Corporately

Fifth, churches must commit to the practice of corporate prayer. Numerous evangelical scholars have written about the necessity of prayer for successful spiritual warfare.¹⁴⁷ Arnold and Lawless repeatedly make the case that prayer is the “essential” and “primary” means for believers to access the power of God.¹⁴⁸ Perhaps the most stirring description of the relationship between prayer and spiritual conflict comes from the pen of John Piper. In *Let the Nations Be Glad* Piper describes prayer as a “wartime walkie-talkie for the mission of the church as it advances against the powers of darkness and unbelief.”¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶Stephen W. Pattermore, “Principalities and Powers in Urak Lawoi: Introduction, Contextualizing Key Terms,” *Bible Translator* 45 (1994): 127.

¹⁴⁷Craig Keener writes, “In both Daniel and Paul the battle was fought by prayerfully submitting to God and doing his will, not by directly addressing the hostile powers.” Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: The New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 553. Commenting on Eph 6:10-20, O’Brien notes, “Prayer is given greater prominence within the context of the battle with the powers of darkness than any of the weapons listed in vv. 14-17.” O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 483.

¹⁴⁸See Arnold, *Powers of Darkness*, 158; Arnold, *Power and Magic*, 112; Arnold, “Giving the Devil His Due,” 19; Lawless, *Disciplined Warriors*, 56; and Chuck Lawless, *Putting on the Armor* (Nashville: LifeWay, 2007), 126-27.

¹⁴⁹John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad: The Supremacy of God in Missions*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 45. Piper also notes, “It is not surprising that prayer malfunctions when we try to make it a domestic intercom to call upstairs for more

It is important to note that the sort of prayer advocated here is nothing like the warfare prayer advocated by Wagner.¹⁵⁰ Instead of strategic-level spiritual warfare, North American churches must be committed to petitionary and intercessory prayer. Wells notes that this kind of prayer is based on the belief that “God’s name is hallowed too irregularly, his kingdom has come too little, and his will is done too infrequently,” and that “God himself can change this situation.”¹⁵¹

Churches should encourage believers to engage in petitionary prayer and intercessory prayer in their personal prayer time. However, North American churches must also encourage believers to engage in petitionary prayer and intercessory prayer on

comforts in the den. God has given us prayer as a wartime walkie-talkie so that we can call headquarters for everything we need as the kingdom of Christ advances in the world. Prayer gives *us* the significance of frontline forces and gives *God* the glory of a limitless Provider.” Ibid. Lawless makes similar comments about prayer in *Discipled Warriors*. Lawless, *Discipled Warriors*, 157.

¹⁵⁰Lawless advocates prayer as a means of spiritual warfare, yet cautions about referring to Daniel or Paul in support of strategic-level spiritual warfare. Ibid., 163. Similarly, Schemm warns, “Prayer is the means by which believers sustain their opposition to the evil and darkness of this age. . . . Prayer is not the means by which believers engage Satan and demons in spiritual warfare; it is the means by which believers call on God for divine assistance in order to persevere and stand strong in Christ so that the gospel will continue to prevail not only for them but also for others who have not yet believed (Eph. 6:10-20).” Schemm, “The Agents of God,” 336. Tinker explains, “Certainly Paul prayed and asked for prayer, but he never asked for spirits to be bound. All he wanted was the spiritual strength he needed to preach the gospel fearlessly. . . . There is not even a hint that we are to pray against territorial spirits.” Tinker, “The Phantom Menace,” 80. Grudem cautiously states that it may be appropriate at times to briefly rebuke demons in the name of Jesus, but he falls far short of advocating strategic-level spiritual warfare. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 430.

¹⁵¹David Wells, “Prayer: Rebelling Against the Status Quo,” in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, 3rd ed., ed. Ralph Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1999), 143.

a corporate level.¹⁵² In Ephesians 6:10-20, Paul provides a biblical basis for corporate prayer. As Paul describes the church's stand against the principalities and powers, he uniformly directs his imperatives to the church as a whole. This includes Ephesians 6:18-20 where Paul commands the Ephesians to engage in prayer on his behalf. Additionally, it is worth noting that the other two references to the principalities and powers in the letter of Ephesians occur in the midst of Paul's own prayers (Eph 1:15, 3:10). It is also significant that the early church was a church that valued praying together (Acts 1:14, 2:42, 4:24, 12:5, 13:3, 20:36, 21:5).

Everett Ferguson argues that the early church understood the connection between corporate prayer and standing against the principalities and powers. He notes, "To continue in prayer is prominent in the instructions given to Christians concerning what will keep them from the deceitful demons and enable them to remain blameless."¹⁵³ More recently, Donald Whitney has emphasized the importance of corporate prayer, although not in the context of the church's stand against the principalities and powers. Whitney laments the fact that there is little "group prayer" in today's church, and he insists that the church has always been at its best when its people have knelt in prayer together.¹⁵⁴ He boldly declares, "If congregational or small group prayer isn't part of

¹⁵²Schemm's treatment on prayer in "The Agents of God" is helpful, but focused on the individual believer. Schemm, "The Agents of God," 336.

¹⁵³Everett Ferguson, *Demonology of the Early Christian World* (New York: Edwin Mellen, 1984), 128. Luther also spoke about the relationship between prayer and demonic opposition. He also emphasized the importance of believers praying together in the face of such opposition. Luther, *Table Talk*, in *Luther's Works* (1967): 54:78.

¹⁵⁴Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines within the Church: Participating Fully in the Body of Christ* (Chicago: Moody, 1996), 163, 168. Whitney refers to the

your Christian life, there's a problem. Private only prayer is not New Testament Christianity."¹⁵⁵

Lawless is another scholar who recognizes the importance of corporate prayer, and unlike Whitney he does so in the context of spiritual warfare. In *Disciplined Warriors*, Lawless insists, "God expects us to pray, and He expects us to grow healthy churches that focus on praying."¹⁵⁶ Lawless and Whitney are right to emphasize the importance of corporate prayer. North American churches must rediscover this practice as they attempt to stand against the principalities and powers.

Commit to Evangelizing the Lost

Sixth, churches must commit to evangelism. This commitment is vital because the god of this world, who is also the leader of the principalities and powers, has blinded the minds of unbelievers to the light of the gospel (2 Cor 4:4). Moreover, the scriptural foundation for this aspect of the church's stand against the principalities is strong. First, in Ephesians 6:10-20 Paul ended with a plea for prayer, and he specifically requested prayer for his evangelistic efforts (Eph 6:19-20). Second, when Paul described his evangelistic ministry in Colossians 1:24-2:5, he sandwiched the description with two references to the principalities and powers (Col 1:15-23, 2:6-20).¹⁵⁷ Third, Paul

1858 revival that began in New York as well as the Moravian missionary movement, and notes that both originated in corporate prayer meetings. *Ibid.*, 171, 72.

¹⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 174.

¹⁵⁶Lawless, *Disciplined Warriors*, 152.

¹⁵⁷Paul also ended his letter to the Colossians with this request, "Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on

described his own call to evangelism and missions as a call to minister in such a way that the Gentiles might “turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God.” (Acts 26:18)

In light of these passages, North American churches should understand that a commitment to evangelism is a commitment to spiritual warfare. Several evangelical scholars have come to this realization in recent years.¹⁵⁸ For example, Lawless stresses the warfare aspect of evangelism in *Discipled Warriors*. He writes, “The proclamation of the gospel is itself an act of warfare against Satan’s kingdom.”¹⁵⁹

Because evangelism is spiritual warfare, Arnold is right to suggest, “The church today must realize that it will face powerful demonic opposition whenever it mobilizes to make known the good news of Jesus Christ to its community. It is therefore imperative that the church responds to its evangelistic task through appropriate spiritual preparation and dependence upon the power of God.”¹⁶⁰ The dependence and preparation Arnold recommends will require North American churches to engage in evangelism that is marked by dependence on the Holy Spirit, faithfulness to the gospel message, commitment to corporate holiness, and desire to make disciples.¹⁶¹

account of which I am a prisoner – that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak” (Col 4:2-4).

¹⁵⁸See Arnold, “Giving the Devil His Due,” 19; Kraft, “Spiritual Conflict and the Mission of the Church,” 281; and Reid, *Strategic Level Spiritual Warfare*, 280-88.

¹⁵⁹Ibid., 74. Later in the same work, Lawless writes, “Evangelism is itself a spiritual battle, as we take the gospel of light into the kingdom of darkness.” Ibid., 83.

¹⁶⁰Arnold, *Powers of Darkness*, 193.

¹⁶¹Writing about the importance of depending on the Holy Spirit, Arnold

Most importantly, as they stand against the principalities and powers, North American churches must engage in evangelism on a corporate level.¹⁶² First, this approach to evangelism will require North American churches to emphasize the necessity of every believer engaging in evangelism. In writing about the persecuted church, Luke notes that ordinary believers driven from their homes went about speaking and preaching the Word (Acts 8:4, 11:19). Second, a corporate approach to evangelism will require North American churches to emphasize the connection between unity and evangelism. In his high priestly prayer, Jesus described the relationship between the unity of his people and the effectiveness of their witness: “The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and love them even as you loved me” (John 17:22-23).

Green insists that the early church understood the importance of every believer engaging in evangelism. In *Evangelism in the Early Church* he writes, “One of the most

insists, “The gospel must be proclaimed in the power of the Spirit because the church faces an enemy of supernatural proportions, who commands a host of angelic powers seeking to prevent the spread of the kingdom of Christ.” *Ibid.*, 135. Writing about the importance of being faithful to the gospel message, Lawless points out, “The Enemy is not alarmed when we preach good messages, tell comforting stories, and affirm each other – as long as we never tell the good news of Jesus, the Son of God.” Lawless, *Discipled Warriors*, 95. Arnold and Lawless both talk about the importance of corporate holiness with respect to evangelism. See Arnold, *Powers of Darkness*, 154; and, Lawless, “Spiritual Warfare and Missions,” 42. Lawless insightfully expresses the importance of making disciples: “Because ‘making disciples’ is the central aspect of fulfilling the Great Commission, it stands to reason that Satan would want to scheme against churches that seek to produce disciples.” Lawless, *Discipled Warriors*, 49-50.

¹⁶²The emphasis of corporate prayer is believers praying for each other and with each other. The emphases of corporate evangelism are every believer engaging in evangelism and every believer helping to maintain unity in a local congregation.

striking features in evangelism in the early days was the people who engaged in it. Communicating the faith was not regarded as the preserve of the very zealous or of the officially designated evangelist. Evangelism was the prerogative and the duty of every church member.”¹⁶³ Thus it seems the early church possessed Hiebert’s belief that “the church is a community called by God to invite people to enter the kingdom of God.”¹⁶⁴

Whitney points out, “It brings more glory to God when we bear witness of Him together than when we do so individually.”¹⁶⁵ He also notes, “Jesus said unity was essential for effective evangelism, and it takes a *group* of Christians to demonstrate unity.”¹⁶⁶ When the church engages in this kind of corporate witness and corporate unity, the principalities and powers will attack. As Lawless cautions, “The Enemy battles against the corporate church to keep the body of Christ from reaching out.”¹⁶⁷ Thus, as the churches engage in corporate evangelism, they must put on the armor of God.

Commit to Putting on the Armor

Seventh, churches must commit to putting on the armor of God. As has already been observed, when Paul admonished the church at Ephesus to take up the armor of God he repeatedly directed his instructions to the church as a whole, not to individual believers. Arnold explains,

¹⁶³Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, 380.

¹⁶⁴Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews*, 283.

¹⁶⁵Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines within the Church*, 91.

¹⁶⁶*Ibid.*, 92.

¹⁶⁷Lawless, *Discipled Warriors*, 85.

The spiritual warfare passage is often viewed in individual terms; that is, each individual Christian should pray and ask God for strength to do battle. Paul actually depicted the arming in corporate terms. The whole church is involved in the process of arming. In fact, each believer is responsible for arming other believers. All of Paul's admonitions in this passage are in the plural.¹⁶⁸

In describing Paul's admonitions in Ephesians 6:10-20, Lawless rightly identifies three commands: be strong, put on, and stand.¹⁶⁹ The most emphasized command is the four-fold admonition to "stand."¹⁷⁰ In order to obey this directive, churches must seek to "put on the whole armor of God" (Eph 6:11). Churches will be "unassailable before the enemy in Christ" only when they arm themselves in truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, faith, salvation, and the Word of God.¹⁷¹

For the purposes of this dissertation, it is not necessary to chronicle each piece of the armor Paul referred to in Ephesians 6:10-20.¹⁷² Instead, in discussing the church's

¹⁶⁸Arnold, *Powers of Darkness*, 159. Also see Arnold, "Giving the Devil His Due," 19. Tinker makes a similar observation: "The call in Ephesians 6:10 is for everyone *collectively* to put on the whole amour of God." Tinker, "The Phantom Menace," 79-80.

¹⁶⁹Lawless, *Discipled Warriors*, 53.

¹⁷⁰O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 463. Arnold, *Powers of Darkness*, 154.

¹⁷¹Schemm, "The Agents of God," 335. Keener describes Paul's allusion to an armed Roman soldier, and he explains how it relates to the "unassailable" nature of an armed church. He writes, "The image Paul's words would have evoked for most of his readers is that of a Roman soldier ready to do battle. Most adults who heard his letter read would have seen Roman soldiers and could relate this image to their spiritual warfare against the demonic powers at work in the world; God who fought for them had supplied them his armor. . . . In the day of battle, Roman soldiers were to stand their ground, not retreat. As long as they stood together on a flat, open field and did not break ranks, their legions were considered virtually invincible." Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, 553.

¹⁷²Numerous works are already available. The most helpful works dealing

stand against the principalities and powers, it is only necessary to note that Ephesians 6:10-20 is primarily concerned with the faith and lifestyle of God's people.¹⁷³ As Franklin and Lawless explain, "Wearing all the armor of God – indeed, spiritual warfare itself – involves daily lifestyle, not finding some quick fix or immediate solution to struggles in life. Putting on the armor means daily living a life pleasing and honoring to God and being a faithful disciple of Jesus in all areas of life."¹⁷⁴

Because Satan and the principalities and powers under his control are both real and powerful, and because Satan and the principalities and powers under his control have set themselves against God and against his people, it is imperative that North American churches be committed to putting on the whole armor of God. As Spurgeon warns, the battle is real, and the battle is dangerous:

Instrumental in the fall of humanity, Satan has acquired a very vast experience in opposing mankind. Having tempted the highest and the lowest, he knows exceedingly well what the strings of human action are and how to play upon them. He watches first of all our peculiar weaknesses. He looks us up and down and soon discovers our faults. Our weakness may be pride or lust or impatience or laziness, but we are assured that the eye of malice is quick to perceive and take advantage of a weakness. When the arch-spy finds a weak place in the wall of our castle, he takes care to plant his battering ram and begin his siege. You may conceal – even from your dearest friend – your weakness, but you will not conceal it from your worst enemy, who has lynx eyes and detects in a moment the joint in your armor.¹⁷⁵

with the armor of God have been written by Lawless. His works are so helpful because he consistently emphasizes the role of the entire church. See Lawless, *Discipled Warriors*; John Franklin and Chuck Lawless, *Spiritual Warfare*; Lawless, *Putting on the Armor*; Lawless, "Spiritual Warfare and Evangelism"; and Lawless, "Spiritual Warfare and Missions."

¹⁷³Garrett, *Angels and the New Spirituality*, 228.

¹⁷⁴Franklin and Lawless, *Spiritual Warfare*, 108.

¹⁷⁵Spurgeon, *Spiritual Warfare in a Believer's Life*, 56.

Summary

In summary, the novelty of this chapter is not found in innovative suggestions for the church. Such innovation is at the heart of two misguided approaches to the principalities and powers: the liberal Protestant approach and the spiritual warfare approach. Instead, the novelty of this chapter is the insistence that God has called the church, not only individual believers, to stand against the principalities and powers.

This insistence will most certainly sound strange to naturalistic, individualistic North Americans. Therefore, North American churches must emphasize the centrality of the kingdom of God and the importance of a biblical worldview. Additionally, in order to proclaim the wisdom of God to the principalities and powers, North American churches must be committed to being the church, teaching Christology, teaching soteriology, teaching demonology, praying corporately, evangelizing the lost, and putting on the armor of God.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

No dissertation about the principalities and powers would be complete without these oft quoted words from the pen of C. S. Lewis:

There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight.¹

The errors of disbelief and fascination can be found throughout church history. The church fathers and the Reformers largely avoided the errors of disbelief and fascination.² However, during the medieval period the church succumbed to fascination, and during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the church succumbed to disbelief.³

¹The *Screwtape Letters* was originally written in 1942. This quotation is taken from a more recent edition of the book. C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2001), ix. Paul Hiebert offers a similar warning in “The Flaw of the Excluded Middle.” He cautions against secularism and a Christianized form of animism. Paul G. Hiebert, “The Flaw of the Excluded Middle,” in *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 199-201.

²Chuck Lowe, *Territorial Spirits and World Evangelisation: A Biblical, Historical and Missiological Critique of Strategic-Level Spiritual Warfare* (Sevenoaks, Kent: OMF International, 1998), 85-103. Duane A. Garrett, *Angels and the New Spirituality* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1995), 58-101.

³For treatments of the medieval period, see Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1971); and David Keck, *Angels and Angelology in the Middle Ages* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998). For treatments of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see Clinton E. Arnold, *The Powers of Darkness: Principalities and Powers in Paul’s Letters* (Downers Grove, IL:

In order to follow the example of the church fathers and the Reformers, North American churches must understand the role of the church within the kingdom of God. Moreover, North American churches must recognize that worldview issues like materialism and individualism have a dramatic impact on one's interpretation of and response to the principalities and powers. Once these issues are addressed corporately, churches must stand against the principalities and powers by making the following commitments: commit to being the church, commit to teaching Christology, commit to teaching soteriology, commit to teaching demonology, commit to praying corporately, commit to evangelizing the lost, and commit to putting on the armor. Each of these commitments is derived from the biblical teaching about the principalities and powers. While it is ultimately individuals who make these commitments, each of these commitments should be made on a corporate level.

In making these commitments, North American churches should heed the warnings of Lewis and Hiebert. There is nothing new under the sun (Eccl 1:9), and the potential dangers of the past still threaten the church today. First, in a Western context, there will be some who find the issue of demons irrelevant to daily life.⁴ As a result, complacency is one potential danger. Second, in a culture that is increasingly fascinated with all things spiritual, there will be some who take the discussion of demons beyond biblical revelation.⁵ Therefore, fascination is another potential danger. Third, in a

InterVarsity, 1992), 167-82; and John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, *The Bible Speaks Today* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 1979), 267-75.

⁴Arnold, *Powers of Darkness*, 169.

⁵Garrett, *Angels and the New Spirituality*, 1-9.

culture that prizes rugged individualism, there will be some who try to stand against the principalities and powers alone.⁶ Consequently, yet another danger is the rejection of the biblical concept of an entire church standing against and proclaiming the wisdom of God to the principalities and powers (Eph 3:1-13).

Areas for Further Study

Much has been written about the principalities and powers, especially in the last half century. This dissertation has built on the work of conservative scholars by emphasized the necessity of the church standing against the principalities and powers and by offering a biblical proposal for such a stand. Nevertheless, several opportunities for further study exist.

It is remarkable that while the gospels refer consistently to “demons,” Paul preferred the terminology of “principalities and powers.” To be sure, Paul did mention demons in two places (1 Cor 10:20-21, 1 Tim 4:1); however, he made numerous references to the principalities and powers. Assuming the conservative approach is correct, the “principalities and powers” in Paul’s letters can be equated with the “demons” of the gospels since both refer to personal, evil, spiritual beings. With this understanding come several questions. Why did Paul prefer the terminology of “principalities and powers?” Why did the gospel writers prefer the word “demon?” Why did Paul not discuss possession and exorcism when he referred to the principalities and powers? Arnold has dealt briefly with these issues in *Powers of Darkness*.⁷ However,

⁶David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth, Or, Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 137-217.

⁷Arnold, *Powers of Darkness*, 183-84.

the church would be well served by a fuller treatment of these issues.

Another opportunity for further research pertains to a strategy for the church's stand against the principalities and powers that would be suited to a non-Western context. Several of the issues discussed in this dissertation, particularly Western materialism and individualism, would be foreign to a non-Western context. Moreover, while much has been written about worldview issues and spiritual warfare in non-Western contexts, little has focused specifically on the principalities and powers.⁸ Accordingly, churches outside a Western, North American context would be well served by further research in this area.

⁸In many of these works, the related issue of territorial spirits is addressed. Charles Lawless, "Spiritual Warfare and Evangelism," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 5 (2001): 28-44; idem, "Spiritual Warfare and Missions," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 9 (2005): 34-48; J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, "Pulling Down Strongholds: Evangelism, Principalities and Powers and the African Pentecostal Imagination," *International Review of Mission* 96 (2007): 306-17; Howard Brant, "Power Encounter: Toward an SIM Position," *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 10 (1993): 185-92; Daryl R. Climenhaga, "Contemporary Issues in Mission: A Tentative Assessment," *Didaskalia* 13 (2001): 25-37; Ali Emmanuel El-Shariff Abdallah, "Contemporary Issues in Mission: An African Perspective," *Didaskalia* 13 (2001): 11-23; Keith Ferdinando, "Screwtape Revisited: Demonology Western, African, and Biblical," in *The Unseen World: Christian Reflections on Angels, Demons and the Heavenly Realm*, ed. Anthony N. S. Lane, 103-32 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996); Roger S. Greenway, "Missions as Spiritual Warfare: An Historical Sketch of Recent Thinking," *Urban Mission* 13 (1995): 19-24; Paul G. Hiebert, "Spiritual Warfare and Worldview," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 24 (2000): 240-56; Charles R. A. Hoole, "Territorial Spirits: An Indian Perspective," *Stulos Theological Journal* 5 (1997): 59-68; Lowe, *Territorial Spirits and World Evangelisation*; Edward F. Murphy, "World View Clash: A Handbook for Spiritual Warfare," *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 10 (1993): 163-67; Stephen W. Pattermore, "Principalities and Powers in Urak Lawoi: Introduction, Contextualizing Key Terms," *Bible Translator* 45 (1994): 116-29; John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad: The Supremacy of God in Missions*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003); Michael Pocock, Gailyn van Rheenen, and Douglas McConnell, *The Changing Face of World Missions: Engaging Contemporary Issues and Trends* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005); Vern S. Poythress, "Territorial Spirits: Some Biblical Perspectives," *Urban Mission* 13 (1995): 37-49; and Mike Wakely, "A Critical Look at a New 'Key' to Evangelization," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 31 (1995): 152-62.

A third opportunity for further study relates to the health and growth of North American churches. In addition to emphasizing the kingdom of God and addressing worldview issues, this dissertation encouraged North American churches to make seven commitments in order to stand effectively against the principalities and powers. It would be fascinating to determine whether or not churches that made these seven commitments experience greater health or increased growth. Such a study would be both fascinating and profitable because the strategy proposed in this dissertation is intended to encourage the health and growth of churches so that the manifold wisdom of God might be more fully proclaimed to the principalities and powers.

APPENDIX

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPLEMENTING THE PROPOSED STRATEGY IN A LOCAL CHURCH

The following outline is intended to provide specific and practical suggestions for the implementation of the seven commitments discussed in chapter 5. Additionally, suggestions for dealing with worldview issues are included. The purpose of each commitment is explained, settings where the commitment could be put into action are proposed, useful resources are listed, and pertinent biblical texts are noted.

Commit to Being the Church

1. Purpose: to help Christians understand and pursue the biblical characteristics and purposes of the church
2. Settings: this commitment should first be taught to church staff, teachers, and leaders; if a church has a new members class this commitment should be discussed; other possible settings include a Sunday morning sermon series, small groups and/or Sunday school, and discipleship for new Christians
3. Resources: J. L. Dagg, *Manual of Church Order*; Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*; Joshua Harris, *Stop Dating the Church*; Chuck Lawless, *Discipled Warriors*; Chuck Lawless, *Membership Matters*; Thom Rainer and Chuck Lawless, *Eating the Elephant*
4. Biblical Texts: Matthew 16:13-20, 18:15-20, 28:18-20, John 17:1-26, the book of Acts, Ephesians 3:1-13, Revelation 2-3

Commit to Teaching Christology

1. Purpose: to help Christians understand and embrace the person of Christ
2. Settings: this doctrine should be taught to candidates for baptism and new Christians; if a church has a new members class this doctrine should be discussed; workers and

volunteers for evangelistic ministries should receive training in this area; other possible settings include a Sunday morning sermon series, small groups and/or Sunday school, and Vacation Bible School

3. Resources: James Montgomery Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith*; Mark Driscoll and Gerry Breshears, *Vintage Jesus*; Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*; Donald Macleod, *The Person of Christ*; R. C. Sproul, *The Glory of Christ*; Bruce Ware, *Father, Son and Holy Spirit*
4. Biblical Texts: John 1:1-18, Philippians 2:1-10, Colossians 1:15-20, Hebrews 1:1-4

Commit to Teaching Soteriology

1. Purpose: to help Christians understand and embrace the work of Christ
2. Settings: this doctrine should be taught to candidates for baptism and new Christians; if a church has a new members class this doctrine should be discussed; workers and volunteers for evangelistic ministries should receive training in this area; other possible settings include a Sunday morning sermon series, small groups and/or Sunday school, and Vacation Bible School
3. Resources: Bruce Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*; Leon Morris, *The Atonement*; John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*; J. I. Packer and Mark Dever, *In My Place Condemned He Stood*; R. C. Sproul, *The Truth of the Cross*; John Stott, *The Cross of Christ*
4. Biblical Texts: Romans 8:26-29, 1 Corinthians 15:1-49, Ephesians 1:3-23, Colossians 2:6-15, Hebrews 9:1-10:18

Commit to Teaching Demonology

1. Purpose: to help Christians understand and stand against the principalities and powers
2. Settings: this doctrine could be taught at a special church-wide conference; individuals participating in foreign mission trips should receive training in this area; other possible settings include a Sunday morning sermon series as well as small groups and/or Sunday school
3. Resources: Clinton Arnold, *Powers of Darkness*; Clinton Arnold, *Three Crucial Questions about Spiritual Warfare*; Duane Garrett, *Angels and the New Spirituality*; Robert Lightner, *Angels, Satan, and Demons*; Chuck Lowe, *Territorial Spirits and World Evangelisation*; Sydney Page, *Powers of Evil*
4. Biblical Texts: Romans 8:31-39, 1 Corinthians 10:14-22, 15:20-28, Ephesians 6:10-20, Colossians 2:8-20, 1 Timothy 4:1, 1 Peter 3:18-22, Jude 5-13

Commit to Praying Corporately

1. Purpose: to encourage Christians to pray for the church and with the church
2. Settings: this commitment should first be taught to church staff, teachers, and leaders; if a church has a new members class this commitment should be discussed; other possible settings include a Sunday morning sermon series, small groups and/or Sunday school, and discipleship for new Christians
3. Resources: Patrick Johnstone and Jason Mandryk, *Operation World*; Chuck Lawless, *Discipled Warriors*; Donald Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*; Donald Whitney, *Simplify Your Spiritual Life*; Donald Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines within the Church*
4. Biblical Texts: Matthew 6:5-15, Acts 4:23-31, Ephesians 6:18-20

Commit to Evangelizing the Lost

1. Purpose: to encourage Christians to share the gospel and make disciples
2. Settings: this commitment should first be taught to church staff, teachers, and leaders; if a church has a new members class this commitment should be discussed; individuals serving in evangelistic ministries and individuals participating in mission trips should receive training in this area; other possible settings include a Sunday morning sermon series, small groups and/or Sunday school, and discipleship for new Christians
3. Resources: Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*; Mark Dever, *The Gospel and Personal Evangelism*; Will Metzger, *Tell the Truth*; J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*; John Piper, *God is the Gospel*; John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad*
4. Biblical Texts: Matthew 28:18-20, Acts 1:8, Ephesians 6:10-20

Commit to Putting on the Armor

1. Purpose: to equip Christians to put on the armor of God with the help of the church
2. Settings: this commitment should first be taught to church staff, teachers, and leaders; this candidates for baptism and new Christians should receive training in this area; other possible settings include a Sunday morning sermon series, small groups and/or Sunday school, and accountability groups
3. Resources: John Franklin and Chuck Lawless, *Spiritual Warfare*; William Gurnall, *The Christian in Complete Armour*; Chuck Lawless, *Discipled Warriors*; Chuck

Lawless, *Putting on the Armor*; C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*; Charles Spurgeon, *Spiritual Warfare in a Believer's Life*

4. Biblical Texts: Ephesians 6:10-20

Dealing with Worldview Issues

1. Purpose: to enable Christians to recognize their own worldview and interact with other worldviews
2. Settings: this commitment should first be taught to church staff, teachers, and leaders; high school students and college students should receive training in this area; mission trip participants should receive training in this area; this issue could be taught at a special church-wide conference; other possible settings include a Sunday morning sermon series, as well as small groups and/or Sunday school
3. Resources: C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*; Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth*; Francis Schaeffer, *Trilogy*; James Sire, *The Universe Next Door*; David Wells, *Above All Earthly Powers*; David Wells, *No Place for Truth*
4. Biblical Texts: Matthew 22:24-40, Romans 12:1

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ABSTRACT

PRINCIPALITIES AND POWERS: A HISTORICAL AND BIBLICAL STUDY WITH STRATEGIC APPLICATION IN NORTH AMERICAN CHURCHES

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This dissertation provides a historical and biblical study of the principalities and powers. It also offers strategic application for North American churches. Chapter 1 introduces the issue of the principalities and powers. Three major contemporary approaches to the principalities and powers are presented, and the impact of worldview is discussed.

Chapter 2 offers a historical perspective on the principalities and powers. The following four historical periods are considered: the early church (A.D. 100-500), the medieval period (A.D. 500-1500), the Reformation (A.D. 1500-1800), and the nineteenth and twentieth century (A.D. 1800-Present). For each period considered, attention is given to the predominant interpretation of the principalities and powers as well as the predominant proposed response to the principalities and powers.

Chapter 3 presents an analysis of the three major contemporary approaches to the principalities and powers. The primary spokesmen for these approaches are Walter Wink, C. Peter Wagner, and Clinton Arnold. Each of the three contemporary approaches is analyzed in the areas of worldview assumptions, interpretation of the principalities and

powers, proposed response of the church, and historical justification.

Chapter 4 offers a biblical perspective on the principalities and powers. First, the relevant passages are interpreted and discussed. Second, the principalities and powers are discussed systematically by considering the biblical teaching about their creation, their fall, their initial defeat, their struggle, and their final defeat.

Chapter 5 argues that standing against the principalities and powers is a corporate response. First, the relationship between the kingdom of God and the church is explained. Second, the importance of worldview is again discussed. Finally, a specific strategy is offered for the church's stand against the principalities and powers. A short concluding chapter summarizes the work and offers suggestions for further study.

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