



## THE GOSPEL AS THE TRUE ARMOR OF GOD DELIVERANCE FROM DEMONS AS TRANSFER OF DOMINION

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*For He 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. (Colossians 1:13, 14)*

*We know that no one who is born of God sins; but He who was born of God keeps him and the evil one does not touch him. We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one. (1John 5:18, 19)*

It is not where demons are in relationship to us; it is where we are in relationship to Christ—that is the worldview of the Biblical writers. Those who have believed the gospel are transferred from one spiritual domain to another. But while we physically reside in this world, we are surrounded by spiritual forces of darkness. **My thesis is this—the gospel is the armor of God in which we must stand.**

Those who do not stand in the gospel, though they claim to believe it, retreat to paganism where they enlist shamans to mediate between them and the hostile powers. “Believers” who retreat to the pagan worldview consistently create a class of “Christian” shamans. In so doing they leave their Christian base and retreat from the gospel itself.<sup>1</sup>

### Transfer from Darkness to Light Through the Gospel

Those who have been transferred from the dominion of darkness through the gospel, by grace through faith, have no reason to long for the days they spent as pagans, seeking help from shamans to ward off bad fate. We do not need secret information beyond scripture, incantations, magical practices, spiritual directors, mysticism, or anything beyond what Christ has done through the

gospel, once for all:

*“For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God” (1Peter 3:18a)*

The magical practices and syncretistic folk religion of Ephesus were lucrative and deemed necessary by those who were confronted by the gospel, as narrated by Luke in Acts 19:18-38. Many who were converted repented of their magic practices:

*Many also of those who had believed kept coming, confessing and disclosing their practices. And many of those who practiced magic brought their books together and began burning them in the sight of everyone; and they counted up the price of them and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. So the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing. (Acts 19:18-20)*

Why would any who were thus converted and delivered see a need for a Christianized version of magic? Why would those who believe the gospel today seek out counselors who point to their sinful past (requiring special revelation to know and interpret it) rather

than to the sufficiency of Christ? Even those who understand the background and issues that help us properly interpret Ephesians and Colossians often point us in wrong directions.

For example, Clinton E. Arnold, whose work continues to help us understand the meaning and background of both epistles, is endorsed by those we have written about and warned against.<sup>2</sup> For example, Arnold’s book *Power and Magic – The Concept of Power in Ephesians*<sup>3</sup> was endorsed on the back cover by C. Peter Wagner, Neil T. Anderson, John Wimber, and Ed Silvano. The problem, in my opinion, is to leave the door open to wrong thinking and practice due to a lack of ability to fully see the implications of the gospel. Those in Christ need to stand in the gospel as they preach the gospel and pray for others who do. God commands us to stand, not to retreat to extra-biblical information, whatever it might be. The armor of God in which we stand is the gospel. Period. Later in this article we will deal with wrong implications and applications.

It is important to remember that Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus to remind them that God had rescued them from the power (lit. “authority”) of the prince (lit. “ruler”) of darkness:

*And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ*

(by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, (Ephesians 2:1-6)

Those who were spiritually “dead” were under the authority of the ruler of spiritual wickedness and lived accordingly. God made them alive through the gospel and they are now seated with Christ. Paul uses two Hebraic expressions (“sons of disobedience” and “children of wrath”) to emphasize the fact that being under the power of spiritual wickedness means that they were in rebellion against God’s law and rightly under His wrath. One great, gracious, and merciful act of salvation changed everything. They were rescued from Satan, sin, and more importantly God’s wrath and are now in a different domain. To resort to the secrets of the shamans would be tantamount to apostasy, as we shall see.

#### HELLENISTIC MAGIC IN EPHEBUS – THE BACKGROUND TO EPHESIANS

In Ephesus practitioners used magic to gain power and wealth through manipulation of the spirit realm. Arnold states, “Ephesians strongly emphasizes the theme of power; the whole concern of Hellenistic magic was how to obtain access to and use supernatural power, a power gained by manipulating the spirit world” (Arnold: 39). One would think that since those in Ephesus who had been converted through the gospel and burned their valuable works of magic arts—they would be happy to be done with magic. However, they needed assurance (as did those in Colossae) that Christ was sufficient for all things pertaining to life in this wicked world. Arnold cites the work of Preisendanz who published some extant magical papyri:

Interestingly, two of these [Christianized magical papyri] depict Artemis as an intruding demon . . . the text begins with adjuration that the ‘scorpion Artemis’ would be bound. It con-

tinues with the aim that the household be protected from all evil and for the ‘aerial spirits.’ The text invokes the aid of ‘Mary (who gave birth to Christ)’ together with Sabaoth, Solomon, and a number of other magical names. Most of these papyri give recipes for constructing amulets to protect the wearer from evil spirits. (Arnold: 38).

Many converted from paganism have a strong temptation to “Christianize” pagan practices because they fear bad outcomes (in this life) if they do not. Many who begin by faith want to proceed on some other basis than the finished work of Christ. Arnold correctly concludes:

Believers in these young Christian communities lived in a milieu characterized by flourishing magical practices, the renowned Artemis cult, and a variety of other Phrygian mysteries and astrological beliefs. Yet a single common feature may be discerned among all the religious diversity in western Asia Minor: people had an extraordinary fear of the hostile spiritual “powers.” Through their practices and rituals . . . local religion and magic claimed to offer relief from this oppressive fear, and even promised means of control over the dreaded demonic realm. Although many of the new Christians in this area forsook their magical practices and burned their magical papyri, as Luke records, a good number would have been tempted to conflate their magical beliefs with Christianity. (Arnold: 167)

The Bible asserts that wicked spiritual powers are real. It also asserts that those who have been apprehended by Christ through the gospel have been transferred into Christ’s kingdom and are not under these demonic forces.

Luke narrated the event that caused the people in Ephesus to forsake their

practices at great personal cost:

*But also some of the Jewish exorcists, who went from place to place, attempted to name over those who had the evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, “I adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preaches.” Seven sons of one Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. And the evil spirit answered and said to them, “I recognize Jesus, and I know about Paul, but who are you?” And the man, in whom was the evil spirit, leaped on them and subdued all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. (Acts 19:13-16)*

This explains what happened in Acts 19:18-20 cited earlier. They rejected their magic arts and artifacts.

The point of Ephesians is that though these powers are aligned against us, we are no longer under their authority and domain. We need to stand in the gospel and not retreat to the shamans and their secret knowledge. The sad reality today is that spiritual warfare teachings and teachers use Ephesians 6:10-20 to unwittingly point people away from the gospel to techniques to “wrestle” spirits and “put on” pieces of armor as if Paul taught incantations and techniques akin to the pagan magical practices. Some of those who correctly understand the background to Paul’s writing in Ephesians apparently think we need to do something besides stand in the gospel. Instead they teach Christianized shamanism to help people avoid unhappy situations in this life.

#### EPHESIANS – AUTHORIAL INTENT

To understand Ephesians, we need to understand Paul’s purpose (intent) in writing the epistle. Arnold correctly identifies the purpose of what is affirmed in Ephesians 1:

In contrast to the experience of Mystery “enlightenment,” the author of Ephesians stresses an enlightenment of the innermost

being of man brought about by the Spirit of God and directed toward the true knowledge of God. . . . The writer wants his readers to be fully assured that he who has made these promises has sufficient power and ability to carry them out. . . . These affirmations about a secure destiny would prove particularly comforting to believers living in a milieu where people experienced great anxiety about their “fate” – a fate thought to have been determined by the stars and cosmic “powers” (Arnold: 77).

The fear of the influence of evil forces is a necessary and important background to understand Ephesians and Colossians, both of which were written to churches in Asia Minor.

Ephesians also emphasizes the doctrine of election. Why? If the Ephesian Christians were chosen by God, their status did not depend on fate, but the kind intention of God’s will in Christ. Arnold addresses this as well:

Christians who before their conversion received false comfort from Artemis by viewing the zodiacal signs so prominently depicted on her cultic image and assuming that their goddess held sway over the “powers” controlling fate would now experience true and profound comfort knowing that they had been chosen by God before the foundation of the world. There would be no reason for these converts to consult either Artemis or any other pagan deity for oracular advice. Their fate does not rest in the whims of hostile spiritual “powers.” Their future is secure and blessed by virtue of their election in Christ. (Arnold: 128, 129)

The importance of the Holy Spirit-inspired author’s intent (in this case Paul’s) is a key foundation for hermeneutics.<sup>4</sup> Paul wrote to comfort his readers that they were secure in

Christ and to exhort them to stand (Ephesians 6:11, 14). They have the gospel; the mystery religions and their shamans have nothing to offer.

### We are Christ’s Inheritance

A key translation issue must be addressed before the issue of transfer of dominion can be understood in proper Biblical context. The issue arises in Ephesians 1:11. Here the NASB is not the best translation and misses the point. However, the HCSB is much better: *In Him we were also made His inheritance, predestined according to the purpose of the One who works out everything in agreement with the decision of His will, (Ephesians 1:11 HCSB)*. It is true that we do have an inheritance (NASB) but the point here is that we are Christ’s inheritance as was promised to Him by the Father:

*“I will surely tell of the decree of the Lord: He said to Me, ‘You are My Son, Today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, And the very ends of the earth as Your possession.’” (Psalm 2:7, 8)*

This passage from Psalm 2 is identified as Messianic in several NT passages including Acts 13:33 and Hebrews 1:5. Those who believe are part of God’s inheritance promised to the Son. We were previously under the hostile powers (evil spirit beings) but now are under Christ who has all authority and power.

F. F. Bruce offers this translation of **Ephesians 1:11**: *“It was in Christ, too, that we were claimed by God as his portion, having been foreordained according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will.”* Bruce comments:

The verb translated “we were claimed . . . as his portion” has been rendered more freely in a number of recent versions. In the RSV it is taken together with the following participle and rendered comprehensively “we . . . have been destined and appointed.” The NEB less freely, renders it

“we have been given our share in the heritage.” The NIV renders it “we were . . . chosen.” But we are dealing with a passive form of the verb which means “appoint by lot,” “allot,” “assign,” and the passive sense should be brought out unless there is good reason to the contrary. The reason for the rendering “we were claimed by God as his portion” (rather than “we were assigned our portion”) is that it is in keeping with OT precedent. In the Song of Moses (Deut. 32:8–9) the nations of the world are assigned to various angelic beings (“the sons of God”), but Yahweh retains Israel as his personal possession: *“for the LORD’s portion is his people, Jacob his allotted heritage.”* So here, believers in Christ are God’s chosen people, claimed by him as his portion or heritage. That this is the sense is confirmed by the reference in v. 18 to “the glorious wealth of his inheritance in the saints.”<sup>5</sup>

Paul’s intent in Ephesians is to assure the saints that God has delivered them from the hostile powers that are assigned over the pagans and made them His own inheritance. God the Father promised God the Son that He would give Him the nations as His inheritance. The Son is not about to lose His inheritance to the principalities and powers (evil spiritual forces) that are assigned to the pagans. We are safe. F. F. Bruce mentioned Ephesians 1:18 as well. Paul wrote, *“I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints” (Ephesians 1:18)*.

Before discussing the important matter of “enlightenment,” which was also offered by the false religions of Asia Minor, we need to explain the phrase “His inheritance in the saints” which has always seemed enigmatic to me. With the idea that we are His inheritance, we can begin to make sense of “in the saints.” The dative case in the

Greek is likely a “dative of sphere” which means that the point of Paul’s prayer is that we are in the sphere of God’s inheritance, part of His lot. Thus the translation “among the saints” (HCSB; NRSV) brings out idea of the sphere of God’s inheritance. A. T. Lincoln comments: “Here his inheritance involves the people of God from both Jews and Gentiles, for it is [*en tois agiois*], ‘among the saints.’”<sup>6</sup>

We, those who “have been enlightened” (or “having been enlightened” – perfect, passive, participle; i.e. by God), are the subject of Paul’s prayer that we realize the many implications of our mutual salvation (Ephesians 1:16 -18). One of those implications is that we are His inheritance, thus no longer under the spiritual powers of darkness as we would be if we were still in darkness.

According to the best reading of Deuteronomy 32:8, 9, the nations are under the “sons of God” (i.e. fallen angels) while God’s people are directly under Yahweh. Bruce mentioned the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32:8, 9 when he commented on Ephesians 1:11 (see above). Arnold also referred to Deuteronomy 32:9 to show that the saints are “God’s inheritance” (Arnold: 77).

This idea is shown in the ESV translation: “*When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when he divided mankind, he fixed the borders of the peoples according to the number of the sons of God. But the Lord’s portion is his people, Jacob his allotted heritage*” (Deuteronomy 32:8, 9 ESV).

That the “sons of God” (also called “the host of heaven”) include wicked spirit beings can be seen in such passages as Job 1:6 and 1 Kings 22:19 – 22). Michael S. Heiser of Logos Bible software has published extensive research on this.<sup>7</sup>

When Stephen indicted the Sanhedrin (Jewish leadership council) of rebellion against God, he claimed that when Israel rebelled against Yahweh, she was put under the “host of heaven”: “*But God turned away and delivered them up to serve the host of heav-*

*en*” (Acts 7:42a). God’s inheritance are those, Jew and Gentile, who have been transferred *from* the domain of spirits of darkness who rule over the nations *to* the kingdom of His beloved Son (Colossians 1:13). The rest are under the powers of darkness. Those to whom Stephen preached in Acts 7 realized this implication and became enraged:

*When they heard these things, they were enraged in their hearts and gnashed their teeth at him. But Stephen, filled by the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven. He saw God’s glory, with Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and he said, “Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!” Then they screamed at the top of their voices, covered their ears, and together rushed against him. They threw him out of the city and began to stone him. And the witnesses laid their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul. They were stoning Stephen as he called out: “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!” Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not charge them with this sin!” And saying this, he fell asleep. Saul agreed with putting him to death. (Acts 7:54-8:1 HCSB)<sup>8</sup>*

Here “Saul,” whose conversion is narrated in Acts 9, witnessed Stephen’s claim. It was this Saul, now known as Paul, who preached in Ephesus and wrote the Epistle to the Ephesians. Paul no longer served the host of heaven after he came to Christ! Neither did the Christians in Ephesus. They had: believed the gospel, rejected Artemis, caused a serious upheaval, and now were assured by the apostle that they were God’s inheritance. This is important because it underscores the concept of deliverance *from* evil spirits as transfer of dominion, from that of Satan, darkness, evil spiritual forces, principalities and powers—to God. The gospel is the means that God uses to accomplish this transfer of dominion. The armor of God that enables us to stand (and not

retreat to the shamans) is the gospel. All Jews and Gentiles who have believed the gospel are God’s inheritance. Those who continue to reject the gospel and live in darkness are under the spiritual forces of darkness. They resort to the shamans of the mystery religions. In Ephesus they served Artemis. Paul prayed that those who had been converted through the gospel would realize the magnitude of their new situation, using terms that reinforced the truth of their new status in Christ.

### HAVING BEEN ENLIGHTENED

In Ephesians 1:8 Paul also brings up the important term “enlightened.” This term was familiar to the Christians in Ephesus because it came from the mystery religions of Asia Minor. Many pagans, confronted by Paul’s preaching of the gospel in Ephesus, presumed they had found “enlightenment” through mystery initiation rites:

It is of special significance, however, to note that the word “enlightened” (*pho\_tizo\_*) was used in the Mystery Religions in a technical sense for the rite of initiation. . . . In contrast to the experience of Mystery “enlightenment,” the author of Ephesians stresses an enlightenment of the innermost being of man brought about by the Spirit of God and directed toward the true knowledge of God. (Arnold: 76, 77)

Many pagan religions offered false “enlightenment” so the Bible’s frequent use of the terms “darkness” and “light” to describe conversion is of great interest. For example, consider Paul’s description (spoken when on trial before King Agrippa) of his calling at his conversion as given to him by the Lord Himself:

*“to open their [Gentile] eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive*

*forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me” (Acts 26:18).*

Here we have the concepts of transfer of dominion (“authority” in the Greek) inheritance (lit. “lot”) combined with the idea of turning to God in faith—which means freedom from darkness and transfer to true light (conversion as the true enlightenment). The Gentiles who were under the spiritual powers of darkness find “release from sins” (i.e. they no longer abide under the wrath of God), and become part of the redeemed people of God who are people whose “lot” is to be part of God’s own people who are now ruled by God. The “enlightenment” of the pagans is in reality darkness, hopelessness, and being ruled by Satan and his minions.

David Peterson correctly sees grammatical links to the Servant of Yahweh in Paul’s conversion:

In various ways, Paul’s call and commission is likened to that of great canonical prophets in the exilic period, but the Isaianic allusions in vv. 16–18 are particularly significant. Luke makes it clear that Jesus fulfills the Servant’s [Peterson previously referenced Isaiah 42:6-7, 16 and Isaiah 49:6] role (cf. Lk. 4:18–19; 22:37; Acts 3:13–15, 26), but shares aspects of that role with his chosen representatives (cf. Acts 1:8; 13:46–47). So what is said in Acts 26:16–18 . . . thus confirms Paul’s key role in the divine plan, which began to be fulfilled with the coming of John the Baptist and then Jesus, to bring salvation to Israel and to the Gentiles.<sup>9</sup>

Peterson makes an important point about Isaiah which is only strengthened by seeing the verbal links to Isaiah 49:6.

The Servant of Yahweh (Messiah) in Isaiah was prophesied to be the One who would bring “light” to the Gentiles:

*He says, “It is too small a thing that*

*You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also make You a light of the nations So that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth.” (Isaiah 49:6)*

It is noteworthy that Isaiah 49:6 in the LXX (Septuagint) uses the same term for “turn” (*epistrepsai* – aorist, active infinitive) that Luke uses in his account of Paul’s address before Agrippa in Acts 26:18. The allusion to Isaiah is important. Those who repent (i.e. “turn”) are truly enlightened while those who reject Messiah are in darkness and spiritual bondage no matter what so-called enlightenment they thought they gained through syncretistic magic such as was found in Ephesus.

Spiritual enlightenment is *not* found in compromised Judaism or pagan mystery religions but *only* through the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is consistently taught in the New Testament. Here are some passages that refer to this truth:

*“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy” (1Peter 2:9, 10).*

*“For you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light” (Ephesians 5:8)*

*“And the light shines on in the darkness, but the darkness has not mastered it.” (John 1:5 NET)<sup>10</sup>*

*“This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil” (John 3:19).*

*“I have come as Light into the world, so that everyone who believes in Me will not remain in darkness” (John 12:46).*

## STAND FIRM!

Given the prevalence of the theme of darkness and light that characterize two spiritual authorities, it becomes clear that the armor of God mentioned in Ephesians 6 and the imperative to stand, must be understood in the context of the change of dominion from the hostile powers of darkness to that of God. The implications for Christians include these Biblical facts: (1) we are God’s inheritance in Christ; (2) we have enlightenment; (3) we are secure from the hostile powers; (4) the magical practices of the pagans and their shamans are shameful and forbidden (not to mention powerless); (5) our status in Christ is secure; (6) we need not fear bad fate; (7) ethical living for Christians is such that we stand as those in light; (8) This in sharp contrast to the pagans who live out the shameful practices of darkness.

In this context, Paul writes:

*Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the full armor of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand firm therefore. . . (Ephesians 6:11 – 14a)*

The spiritual powers of darkness are real, and are not “flesh and blood.” So Paul tells believers to stand. The Greek term for “full armor” can be transliterated as “panoply.” It denotes the armor a Roman soldier would wear when fully equipped for battle. It is used figuratively in the sense that “put on” is what a literal foot-soldier would do; but for the Christian the pieces of armor are aspects of the gospel in which they stand. The purpose of the armor is to empower (Greek *dunamai*) believers to stand against the “schemes” (Greek

*methodeia*) of the devil. It is noteworthy that the same word is used in Ephesians 4:14 for the schemes of men who teach false doctrine. False teachers on the scene of history use nefarious means to spread the schemes of the devil.<sup>11</sup>

Pagan shamans sought to manipulate the spiritual powers of darkness through magical practices. These demonic powers are real and once held the Christians of Asia Minor under their sway. They (believers) were delivered by the power of God through the gospel which resulted in their transfer from the authority of darkness to that of light. As God's own inheritance, they are now seated with Christ. But false teachers, still held in the bonds of darkness, presented themselves as enlightened ones. Believers (then and now) must realize that the armor (panoply) of God is the gospel, which means they must stand and not retreat. Many false teachers in the church are a new "Christianized" version of pagan shamans.

The key imperative in Ephesians 6 is *stand!* The term for "stand" in the Greek is used four times in Ephesians 6:11-14a. The first three usages are in the aorist, active, infinitive; with the imperative (command) found at the beginning of verse 14. Clinton Arnold states, "The whole of vv. 14-20, then, is dependent on the main thought of v. 14—'stand!' all other thoughts are subservient to this ultimate aim. The divine armor and power are provided for the attainment of this goal." (Arnold: 106). A. T. Lincoln offers the following astute comments on the command to stand:

The exhortation about the need to "stand" is reiterated (vv 11, 13c and also "to withstand" in v 13b), but this time it takes the form of an imperative. The verb has the same force throughout, suggesting the stance of the soldier in combat, standing firm, resisting, and prevailing against the enemy. It is clearly a vital notion for the writer, and it is worth noting that it was also important in Paul's writings. 1 Thess. 3:8 speaks of standing fast

in the Lord, while 2 Thess. 2:15 exhorts "stand firm" and Gal 5:1 "stand fast therefore." In 1 Corinthians Paul speaks of some who think they stand needing to take heed lest they fall (10:12) and of the gospel in which the Corinthians stand (15:1), and exhorts them to stand firm in their faith (16:13; cf. also 2 Cor. 1:24).<sup>12</sup>

We must stand in the gospel, as God's inheritance, promised to the Son and secured by God's work of grace.

The glaring question that is rarely asked is—what would constitute failure to stand? Our claim is that any shamanistic, spiritual warfare teaching brought into the church is retreat from the gospel. The opposite of standing one's ground as those who have been transferred from Satan's domain (darkness) to God's (light), is retreat to the shamans. Christianized shamanism claims to take the existence of wicked spiritual powers as real and serious, all the while promoting the pagan worldview which Paul rebukes in Ephesians and Colossians.

### THE ARMOR OF GOD

The "panoply" of God and the individual pieces thereof, are gospel issues: truth, righteousness, gospel of peace, faith, salvation, and the word of God which is Holy Spirit inspired. There is nothing here that would lead us to the shamanistic conclusions to which most spiritual warfare practitioners come. God uses the gospel to deliver people from the domain of darkness into that of His beloved Son (Colossians 1:13). Those who are His inheritance are ruled by God directly and are no longer subject to the hostile, spiritual powers. As such, they need to stand their ground, i.e. not retreat to the pagan worldview. The armor itself is the gospel in its glorious fullness.

It is important to correctly identify the paragraph break in Ephesians 6:18 to show that prayer is *not* part of the armor, but prayer *is* for the preservation of the saints and boldness to proclaim

the gospel so that others will be transferred from the domain of spiritual darkness into the domain of God's light. The armor of God is described in Ephesians 6:14b-17. The NASB puts the paragraph break at verse 18 and this is correct. The HCSB is laid out nicely, showing the armor of God section indented from the left as 6:14b-17. Those who leave the door open for Christian shamanism generally include Ephesians 6:18-20 as part of the armor of God section. Clinton Arnold does this (whether or not he realizes the mischief this leads to).

Arnold rightly sees the emphasis that Paul places on the gospel:

The motif of the gospel is picked up again in the sixth spiritual weapon . . . given by the Spirit (v. 17). There should be no doubt that *re\_ma* here refers to the gospel. . . The gospel thus proves to be a key implement in the church's resistance against the kingdom of the devil . . . Many of the concepts overlap as in the three-fold mention of the gospel (v. 14 as "truth"; v. 15, "the gospel"; and v. 17, "the word of God"). (Arnold: 111)

But the conclusions that Arnold comes to (that the issue is power and prayer is part of the armor) do not logically follow from the text. Arnold discusses prayer as "armor":

The author appears to give prayer a more prominent place than merely the seventh among a list of spiritual weapons. Prayer here seems to serve as a partial basis for the deployment of the other arms. . . . This emphasis on prayer is extended even further when in v.19 the author requests prayer for himself to the end that he himself might have an effective use of one of the spiritual weapons, i.e. the gospel. (Arnold: 112)

Thus he leaves the door open for such false teachers as Ed Silvano, Neil T.

Anderson, and C. Peter Wagner to endorse Arnold's book and teach ideas that cannot be supported by Scripture. Their teachings have been critiqued in a number of past issues of *CIC*.

Surely prayer for boldness to proclaim the gospel (Ephesians 6:19, 20) does not support the idea that principalities and powers over cities or nations must be verbally bound for evangelism to succeed as taught by Wagner, Silvano and others. Prayer does not mean having checklists of past sins and possible causes for demonic bondage that should be filled out as taught by Neil T. Anderson. Anderson even tells Christians to pray for God to remind them of past sins and provides prescribed prayers of renunciation to be repeated!<sup>13</sup> Thus prayer, wrongly understood, out of context, as if it were "armor" when in fact it is prayer to God for boldness to preach the gospel, becomes Christianized paganism. Rather than praying to God, Christians are led to the equivalent of incantations. We need to remember what Christ has done for us, once for all, not remember sins from the past. What happened to the sufficiency of Christ?

On the contrary, the panoply of God that Paul teaches is found in verses 14b – 17. Bruce makes an important point that there are OT allusions in this section that show God as the one with armor:

"Stand therefore," comes the command; and then the panoply of God is described in detail, each piece of armor being identified with some divine gift or virtue. There are literary antecedents for this metaphorical use of armor. In Isa. 59:17 the God of Israel, displeased because no one has shown himself willing to stand up for justice, arms himself for the defense of the cause of truth . . . Truth is to be their belt or girdle (lit., "having girt your loins with truth"); this may be an echo of Isa. 11:5, where it is said of the coming "shoot from the stump of Jesse" that "righteousness shall be the girdle of his

waist, and faithfulness (LXX "truth") the girdle of his loins." Here truth remains the girdle but righteousness becomes the breastplate, as in Isa. 59:17. . . The designation of the military footwear (the *caligae*, if we use the Roman term) as "the preparation of the gospel of peace" is patently borrowed from Isa. 52:7: "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good tidings, who publishes peace" . . . The "helmet of salvation" is taken from Isa. 59:17, where Yahweh wears it.<sup>14</sup>

The point in all of this is that our armor is God's armor supplied through His Messianic promises—and leads us to stand. We have no reason to retreat to a Christianized version of shamanism as many do. Stand in the gospel!

We have everything we need to stand and stand we shall, because we are God's inheritance and He will not lose us. Truth, righteousness, peace with God (i.e. gospel of peace), faith, salvation, and God's inerrant word are the panoply of God. We have been transferred from the dominion of Satan to God, as Paul preached in Acts 26:18.

## CONCLUSION

The theme of transfer of dominion, from Satan to God is taught throughout the Bible. Clinton Arnold correctly concludes:

Ephesians strongly highlights the two motifs of the transfer of dominions and the incorporation into Christ of believers. . . . His [Paul's] intention in affirming this is to bolster the confidence of the readers in Christ so they do not resign themselves to the compelling influence of the "powers" or seek other magical or mystical means of averting their influence. (Arnold: 166)

The pagans lived in fear of the hostile spiritual forces. God did a powerful work of grace through the gospel in

Ephesus and delivered those who believed from the authority and power of the demonic forces. Arnold further correctly concludes:

There is no need for believers to seek any additional protection from the "powers" by any means. This would include the devising of ways to manipulate the demons or the invoking of angelic assistance. . . . Believers should no longer seek access to power along pagan and magical-mystical Jewish lines. This means that rigorous asceticism, incantations, amulets, the repetition of names, or any other similar means was entirely unnecessary in view of the new state of affairs which obtains for believers. (Arnold: 169).

So why, we must ask, do various evangelical followers of Arnold's work prescribe exactly what he warns against? The answer appears to be in the term "power" which is attractive to many such as C. Peter Wagner and "appropriate" which opens the door to Neil T. Anderson and others. Arnold concludes: "This power, however, needs to be appropriated by believers through faith" (Arnold: 169).

If the faith discussed is generated by a work of man and appropriated by the ones who best know how to do so, the door is left open for a new class of Christian shamans who are better than others at mediating between us and the spirits. The subjective triumphs over the objective and we end right back in bondage.

As this article is being written (2012), Talbot School of Theology, Biola University offers a degree program (recommended by Richard Foster's *Renovare*)<sup>15</sup> in spiritual direction. Clinton E. Arnold is the dean of the Talbot School of Theology.<sup>16</sup> The degree program in spiritual direction offered by Talbot requires this:

**Intensive Journey Inward Retreat** -- Due to the nature of soul work involved in spiritual

direction and in harmony with its tradition, each student is required to have a total of three weeks of extended retreat in isolation or partial isolation (which will be defined in each student's POI process) to explore and cultivate the inner life in the presence of God under the supervision of a spiritual guide (as designated or permitted by the faculty) and one's advisor. Special instructions will be given in order to facilitate making the proper arrangements. This experience will attempt to integrate insight from various psychological as well as contemplative traditions for the intended purpose of drawing near to God in the Holy Spirit. The student should enroll in four units of SF 670 Intensive Journey Inward concurrently or upon completion of retreat (Spring of second year or final semester of enrollment). The Intensive Retreat is to be completed before graduation.<sup>17</sup>

How sad. Pagan shamanism has invaded evangelicalism because we fail to make valid implications and applications of inspired Scripture. Invalid implications and applications, as we argued in the previous issue of *CIC*, constitute false prophesy.

The gospel is the armor of God. Period. A journey inward is paganism at its worst.

## END NOTES

- In 2002 we described the Colossian heresy which is syncretism espoused by false teachers who deny the sufficiency of Christ. Critical Issues Commentary Issue 69; March/April 2002: <http://cicministry.org/commentary/issue69.htm> Paul identified the hostile powers (*stoicheia*) as the source of the Colossian philosophy.
- See *CIC* issues 1, 2, 21, 26, 33, 40, 48, 68, 69, 70, 71, 78, 81, and 109 which refute false spiritual warfare teachings and issues 54, 61, 66, 79, 82, 83, 91, 96, 98, 99, 103, 107, 111, 112, 114, and 117 which refute mysticism and various forms of divination.
- Clinton E. Arnold; *Power and Magic – The Concept of Power in Ephesians* (Wipf and Stock: Eugene Or., 1989 – previously published by Baker Book House). All further references to Clinton Arnold's work on Ephesians will be bracketed within this essay.
- I am privileged to have studied hermeneutics under Dr. Robert Stein during my first year in seminary (fall 1992 through spring 1993). He later published a non-technical book on hermeneutics that conveys the issue of authorial intent: Robert H. Stein; *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible – Playing by the Rules* (Baker Academic: 1994, 2011)
- Bruce, F. F. (1984). *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*. Includes indexes. The New International Commentary on the New Testament (263). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.
- Lincoln, Andrew T.: *Word Biblical Commentary : Ephesians*. Dallas : Word, Incorporated, 2002 (Word Biblical Commentary 42), S. 58.
- <http://www.thedivinecouncil.com/DT32BibSac.pdf>
- The Holy Bible: Holman Christian standard version*. 2009 (Ac 7:54–8:1). Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers
- Peterson, David G. (2009). *The Acts of the Apostles*. The Pillar New Testament Commentary (668). Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.
- The NET Bible translators of John 1:5 provide this insightful note: "The verb (*katelaben*) is not easy to translate. "To seize" or "to grasp" is possible, but this also permits "to grasp with the mind" in the sense of "to comprehend" (esp. in the middle voice). This is probably another Johannine double meaning - one does not usually think of darkness as trying to "understand" light. For it to mean this, "darkness" must be understood as meaning "certain people," or perhaps "humanity" at large, darkened in understanding. But in John's usage, darkness is not normally used of people or a group of people. Rather it usually signifies the evil environment or 'sphere' in which people find themselves: . . . For John, with his set of symbols and imagery, darkness is not something which seeks to "understand (comprehend)" the light, but represents the forces of evil which seek to "overcome (conquer)" it. The English verb "to master" may be used in both sorts of contexts, as "he mastered his lesson" and "he mastered his opponent." *The NET Bible* (Jn 1:5). Biblical Studies Press.
- Bruce comments on the Greek text of Ephesians 4:14: "by the sleight of men, in craftiness, after the wiles of error" (ASV), where "sleight" represents ("playing with dice"), "craftiness" represents ("rascality"), and "wiles" represents ("scheming")—a further piling up of synonyms.
- Lincoln, A. T. (2002). Vol. 42: *Word Biblical Commentary : Ephesians*. Word Biblical Commentary (447). Dallas: Word, Incorporated.
- Neil T. Anderson, *The Bondage Breaker*; (Eugene: Harvest House, 2000 edition) 207 and throughout his book.
- Op. Cit. Bruce; 408-410.
- <http://www.renovare.us/WHATWEDO/Training/SpiritualityTraining/SpiritualDirection/tabid/2384/Default.aspx>
- [http://www.talbot.edu/faculty/profile/clinton\\_arnold/](http://www.talbot.edu/faculty/profile/clinton_arnold/) We continue to appreciate Arnold's scholarship and are thankful for helping the church see the background issues in Asia Minor during the time of the apostles.
- <http://www.talbot.edu/degrees/ma-spiritual-formation-and-soul-care/>

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