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## ***Bitterness and Anger in Ephesians, Archetypes, & The BI-Hemispheric Structure of the Brain: Comparing Paul, Jordan Peterson, and Iain McGilchrist***

*Joshua Armstrong*

Many people eager to confront falsehood and pursue justice or truth do so *nourishing* a vindictive, bitter, or resentful attitude. Nourishing anger, particularly resentment, is akin to stoking up the archetypal “Luciferian spirit,” according to clinical psychologist and author Jordan Peterson.<sup>1</sup> This spirit presumes: “what I do is all there is to do, what I know is all there is to know.”<sup>2</sup> It is symptomatic of attending to the world in a way overly reliant on a “left-hemisphere” approach, which leads to entrapment in a “self-reflexive virtual world” disconnected from real “other” things, and only really knowing *itself*, according to psychologist and neuroscience researcher Iain McGilchrist.<sup>3</sup> Both suggest that sustained resentment signals: “I have a problem.” Moreover, they explain how this problem is exacerbated by scientific materialism which distorts our perceptions of ourselves and the world.<sup>4</sup> Their observations have led them, each in their own way, to issue a rallying cry that says we must *revise* our presumption that we see more than our ancestors and admit that we just see differently—and in many ways *less*. McGilchrist goes so far as to say, “time is running out” and we need “to see the world with new eyes.”<sup>5</sup>

The crisis of mental health, the hunger for self-understanding, and the standing our culture assigns to psychometrics, science, and self-improvement books today make these authors worth hearing. Besides Peterson’s 7.7 million YouTube followers, he is a best-selling author, a former professor at the University of Toronto and Harvard, and a scientific researcher who has developed a “Big 5 Aspects Scale” Personality course. In my former military career, I took his course to better understand the insights of Operational Psychologists while directing a *Recruiting, Assessment, Selection, and Development* team at a special mission unit—I benefited from it. McGilchrist lectures around the world and is a former Oxford Fellow and Research Fellow in neuroimaging at Johns Hopkins. His focus on the implications

of the specialization of each hemisphere of the brain for science and culture complements the perspectives of Peterson. Both psychologists use spiritual language in their exploration of the mind gripped by or trapped in resentment and anger. In this essay, I use bitterness, resentment, and anger as synonyms referring to states of animosity toward others, God, or life.<sup>6</sup> The opportunity and issues I see are that (1) these influential scientists identify resentment as a problem according to their lens of expertise, (2) they reveal how our culture contributes to this problem and (3) they propose spiritual solutions and increased vigilance which, (4) are inadequate and incomplete when compared to Ephesians. Emotions remind religious and irreligious persons alike that we are less self-commanding than we think.<sup>7</sup> Since resentment and our increased vitriol is a problem widely recognized today, and because these thinkers waded into spiritual matters to address it, it is worth comparing their proposals to Paul, who in Ephesians 4:31-32 addresses bitterness, writing:

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Paul's letter to the Ephesians is the authoritative voice I use to theologically discern Peterson and McGilchrist's diagnosis of the problem and proposed solution.<sup>8</sup> In Ephesians, Paul describes human life as a *walk* always lived within a spiritual playing field never isolated from the Triune God, sin, spiritual forces of evil, and other people. The sort of relationship we have with the unavoidable company of God, sin, spiritual forces of evil, and others shapes our perceptions, desires, and behaviors. Whether we think we're *absolutely* right or wrong, just at work or *just* at home: Paul reminds us that we're on the spiritual playing field. Simultaneous to addressing resentment, each author also encourages *vigilance*.<sup>9</sup> There is a vigilance that springs from fear, which perhaps sees and battles resentment within, but remains without hope. Or there is a vigilance described by Paul that springs from the grace of God, which creates faith, hope, and love and leads to thanksgiving.<sup>10</sup> Paul is not a Stoic merely advising greater composure or immovability; he wants the Ephesians to be moved and strengthened by the Spirit working through his letter, to thanksgiving and love for Jesus Christ because of how Christ loves them—*knowing* Christ is with them always.<sup>11</sup> In their daily walk, Christians are to see they are blessed now by God in Jesus their Lord, yet not beyond the battle with sin and spiritual forces of evil.<sup>12</sup>

I use resentment as a window to compare the systems of two psychologists and the Apostle Paul.<sup>13</sup> **Part I** explores resentment within the context and system of (A) Peterson's book *Maps of Meaning: The Architecture of Belief* and (B) McGilchrist's book *The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western*



*World*. **Part II** focuses on bitterness and anger within the context of Paul’s letter to the Ephesians using 4:31-32 as a keyhole to see his larger argument and purpose.<sup>14</sup> Paul’s letter primes us to see possible points of contact and confrontation as we hear and learn from these contemporary thinkers.<sup>15</sup>

### **Part I: A. Jordan Peterson**

#### **The Problem According to Peterson**

In his book *Maps of Meaning*, Peterson discusses resentment from a mythological “archetypal” perspective because myths, he says, reveal wisdom about how to act—something science cannot give us.<sup>16</sup> Science asks about a thing’s verifiable properties whereas myth asks what a thing means for action. Science sees the world as a bunch of things whereas myth sees it as a place of meaning. He writes:

We lack a process of verification, in the moral domain, that is as powerful or as universally acceptable as the experimental (empirical) method in the realm of description. We have technological power to do anything we want (certainly anything destructive; potentially anything creative); commingled with that power, however, is an equally profound existential uncertainty, shallowness, and confusion...the individual cannot live without belief—without action and valuation—and science cannot provide that belief.<sup>17</sup>

Peterson wants us to see the wisdom codified in ancient writings, to learn from them, and not to repeat the recent atrocities of the twentieth century. Vladimir Lenin’s assertion that “people are not people but carries of ideas” and the expedient revolutionary court system he created to sift the wheat from the chaff, on *his* terms and *his* timeline, epitomize the dehumanizing consequences of scientific materialism.<sup>18</sup>

For Peterson, resentment springs from the archetype of the “eternal adversary,” forever set against the “mythological hero” who faces the unknown courageously, regenerates society and brings “peace to a warring world.”<sup>19</sup> To understand Peterson properly, you should hear “adversary” as the “spirit” (source for a pattern of behavior)<sup>20</sup> animating bitterness, anger, and resentment in each individual’s *personality*. The *adversary* is “horrified by his limited apprehension of the conditions of existence, shrinks from contact with everything he does not understand,” retreats from fear, is “rigid and authoritarian,” and, ultimately, his weakness and “neurotic suffering” engenders resentment and “hatred for existence itself.”<sup>21</sup>

The “adversary” manifests in two types, Peterson says, the “fascist” who

seeks refuge in a group and “crushes everything different than him,” or the “decadent,” who withdraws from society and “clings too rigidly to his own ideas—too undisciplined to serve as an apprentice.”<sup>22</sup> The apprentice is a precursor to the hero and willingly submits themselves to strict systems or a hierarchy of values for sustained periods that culminate in mastery, an ability to adapt past wisdom to present needs (i.e., voluntarily confronting the unknown), and freedom.

Unlike Carl Jung, whom Stanton Jones and Richard Butman suggest was ambivalent about evil, Peterson criticizes our contemporary low view of evil.<sup>23</sup> He writes:

Evil is a living complex. Its nature can be most clearly comprehended through examination of the ‘personality’ it has ‘adopted’ in mythology, literature, and fantasy...those ‘meta’-attributes of evil that have remained stable over time despite dramatic shifts in the particulars of human existence and morality.

Evil, like good, is not something static: it does not merely mean breaking the rules... and is not simply anger... Evil is rejection of and sworn opposition to the process of creative exploration... proud repudiation of the unknown, and willful failure to understand... the desire to disseminate darkness, for the love of darkness, where there could be light. The spirit of evil underlies all actions that speed along the decrepitude of the world...<sup>24</sup>

Evil, for Peterson, is the embodiment of the *process* in the individual and society which fails to confront the “unknown” and grow, preferring to lie, crush, scoff, and remain blind.<sup>25</sup> For him, the New Testament might best be rendered a “process”—we’ll address this later.<sup>26</sup> He writes that the (Biblical) devil’s “implicit or explicit imitation leads to disaster; the stories that portray his central features exist as *object lessons* in the consequences of resentment, hatred, totalitarian arrogance or jealousy.”<sup>27</sup>

### **The Solution According to Peterson**

Peterson says to “never forget” the Holocaust means to “know thyself:” “to recognize and understand that evil twin, the mortal enemy, is part and parcel of every individual.”<sup>28</sup> Peterson calls his reader to growth through the pursuit of meaning.<sup>29</sup> Growth means becoming an integrated, self-aware, authentic, and honest person—not yielding to the lie, raging like a “fascist,” or retreating like a “decadent.”

Growth occurs through the pursuit of an *interest* that “renders the world bearable, enables you to risk security,” face the unknown, and act.<sup>30</sup> Accordingly, his final chapter is on the “divinity of interest,” because an interest unique to you is what enables forward movement into the unknown, despite inevitable suffering. In context, he notes how hope, curiosity, and interest draw us *forward* in goal-oriented

travel (enabling us to act), whereas fear, apprehension, and anxiety cause us to halt and reassess the validity of our metaphorical map.<sup>31</sup>

For Peterson, our aim should be to courageously face the unknown by following the archetypal hero—who cannot emerge without also attending to the internal adversary. “The heroic attitude is predicated on the belief that something new and valuable still exists... faith that the individual spirit will respond to challenge and flourish.”<sup>32</sup> He calls for faith and belief. One consequence of “seeing” faith’s inevitability, a primary aim in his book, will be the accompanied desire to see wisdom in the “treasure trove of archetypal forms” found in myths.<sup>33</sup> We all act trusting (“in faith”) that our strategy for action in the face of the unknown is our *best* option. Resentment is associated with fear of the unknown, a lack of faith, and indicative of a “bad strategy” for action.

It is necessary to engage Peterson’s work charitably and critically. If I were to translate Peterson’s work into theological terms, he suggests myths carry elements of natural law, the sort of stuff shaping the “accusing” or “excusing” gentile’s conscience (Rom 2:15).<sup>34</sup> Myths and literature function as “natural law” because they invite readers to imagine how they would respond to the same situations of the characters. This offers them a new perspective that holds up an ideal image of how to act which, as a result, stands over them accusing or excusing their past choices while guiding future ones. As Lutherans, we might affirm Peterson as much as Melancthon praises Aristotle’s writings when his work is properly distinguished from theology.<sup>35</sup> The works of Peterson and Aristotle might be helpful in horizontal relationships with other people, like in politics and organizational health, but not helpful once we veer into conversations about our “vertical” relationship with God. What is “good” and “righteous” *before* God can only be determined by God’s self-revelation.<sup>36</sup>

Peterson, however, has gaps. While Peterson holds a higher form of evil than most, one must ask, how do we reconcile competing images of “the hero” and “villain” across myths that contradict one another? Moreover, if the dividing line between good and evil cuts through my heart, as he often says, can I really step away from it and understand it on my own, then “integrate it” into my personality—or must someone stronger step in and overcome it (Luke 11:22). Are sin and evil simply housecats we should live with or dragons to be killed? How will I know if I am regressing or maturing, moving toward “good” or toward “evil” if I judge such movement by my terms or my preferred interpretation of what a myth means for me?

Finally, unlike Aristotle, Peterson has a New Testament, and his interpretations reject the fundamental assertions of the authors and disregard the implied reader.<sup>37</sup> Can we ignore the claims of the Biblical authors without misunderstanding them and, consequently, the meaning of good and evil we seek to extrapolate from them and apply to today? As we seek to understand Peterson charitably, we must also be ready to defend and request a charitable reading of the Biblical authors.<sup>38</sup> Hold these questions for Paul.

Now we turn to a less overtly religious discussion on anger by looking at it through the lens of the structure of the brain and consciousness.

**Part I: B. Iain McGilchrist**  
**The Problem According to McGilchrist**



Iain McGilchrist's thesis in his book *The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World* is that all human beings experience the world in two different modes<sup>39</sup> which arise from the specializations of two different hemispheres of the brain. These two hemispheres need to cooperate but are actually involved in a power struggle.<sup>40</sup> After aggregating some “5,000 independent pieces of research” he seeks to bring awareness to how the structure of the brain is related to the nature and structure of consciousness.<sup>41</sup> Though

there is overlap in hemispheric functions, the hemispheres have distinguishable roles, especially related to our modes of knowing, attending, and experiencing the world.<sup>42</sup> He associates the vitriol we see today to our hemispheric imbalances, noting that we increasingly prioritize “knowing” through an abstract, atomizing, analytical “left hemisphere interpreter” and, therefore, perceive and act like persons with right hemisphere deficits. The left hemisphere is a “wonderful servant and horrible master” because “in the most down-to-earth empirically verifiable way” it is less reliable than the right hemisphere “in matters of attention, perception, judgement, emotional understanding, and indeed intelligence as it is conventionally understood.”<sup>43</sup> For our purposes, we will look at how the power struggle between hemispheres manifests in perception and emotions—particularly anger and resentment.<sup>44</sup>

Anger is unique among emotions because it, unlike the others, is processed in the left hemisphere, the same hemisphere most involved with language, analytical and impersonal thinking, and abstraction (i.e., attending to a re-presented category and not an individual entity).<sup>45</sup> Moreover, a left hemisphere interpreter, McGilchrist says, needs certainty, and may, in the case of split-brain patients, be “unreasonably, even stubbornly, convinced of its own correctness” opting to “confabulate” (lie), rather than admit ignorance.<sup>46</sup> Throughout the book, he anthropomorphizes the left hemisphere calling it arrogant. In contrast to the left hemisphere, the right hemisphere “sees nothing in the abstract but always appreciates them in their context, it is interested in the personal” and it “is constantly on the lookout for what it does *not* know.”<sup>47</sup>

The reverberating refrain of his book is: “beware!” Our hemisphere imbal-

ance is a problem. One takeaway from the contrast of hemisphere functions is to notice how anger springs from a way of attending to the world that presupposes certainty about my construal of a situation and filters out the possibility of *my* ignorance.<sup>48</sup> Imagine a leg cursing an arm for never carrying the heavy weight it does all day.

The dominance of the left hemisphere is evident in fundamentalism of all sorts, but McGilchrist is most troubled by the mechanistic views of humanity reinforced by scientific materialism.<sup>49</sup> The dysfunctional aspects of left hemisphere dominance are epitomized by schizophrenics who “routinely see themselves as machines (computers, robots, or cameras)” believing, at least according to one patient, that “body and soul don’t belong together.”<sup>50</sup> Repeatedly, he rejects the metaphor of “man as machine” and calls it harmful. While McGilchrist does not discuss evil, he does note that “attention is a moral act: it creates, bringing aspects of things into being, but in doing so makes others recede.”<sup>51</sup> He wants us to see how “the type of attention you bring to bear dictates what you discover” as do the tools, which, in philosophy, he notes, are primarily left hemisphere created and, therefore, inherently limited (hear: beware).<sup>52</sup> Moreover, the left hemisphere thinks of things in terms of utilization and manipulation, even in the domain of religion, which he amusingly observes in trending ten-minute meditation apps to make you a better broker.<sup>53</sup>

He wants us to see how we engage with the world differently. The left-brain interpreter ignores individualities and prefers dealing with its categories and classification of things.<sup>54</sup> This way of attending to things might be useful in pedagogy, but its pedagogical limits can be quickly forgotten. Whereas it is with the right hemisphere, he says, that we “distinguish individuals of all kinds, places as well as faces.”<sup>55</sup> It is nuanced and is responsible for maintaining a “coherent and continuous and unified sense of self.”<sup>56</sup>

For instance, a left hemisphere stroke patient (with a functioning right hemisphere) can still differentiate things, like their house from other houses or one person from another. Whereas right hemisphere stroke patients might lose the capacity to differentiate things and people, even confusing friends for strangers (“Fregoli syndrome”) and be convinced that their hometown is an “imposter” city<sup>57</sup>—like in *The Truman Show*. Moreover, a person with only a functioning left hemisphere, upon being asked to draw an elephant, may only draw a part (e.g., the tail) while someone with only the right hemisphere, sketches the whole thing.<sup>58</sup> This tendency is indicative of the left hemisphere’s atomization of things into parts rather than seeing the whole.

If people were dominated by left-brain interpretation, McGilchrist muses:

...individuals would be ironed out and identification would be by categories: socioeconomic groups, races, sexes, and so on, which would also



feel themselves to be implicitly or explicitly in competition with, resentful of, one another. Paranoia and lack of trust would come to be the pervading stance within society both between individuals, and between such groups...<sup>59</sup>

We can think of many more categories: Republican, Democrat, academic, practitioner, victim, oppressor, Pietist, Confessional, etc. His logic invites us to see how categories, a good pedagogical tool, can very quickly be misused or weaponized because classification and manipulation occur in the same hemisphere. McGilchrist says we are (in the West) collectively and individually out of balance: trapped in the self-reflective world of our left hemisphere, and the former escape hatch of religion and art is neglected.<sup>60</sup> Even there, the church has been “undermining itself” by joining “the chorus of voices attributing material answers to *spiritual* problems.”<sup>61</sup> He says “When we do not worship divinity, we do not stop worshipping, we merely find something else less worthy to worship.”<sup>62</sup> He wants us to see that we inevitably revert to mythical ways of seeing and worshipping and that “the spiritual Other” gives us something more than material values to live by.<sup>63</sup> Our current values are dehumanizing and one consequence of this is increased classification, suspicion, and resentment.<sup>64</sup>

### **Solutions According to McGilchrist:**

The metaphor in the book’s title points to McGilchrist’s solution: the *redemption* of the rebellious left-hemisphere emissary.<sup>65</sup> The problem is that the “*emissary*” (left hemisphere) sent out by the wise, “spiritual,” and “selfless *Master*” (right hemisphere) has convinced itself it is the master.<sup>66</sup> Redemption means reintegration of the left hemisphere back to the right hemisphere—the emissary needs to report back to the Master because it is “crucially, *unaware of what it is missing*.”<sup>67</sup> This may occur by exploiting the left hemisphere’s “points of weakness.”<sup>68</sup> These weaknesses are aspects of existence, beyond rationalism, that involves the whole person: “body and soul coming together” which occurs, he says, in religion and art.<sup>69</sup> By engaging the world beyond the left hemisphere’s “mode” for knowing or experiencing the world, it seems we interrupt the habit of preferentially knowing or attending to the world through a left hemisphere interpreter.<sup>70</sup>

In his book, redemption specifically applies to the left hemisphere, which must be redeemed or justified for arrogantly, narrowly, and impersonally attending to the world for utilitarian purposes rather than attending to the whole and real “Other” (whatever that may be at the time). He suggests that Johann Goethe’s *Faust* and *The Sorcerer’s Apprentice* illustrate how redemption occurs. Faust sells his soul to the Devil but because he uses his abilities to serve others, but he has his soul taken by God instead. In *The Sorcerer’s Apprentice* an old master sorcerer returns home to

find his foolish apprentice trying his hand at magic and rather than grow angry with the younger man, bids him understand that he alone can do such work. McGilchrist says “the left hemisphere acts like a sorcerer’s apprentice that is blithely unaware that he is about to drown, a Faust that has no insight into his errors and the destruction they have brought about.”<sup>71</sup> The Master and his emissary must work in concert, he says, “redeemed and redeeming.”<sup>72</sup>

About Christianity, McGilchrist writes:

I have tried to convey in this book that we need metaphors or mythos in order to understand the world... We are not given the option to not choose one, and the myth we choose is important: in the absence of anything better, we revert to the metaphor or myth of the machine... Christianity, provides, whether one believes it or not, an exceptionally rich mythos... It conceives a divine Other that is not indifferent or alien... but... engaged, vulnerable because of that engagement, and like the right hemisphere rather than the left, not resentful (like the Old Testament Yahweh often seemed) about the Faustian fallings away of its creation but suffering alongside it. At the center of this mythos are the images of incarnation, the coming together of matter and spirit, and of resurrection, the redemption, of that relationship, as well as of a God that submits to suffer for that process.<sup>73</sup>

Though McGilchrist references many myths, he gives high praise to the “exceptionally rich” Christian “mythos.” Notice his reluctant admiration alongside a revulsion to what he calls the “resentful” God of the Old Testament. If I understand his theory correctly, I wonder if the intrigue and negative emotion he experiences indicate a lack of understanding according to the left hemisphere’s rational terms? According to the entire Biblical testimony, only God harbors righteous anger, and that same God was incarnate in Jesus Christ.<sup>74</sup>

McGilchrist’s theory is helpful and has gaps. It is helpful because it orients the reader to the inherent limitations of their attention and perceptions. It does so not merely because of an “unconscious” idiosyncratic bias but a bias of how we process and understand *all* “information” (i.e., the world) in “two modes.” Anger might be symptomatic of a single, *inadequate* mode of “knowing” the other.

McGilchrist, too, has his gaps. Ultimately, the “right hemisphere” is Other oriented. He repeatedly says we can only know in context and we only know via metaphor, writing:

This fact, that knowledge comes from distinctions, implies that we can come to an understanding of the nature of any one thing, whatever it may be, only by comparison with something else we already know, and

by observing the similarities, and difference. However, just as everything changes its nature, however slightly, when it changes its context, what we choose to compare a thing with determines which aspects of it will stand forward and which will recede.<sup>75</sup>

Besides rejecting “man as machine” what metaphors or myths shall we use to know ourselves and all others in their appropriate context? Are his metaphorical interpretations of *Faust*, the *Sorcerer’s Apprentice*, or Christianity compatible—if not, which is “best” or to be prioritized? One of the New Age rallying cries is for more “right hemisphere interpretation” along with claims that all is one, all is God, all religions are one, and a rejection of left brain thinking.<sup>76</sup> We are trending in that direction and, once we’re there, on what grounds do we judge another as “arrogant” or “wrong” when “all are one?” The antidote to excessive rationalism cannot be New Age relativism. While McGilchrist is *not* anti-reason,<sup>77</sup> his system may lead some that direction.<sup>78</sup> Could it be that God, the ultimate “Other” reveals himself while also keeping much hidden and that this is a divine means of reminding His creatures of their limitations—limiting rationalism’s excess? What if the Christ McGilchrist admires appointed men to be His witnesses to the world and speak with *His* authority? Paul claimed to be this sort of witness. Let’s turn to him now.

## Part II: Ephesians 4:31-32

**Argument:** Bitterness is (1) spiritually dangerous and (2) addressed within Paul’s larger theme of encouraging Christian maturation into their God-given identity as Christ’s.

Bitterness is dangerous. In Ephesians 4:31-32, Paul addresses the danger of bitterness, within a cluster of maladies, springing from the internal influence of sin and external influences of spiritual forces of evil, from whom the Ephesians have been delivered in Christ Jesus, with the goal that his hearers mature in Christ (4:13). They have been baptized, and, in his letter to the Ephesians, Paul continues to teach them.<sup>79</sup> In Ephesians such teaching includes how to discern and walk as God’s children, i.e., differentiating between their old, alienated self (2:12) and new self in Christ (4:20, 22-23), until their inheritance (1:11) is fully possessed (1:13). Bitterness is addressed within Paul’s larger theme of maturation into their God-given



identity. Paul, as Thomas Winger notes, prays God would give them eyes that “have been [and remain] enlightened” by the Spirit (1:18).<sup>80</sup> First, this seeing involves recognition of their hope in the Gospel and their inheritance (1:18). Then the theme of opened or “enlightened eyes” continues and is expressed in Paul’s encouragement and exhortations for them to “walk in a manner worthy” of their calling (4:1), to grow up (4:15), “discern” (5:10), and “be wise” (5:15).<sup>81</sup> These new ways of seeing and living extend across the relationships in which they “walk:” with God, fellow humans, sin, and spiritual forces of evil. In contrast to modern presuppositions about man, in Ephesians there is no “isolated” existence apart from these fundamental relationships.

### **The Problem According to Paul:**

In Ephesians, bitterness is a problem because: (1) It is an attitude that leads to slander and evil actions in Christ’s community; (2) they live in a non-trivial spiritual playing field; (3) It is contrary to their God-given identity; (4) it does not proceed from the Holy Spirit but another; (5) it is contrary to Paul’s prayers for them to be strengthened and built up.

*Paul describes bitterness within a progressive list that grows from emotional expression (bitterness) to evil speech (slander) and wicked intent (malice).<sup>82</sup>*

Commentators note a few definitions of bitterness: (1) “resentful attitude;” (2) “resentment from which anger springs;” or (3) “hard heartedness that harbors resentment about the past and sustains animosity.”<sup>83</sup> Given Paul’s dominating metaphor of life as a “walk,” bitterness signals one is heading in the wrong direction.<sup>84</sup> Imagining Paul as a mentor, we might hear him cautiously advising, “step away from whatever is nourishing it—that won’t do you any good.” Bitterness is *inherently* relational or “directional.” A bitter attitude might be directed “up” between a person and God, someone knowing only wrath and “being without hope” (2:12), or “horizontally” between other human beings and groups of human beings. Paul does not want their eyes and attitudes to be guided by sin and spiritual forces of evil, and he describes new and better ways of seeing and living based on their new life in Christ—through whom they know the love of God.

*The Ephesians walk in a non-trivial heavenly playing field.<sup>85</sup>*

The Apostle opens the letter with a phrase that sets the stage for everything after it: “blessed be the God the father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed you with *every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places*” (1:3). The phrase “heavenly places” signals the reader to their present life in the heavenly or spiritual playing field: either under the Lord Jesus Christ (1:3) or the reign of spiritual forces of evil (2:2). The phrase is used five times: in the first three instances it refers to their place with

Christ and thereafter, it refers to a location of spiritual forces of evil.<sup>86</sup> Thus, we see the spiritual playing field woven into Paul's dominant metaphor of life as a "walk." One walk is in love, as Christ loved us (5:2), and the other is alienated from God, in darkness, and under evil (4:8).<sup>87</sup>

For emphasis, Paul bookends the letter with references to the spiritual forces of evil (2:1- 3 & 6:10-20). Doing so draws the reader's attention to spiritual dangers (4:26), their vulnerabilities (4:14, 6:11-12), armor and weapons (6:10-20), vocation as the church to be witnesses to God's wisdom and Christ's authority (2:20, 3:9-10), and, therefore, their need for strength, alertness, perseverance, courage, and prayer (6:10, 18-20).

The metaphor of life as a walk connects the battle (6:12) and blessings (1:3) in the heavenly places with daily life in which the battle plays out (4:26) and God's wisdom (5:7,15) is embodied and made known.<sup>88</sup> Bitterness is not an isolated emotion because we are not creatures who can live in isolation, but always live with (1) "the *one* God and Father of all" (inChrist), (2) fellow human beings, and (3) the spiritual forces of evil/darkness and sin. You are Christ's, Paul says, do not offer your mind, words, or body to sin and the forces of evil.

*Bitterness is contrary to their God-given identity and indicative of the old self.*

Bitterness is associated with a "darkened" understanding (4:18) and is appropriately seen as a means to callousness (4:18). Bitterness is akin to the old self (4:22), dead and walking in sin (2:1-3), aligned with spiritual forces of darkness (2:2).<sup>89</sup> In Ephesians, spiritual forces of evil are personified as "working" or "operative" in those who oppose God (2:2).<sup>90</sup> Those who oppose God (2:2; 5:6) also deceive by "empty words" (5:6), and promote diverse evils (5:1- 21) at odds with the Christian's (1:13; 4:4) status as citizens and members of God's household in Christ (2:19). The Devil and evil spirits are depicted as awaiting an "opportunity" (4:27) and "scheming" to knock down those in the faith (6:12).<sup>91</sup> They are correctly perceived as the true "wrestling" opponent of humanity (6:12) rather than other human beings. They attack (6:16) with weapons only defended against by the armor of "faith," "truth," "the gospel of peace," "righteousness," and "salvation" (6:14-17) and are only combatted by the Gospel (6:15) and Word of God (6:17). Ahead of treating bitterness, Paul reminds them of their former way of life "corrupt through deceitful desires" (4:22). Corrupted thoughts might include construing a world (i.e., the *unrenewed* "spirit of your mind" 4:23) where bitterness is nourished and eclipses the gratitude generated by God's blessings like those stated in in the opening doxology and woven throughout the letter (1:3-14; 2:8-9; 5:20).

*Bitterness does not proceed from the Holy Spirit.*

Bitterness in anyone should signal the operation of something other than the Holy

Spirit.<sup>92</sup> We see the activity of two sorts of spirits in Ephesians: The Holy Spirit and all other, evil ones. The Holy Spirit is the one who sealed the Ephesians when they heard the Gospel and believed (1:13), the one whom Paul prays would strengthen them in their inner being (3:16), and the one who is grieved by sin (4:30) which includes corrupt talk (4:29) and the source of such talk, i.e., sin manifest in bitterness of heart. When nourished, bitterness is like offering one's body to evil forces for ungodly purposes (e.g., just like theft [4:28], slander [4:31], or failing to speak the truth [4:15, 4:25], cf. Rom 6:17-19). Sensing it in ourselves, through Paul's teaching and the activity of the *Holy Spirit*, should prompt us to discern (5:10) its' source (evil) and end (death).

*Bitterness leads to spiritual weakness whereas the Holy Spirit gives spiritual strength.*

Paul wants the Ephesians to see the current, blessed state of affairs (1:3-14) declared throughout this letter as *the* authoritative word about the cosmic power struggle they see unfolding within and around them. Bitterness is contrary to Paul's prayer and purposes for them to have the eyes of their heart *enlightened* (1:18), according to the Spirit of Wisdom (1:17), to *comprehend* the love of Christ (3:18-19), to walk in love, forgiving one another as Christ forgave them (4:32). Bitterness is a state of being inattentive to, at best, or rejecting, at worst, the opening doxology (hymn of praise) to God (1:3-14). The Christian's sword against the cosmic forces of darkness, Paul says, is the Holy Spirit's sword. This sword is "the word of God" (6:24), especially the "word of truth, the gospel of their salvation" (1:13). This epistle is meant to be embraced as a weapon against all other spirits who exert influence through words (5:6) justifying indiscriminate indulgence of natural passions and desires—even resentment (2:3; 4:27, 31).

### **The Solution according to Paul**

Paul's "solution" to bitterness is (1) The Gospel; (2) Christ's gift of baptism; (3) instruction about new ways of seeing and living in Christ; (4) instruction regarding relationships.

*To treat bitterness Paul repeatedly proclaims the Gospel. God does not merely help them create new ideas; He creates new persons.*

Peterson's gap is that he only discusses insightful perceptions, yet Paul speaks of a God who loves and creates *real* new creatures (2:10, 22; 4:24) who are brought near to Him by Christ's *real* blood (1:7, 2:13). As a result of Christ's spilled blood, not humanity's heroics, former "strangers and aliens" characterized as "dead" are made alive "citizens," "children," and "members of God's household" (2:19). The same power by which God rose Christ from the dead and seated him at His right hand, Paul says, is "the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe" (1:19-

20). Paul says much about what Christ has done for them.<sup>93</sup>

The Gospel is powerfully proclaimed in the opening thanksgiving to God (1:3-14) and reiterated throughout the letter (2:8-9, 13; 4:32; 5:2b)—*the people never outgrow it*.<sup>94</sup> God does not act capriciously, but Paul says, out of “rich mercy” and “great love” (1:5, 2:4). This Gospel, the fact that Christ has forgiven them, is the motivation for them to forego nourishing resentment and to “forgive others” (4:32).

Focusing on Christ as the hero, and not humanity, does not lead Paul to apathy. Rather, in Christ, Paul gives thanks and praise to God (1:3-10) and encourages the Ephesians to give thanks in all things (5:20), to be strong (6:10), keep alert (6:19), and to ask for their prayers for his own boldness (3:18; 6:18-20). Christ—and the Holy Spirit strengthening them in faith and leading them to thanksgiving—fills the space that resentment and other spirits might otherwise inhabit.<sup>95</sup> We can discern a relationship between attention and health: “when your eye is healthy [looking at the light who is Christ], your whole body is full of light, but when it is bad, your body is full of darkness.”<sup>96</sup> Despite difficulties, being in Christ means the Ephesians can look to Christ, at all times, and thereby give thanks to God, at all times—a habit Paul describes as “wise” (5:15, 20).<sup>97</sup>

### *Baptism*

Christ sent His Apostles to baptize *and* teach. Considering McGilchrist’s critiques about our excessively rational culture which looks down on the body and physical life, we should note that Christ instituted baptism as a gift and Paul teaches the Ephesians about it (Acts 19:1-6). Paul does not promote an abstract, atomizing, rationality that looks down on the physicality of creatures but proclaims “one Baptism” (4:5) and describes a “washing of water with the word” (5:26) which creates new people (4:24) who live out their God-given identity in concrete relationships (5:15-6:9).<sup>98</sup> It is God’s gift (4:5, 8) which Christians receive through faith (2:9, 4:5).<sup>99</sup>

Luther describes Baptism this way, “Because the water and the Word together constitute one baptism, both body and soul shall be saved and life forever: the soul through the Word which it believes, the body because it is united with soul and apprehends baptism in the only way it can.”<sup>100</sup> Interestingly, McGilchrist characterizes Luther’s reformation impulse as movement “toward authenticity” and “coming from the right hemisphere” which were quickly “annexed by a left hemisphere agenda” in later movements.<sup>101</sup> It is better to see Luther as guided by the convictions he clearly articulated elsewhere, writing, “Whoever wishes without danger to philosophize using Aristotle must beforehand become thoroughly foolish in Christ.”<sup>102</sup> When it came to salvation, Luther’s conscience was captive to Christ the True Master. To be “foolish in Christ,” is to trust in His work alone and call a thing

what God calls it. This robs humanity—both hemispheres included—of boasting before God (2:9). Accordingly, the Ephesians are not given license to justify animosity toward others but called to walk in humility and gentleness (4:2).

*New Ways of Seeing and Living in Christ*

As a new people *in* Christ, “having the eyes of their heart be enlightened,” Paul orients the Ephesians to new ways of seeing and walking: maturing, not being tossed about like children, building others up, not corrupting them, being discerning about fruitful and unfruitful endeavors, not stumbling about in the darkness, being wise not unwise, etc. (4:13-14, 16, 29; 5:10, 15).

Paul encourages self-awareness. Speaking to the Ephesian elders in Acts, Paul says, “pay careful attention to yourselves” and be alert for wolves and twisted speech.<sup>103</sup> Again, in his epistle he says “keep alert” (6:18) and “look carefully how you walk, *not* as unwise, but as wise, making the best use of the time because the days are evil” (5:15-16). Self-examination and attention to one’s way of acting are *good*, but not the end. Paul calls attention to resentment and the “renewal of the spirit of their mind” because of whose they are, Christ’s, and whose they are *not*, the devil’s. Importantly, their maturation is not to earn “salvation” but for growth (3:18; 4:13) into the identity that is theirs, already, in Christ.

In their daily walk, the Ephesians are to see they are blessed *now* by God in Christ their Lord, yet not beyond the battle with sin and spiritual forces of evil. Context shapes how we understand ourselves and others. The context of how much a debtor owes affects the degree of gratitude and love they feel to the moneylender who cancels debts: “gee thanks” is different than the silent weeping of realized freedom.<sup>104</sup> Likewise, an Afghani liberated from the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan might put his body armor and weapons behind a decorative glass case once he exits his country, whereas, the person with a Green Card, yet still in enemy territory, hangs his armor and weapons in a position to be donned at a moment’s notice. The Ephesians are like the latter case: citizens in God’s kingdom, and yet, awaiting full realization of their inheritance (1:14). To that end, Paul encourages alertness, perseverance, prayer, and immersion in God’s Word (6:10, 18-19)—they live in a spiritual playing field never in isolation. I suspect Paul wants the Ephesians to see bitterness as a flaming arrow (6:16), that, he prays would only hit their armor and fall extinguished rather than be fanned into flame and consume them or be buried into their heart.

Paul directs the Ephesians to Christ their Lord and not to an inward journey. Christ saves them from sin and spiritual forces of evil which might otherwise entrap them in a world “without hope” where resentment and bitterness flourish. Christ is the only one to defeat sin, death, and the devil. He is *the* dragon-slaying victor and *the* light.<sup>105</sup> So, we each would repeat the error of Goethe’s “foolish



apprentice,” as it were, to imagine we might do the work that Christ, the True Master, alone can do. Like the foolish apprentice or McGilchrist’s arrogant “left brain interpreter,” we might think we can combat or integrate sin and evil into our personality—but this is *foolish*. It’s treating a dragon like a housecat. Sin and evil are not so tame, thinking so fuels complacency and a willingness to let our armor and weapons collect dust neatly on a shelf behind decorative glass.

Paul’s description of Christ’s authority is at odds with Peterson and McGilchrist. As long as the individual is free to cherry-pick mythical heroes of their choosing, whom they understand according to their interpretation, it seems that they undermine the comprehensive discipline necessary for true apprenticeship which Peterson notes is necessary for “true freedom.”<sup>106</sup> For Paul, freedom—or deliverance—only comes through the deliverer (1:7) or light giver (5:8), Christ, and Christ, alone, can continue to lead humanity out of the darkness (5:2, 8). Unlike fragmented apprenticeships of jobs, school, or parenting seasons, the Christian’s apprenticeship begins at birth, in baptism, and extends unto death alongside fellow members of Christ’s body and under one Head, Christ (1:22; 2:20).<sup>107</sup>

*God strengthens and preserves them through their company.*

In Ephesians, Christ is described as descending to earth to give His life-giving gifts to His people through the ministry (4:8-13) while also embedding His people in a community (2:18-22) who live differently *together* (4:22). The ministry offices Paul describes exist so that humanity would not be ignorant (4:18) of God’s loving purposes and will (1:3-4; 3:9), alienated and strangers (2:13-14, 17), nor dead in sin under the spiritual forces of evil (2:1-3). The entire church, together, proclaims God’s wisdom: the Gospel, humanity reconciled with God, and reconciled with one another (3:8-10; 6:12).

In short, Paul reminds the Ephesians they are not alone in an aimless earthly (or heavenly) sea to be tossed about by every wind of doctrine (4:14), *emotion*, or *spirit*. Instead, they mature in the faith (4:13) through the means of ministry established by Christ (4:12) and by speaking the truth in love *together* (4:15). Distrust and resentment are normal for sinful human beings, Paul prompts them to speak the truth in love and put away falsehoods to prevent discord from flourishing.

Paul’s opening doxology (1:3-10) and repeated encouragement to give thanks in *everything* (5:4, 20) paints a picture of a life no longer controlled or gripped by anger and resentment. For Paul, it is not presumptuous to see reasons for “thanks” because the Ephesians need not guess at God’s will toward them. Instead, because of Christ, they know that God the Creator and sustainer of all things loves them and is for them as a father is for his child. The Ephesians are not left to wander about in myths or look to fair weather to understand God’s will. Paul makes clear that the “one God,” descended to earth, dwelt with humanity, died, rose again,

and commissioned witnesses to teach and baptize on His behalf that they might become His people, His temple, and live under His present reign.

The recipients of His letter are to see they have the best company in the cosmos: Christ their Lord, the Holy Spirit, and fellow Christians. They are never alone, in Christ, and this is a good thing. He gives them strength and comfort. Together, they stand firm against the cosmic powers of evil (6:13) and build one another up (4:16) according to God's purposes. One function of our text is the reader matures by discerning "from *whom* or *what* is that *idea, desire or emotion* coming from—the Holy Spirit or some other?"<sup>108</sup> The Ephesians are not slaves to bitterness nor the spirit which nourishes it, they are Christ's.

### Conclusion

The problem I addressed in this essay is the spiritual nature of anger and resentment. The opportunity I see is that this problem is widely recognized, as depicted by Peterson and McGilchrist who (1) diagnose the problem according to their areas of expertise, (2) reveal how our culture contributes to this problem, and (3) propose their own versions of spiritual solutions to the problem along with a call to vigilance that are (4) inadequate and incomplete when compared to Paul's treatment of bitterness in his letter to the Ephesians. In McGilchrist's words—and Peterson would echo him—we must revise "the superior assumption that we understand the world better than our ancestors," and more realistically "acknowledge we may be seeing less than they did."<sup>109</sup>

McGilchrist points out that resentment may be the result of a dominant left hemisphere mode of "knowing" in which we are trapped in a self-reflexive virtual world unwilling to see our ignorance or things in context. To correct this problem, he advocates for "escape" from left hemisphere domination via art and religion because they involve "the body and soul" coming together—a point of weakness for the left hemisphere's mode of knowing. Peterson suggests persistent resentment may be evidence that we are following the archetypal pattern of "the adversary" depicted in mythological villains across cultures and times manifest in "the fascist" or the "the decadent." Rather than tremble and evade the unknown, he calls his reader to follow the pattern of "the hero" who faces the unknown courageously and brings order out of chaos. Paul confirms resentment is a problem and spiritually dangerous but addresses it by reminding the Ephesians of whose they are and whose they are not.

In Ephesians, Paul describes human life as a *walk* always lived within a spiritual playing field never isolated from the Triune God, spiritual forces of evil, sin, and other people. The Ephesians do not live under the lordship of evil, but Christ, Lord over all authorities. Our relationships with the unavoidable company of God, evil forces, sin, and others shape our perceptions, desires, and behaviors. Paul wants them to see the connections between these relationships and their daily walk and he encourages vigilance so that they see the blessings that Christ has won for them are

theirs now, yet the battle with sin and spiritual forces of evil is not over.

The spirituality in Ephesians is the corrective to today's problem of resentment and it is a much different solution than the one presented by the secular authors we explored. In Ephesians, spirituality is based on God's actions *in* Jesus Christ to save (1:7, 2:8-9). Christ is the one *in* whom the mystery of God is revealed (3:6), *in* whom they are made new creatures (4:24), *in* whom they live, walk (2:10, 5:2), "see" (1:18), and mature (4:12-13). Paul illustrates what enlightened "eyes"<sup>110</sup> by the Holy Spirit might see and "new selves" *do* in his encouragement and exhortations<sup>111</sup> for them to "walk in a manner worthy" of their calling (4:1), "to grow up" (4:15), "discern" (5:10), and "be wise" (5:15) across their relationships with God, one another, and with sin and evil. In Christ, they are delivered from sin and spiritual forces of evil which might nourish bitterness, and, instead, made Christ's own, forgiving one another as Christ forgave them. Rather than surrender to resentment, Paul, from prison, sends this letter which proclaims, teaches, and invites the reader to give thanks with him, saying: "blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places..." (1:3).

Endnotes

- 1 Dr. Jordan Peterson is a clinical psychologist popularized by his lectures on the Bible, media interviews, and his "Jordan B. Peterson" podcast. I interact most with his academic magnum opus, *Maps of Meaning: The Architecture of Belief* (1999) whose ideas reoccur throughout his works.
- 2 Peterson, *Maps*, 333.
- 3 McGilchrist, *Master and Emisary*, 93. Dr. Iain McGilchrist is a psychiatrist, neuroscience researcher, philosopher, and literary scholar. His 587-page book has two parts: Part I describes the divided brain and Part II traces his theory through the history of ideas, i.e., "how the brain shaped our world."
- 4 *Ibid.*, xxiii & 7. In his book, scientific materialism (or scientism) refers to an excess and misplaced rationalism contradictory to the "patient and detailed attention to the world," McGilchrist says, that is science. The left hemisphere prizes simple answers, and consistency above all else, is reductionistic and enthusiastic for technological solutions to complex human problems. In the face of "apparent irreconcilables," like matter and consciousness, he says, it acts as if one element or the other does not exist.
- 5 *Ibid.*, xxvi. In his 2022 forward, McGilchrist says: "time is running out, and the way we think, which got us into this mess, will not be enough to get us out of it... we need, I believe, to see the world with new eyes..."
- 6 I define bitterness according to Paul in Ephesians below, too. I am not suggesting we understand "Paul" better by adopting contemporary definitions, I am merely trying to avoid confusion as I use these words interchangeably.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 184 & 186. McGilchrist says affect [e.g., emotional response] comes first, thinking later. He says: "emotion and body are the irreducible core of experience: they are not there merely to help out with cognition. Feeling is not just an add-on, a flavored coating for thought: it is at the heart of our being, and reason emanates from that central core of the emotions, in an attempt to limit and direct them, rather than the other way about." Later he describes how the body responds to commands before cognition occurs, noting, "the brain seemed to know in advance that its 'owner' was going to make a decision to carry out an action."
- 8 Seifrid, *Beyond Law and Gospel?*, 31-34. In many ways, this essay is inspired by Acts 17. Pauline expert Mark Seifrid observes how "Luke presents Paul [in Acts 17] as speaking to his [Athenian] audience about God in their own terms in a way that is nearly scandalous to us. His discourse is so thoroughly informed by Hellenistic and especially Stoic conceptions that, if it were removed from context, we would not recognize it as the voice of Paul." While not at Athens, I seek to engage these thinkers following Paul's example of finding points of contact and confrontation with thought leaders of our day.
- 9 McGilchrist, *Master and Emisary*, 178-179. He describes the "primacy role" of the right brain because of its' grounding role via vigilant attention (over narrowly focused attention), primacy of wholeness (before atomization), and the primacy of experience (presence over "representation" of a thing conceptually).
- 10 Eph 6:18. Paul ends explicitly saying "be alert," yet, against the backdrop of their former (1) hostility with God and others, (2) being in darkness, and (3) following spiritual forces of evil the theme of vigilance can be discerned throughout the letter (4:18-10).
- 11 *Ibid.*, 178. Unlike Plato who thought philosophy began with wonder and awe, Democritus "starts to praise... a refusal to be moved or amazed by anything: 'the stoic sages regard it as their highest aim not to lose their composure...to be astonished by nothing.'" While Paul might be as self-disciplined as the greatest of stoics (1 Cor 9:27), his doxology, prayer for the Ephesian's comprehension of love, awe at the mystery of the Gospel, and frequent call for thanksgiving reveals he has a far different motivation and end-state in mind.
- 12 Seifrid, *Footprints in the Sand*, 95. "We are not yet beyond the battle between unbelief and faith, between the worship of the idols and the worship of the one, true God. We remain simultaneously sinners and saints, and therefore do not yet possess a whole and unified identity but await it in hope. It is the Scripture that interprets us, tells us who we are in our present state, as in the apostle's penetrating narrative of the human encounter with the Law and recognition of the Gospel in Romans 7. So long as we remain in this body and life, we find ourselves in that wretched person, who cries out for deliverance and finds it in Jesus Christ."
- 13 Wilson, *Academic Writing*, 13. This is a comparative two-part essay. This is *not* a "lens essay" whereby modern psychotherapies are used to better understand Paul.
- 14 I borrow the keyhole metaphor from Seifrid.
- 15 Seifrid, *Beyond Law and Gospel?*, 34. Commenting on Paul's address to the Areopagus in Acts 17, he writes "'Confrontation in contact' continues throughout the speech..."
- 16 Questions about "how to act" in the face of the unknown appear even in mundane situations, like: should we risk honesty not knowing how someone will receive our words...withdraw from such conversations...or lie? Why?
- 17 Peterson, *Maps of Meaning*, 10-11.
- 18 Solzhenitsyn, *Gulag*, 308. Excerpt from commentary on criminal courts: "People are not people but 'carriers of specific ideas.' No matter what the individual qualities (of the defendant), only one method of evaluating him is to be applied: evaluation from the point of view of class expediency."
- 19 Peterson, *Maps*, 309. "The... hero... voluntarily faces the dragon of the unknown, cuts it up, and creates the world from its pieces... overcomes the too-long-senescent tyrant and frees the virgin mother from his grasp."
- 20 Peterson's use of the word 'spirit' is not Paul's. Peterson discusses spirit as an idea and pattern of behavior that you follow.
- 21 *Ibid.*, 307.
- 22 *Ibid.*, 307-308.
- 23 Jones & Butman, *Psychotherapies*, 136-137. Two risks with Jung: evil is minimized or maximized. (1) evil is minimized when it is psychologized as the archetypal "shadow" of a historical epoch we are taught to "suppress" but told we should and *can* "integrate" into our personality, or (2) evil is maximized when it becomes "coequal in humanity and God" who are depicted with equal parts of good and bad. For Jung, it seems there is "no clearly articulated external force," that overcomes evil, nor a resurrection where sin is ultimately destroyed.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 310 & 313. Bold italics added.
- 25 *Ibid.*, 311.
- 26 *Ibid.*, 369.
- 27 *Ibid.*, 300.
- 28 *Ibid.*, 311.
- 29 *Ibid.*, 468. "The human purpose... is to pursue meaning—to extend the domain of light, of consciousness—despite limitation. A meaningful event exists on the boundary between order and chaos... The great religious myths state that continued pursuit of meaning... will lead the individual to *discover his identity with God*. This 'revealed identity' will make him capable of withstanding the tragedy of life. Abandonment of meaning, by contrast, reduced man to his mortal weaknesses" (my italics).
- 30 *Ibid.*, 447.
- 31 *Ibid.*, 2. We may change our goal, approach to the goal, or entire value system that led to the creation of a goal.
- 32 *Ibid.*, 333.
- 33 *Ibid.*, xx.
- 34 Cf. Trudeau, *True Myth and Jungian Criticism*, 865. George Trudeau says something like this in his essay putting fantasy writers like Tolkien and C.S. Lewis, who famously called the incarnation "Perfect (true) myth and Perfect Fact," in conversation with Peterson and other Jungians. "When Peterson's humanism is deconstructed, it is clear...[he] is dialoguing with the moral law woven throughout creation...[his] strength is his appeal to objective, natural theology told through imaginative myths."
- 35 Kolb & Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 122 & 124. "...we will give this righteousness of reason the praises it deserves..." Kolb & Arand, *Genius of Luther's Theology*, 29. "Christians need both kinds of righteousness. 'We must be righteous before God and man.'" Luther affirms and distinguishes "two dimensions of human existence: one before God and one before fellow creatures. We have a different kind of righteousness in each relationship: one active before men and once received from God by faith."
- 36 *Ibid.*, 21, 29-30. Arand and Kolb open their book *The Genius of Luther's Theology* with a quote from Luther's lecture on Galatians, writing "both [kinds of righteousness] are necessary, but both must be kept within their limits." Before God, Arand and Kolb note, "we leave all works behind on earth and seek nothing but the righteousness of Christ," received by faith ("divine righteousness"). In thesis 29 of the *Heidelberg Disputation*, Luther says it this way: "whoever wishes without danger to philosophize using Aristotle must beforehand become thoroughly foolish in Christ."
- 37 Voelz, *What Does This Mean*, 365. "Implied Reader: the reader the author has in mind as he writes a text, a construct to be distinguished from

- any real-world readers, i.e., the actual person who has knowledge, abilities, and competency to 'actualize' the text."
- 38 Ibid, 456. "The central ideas of Christianity," he says, "are rooted in Gnostic philosophy, which, in accordance with psychological laws, simply had to grow up at a time when the classical religions had become obsolete." "Yet it could, and it can, and it will happen to everyone in whom the Christian dominant has decayed. For this reason there have always been people who, not satisfied with the dominants of conscious life, set forth—under the cover and by devious paths, to their destruction or salvation—to seek direct experience of the eternal roots and, following the lure of the restless unconscious psyche, find themselves in the wilderness where, like Jesus, they come up against the son of darkness..." ; Jones & Butman, *Psychotherapies*, 129 & 135; Vitz, *Psychology as Religion*, 2. While Peterson is not Jung, Vitz quotation form Jung bears on this essay. Jung said "patients force the psychotherapist into the role of priest... we psychotherapists must occupy ourselves with problems which strictly speaking belong to the Theologian."
- 39 McGilchrist, *Master and Emisary*, 462. E.g., "alienation versus engagement, abstraction versus incarnation, the categorical versus the unique..."
- 40 Ibid, 3.
- 41 Ibid, xv, 11, 13. McGilchrist uniquely draws on insights from neuroscience, philosophy, social sciences, and medical research on split-brain patients (people permanently with one functioning hemisphere), healthy patients with temporary deactivation of one hemisphere, and those with mental disorders. His focus is on the average human, however, and what is true for 95 percent of us. While most of us have not suffered a stroke leaving us with a single functioning hemisphere, he notes, "to the extent that a process goes on usefully in one hemisphere, it reinforces the sending of information preferentially to that hemisphere in the future" which might "compound during development, ultimately producing a wide range of functional asymmetries, via a snowball' mechanism."
- 42 Ibid, xvi.
- 43 Ibid, xvi.
- 44 Ibid, xxii. He believes his theory offers four things: (1) a coherent picture of previously unconnected observations about hemisphere differences, (2) a paradigm for addressing shortcomings that would otherwise be addressed by ineffective piecemeal strategies (3) individual ability to "reappraise [the] left hemisphere's world view", (4) a means to evaluate our thinking from a "descriptive, phenomenological model, anchored in the science of the brain." Ten years after the original publication, he observes we are even "more like individuals with right hemisphere deficits."
- 45 Ibid, 61. "The right frontal lobe is of critical importance for emotional expression of virtually every kind through the face and body posture. The one exception to the right hemisphere superiority for the expression of emotion is anger. Anger is robustly connected with the left frontal lobe."
- 46 Ibid, 81-82. After a "right-sided lesion, the brain loses the contextual information that would help it make sense of experience; the left hemisphere... makes up a story... appears completely convinced by it... even in the absence of amnesia, the left hemisphere exhibits a strong tendency to confabulate...[and it] appears predisposed to repress negative emotions."
- 47 Ibid, 44, 46-47.
- 48 Anger often signals a lack of *vigilant* or *alert* attention to what we do not know because it is *focused* attention predicated on a presupposed certainty about a thing.
- 49 Ibid, xxiii & 7.
- 50 Ibid, 439.
- 51 Ibid, 133.
- 52 Ibid, 135.
- 53 Ibid, 441.
- 54 Ibid, 52 & 447. "Cognition in the right hemisphere is not a process of something coming into being through adding piece to piece in a sequence, but of something that is out of focus coming into focus, in its context as a whole."
- 55 Ibid, 51.
- 56 Ibid, 88.
- 57 Ibid, 54.
- 58 Ibid, 48.
- 59 Ibid, 341.
- 60 Ibid, 6.
- 61 Ibid, 441. italics added.
- 62 Ibid, 441. He quotes and echoes Nietzsche in this paragraph.
- 63 Ibid, 442.
- 64 Ibid, 6. McGilchrist suggests that our contemporary society's "relentless growth of self-consciousness, conflict, and instability" marked by "alternations between extreme positions" evidences our inability to break out of the left-hemisphere "self-reflexive virtual world."
- 65 Ibid, 452. He also refers to something like a renaissance of art, and music, along with a look to the East which has a "healthy skepticism" to language and is less prone to rationalism, he says.
- 66 Ibid, 14. This is metaphor he modifies from Nietzsche.
- 67 Ibid, xxiv.
- 68 Ibid, 438.
- 69 Ibid, 438, 440, 442, 460.
- 70 Ibid, xv, 11, 13.
- 71 Ibid, 234.
- 72 Ibid, 234.
- 73 Ibid, 442.
- 74 Gibbs, *Myth of Righteous Anger*.
- 75 Ibid, 97.
- 76 Vitz, *Psychology as Religion*, 113-114. Vitz added a chapter called "Psychology of New Age Spirituality" to the 1994 edition of his book. He lists its' tenets: All is one, all is God, humanity is God, a change in consciousness is needed, all religions are one, cosmic evolutionary optimism, and, a final important characteristic is frequent "rejection of reason as 'left-brain' thinking...in contrast to New Age emphasis on 'right-brain' mental life, such as mysticism."
- 77 McGilchrist, *Master and Emisary*, 7. "... this book has nothing to offer those who would undermine reason, which, along with imagination, is the most precious thing we owe to the working together of the two hemispheres. My quarrel is only with an excessive and misplaced rationalism which has never been subjugated to the judgement of reason and is in conflict with it."
- 78 Ibid, 85 & 131. He distinguishes between rationality and reason.
- 79 Eph 5:26; Matt 28:19-20; Acts 18:24-20:38.
- 80 Winger, *Ephesians*, 240, 263-165. Winger notes eyes are the object of "give," and "Paul's prayer is 'that God would give to you...eyes that have [and remain] enlightened.'" Without the gifts of Spirit and Enlightenment, there is "no possibility of spiritual knowledge."
- 81 Ibid, 263-264. "a most remarkable image [i.e., opened or enlightened eyes of your heart] . . .hints at the origin of a Christian's spiritual knowledge and introduce a theme that will play quietly throughout the epistle;" William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 765.  $\rho\alpha\pi\acute{\epsilon}\sigma\kappa\alpha\upsilon$ : urge strongly, appeal to, urge, exhort, encourage.
- 82 Winger, *Ephesians*, 530. Best, *Ephesians*, 461.
- 83 Winger, *Ephesians*, 530; Best, *Ephesians*, 460-461; DeSilva, *Ephesians*, 241-242; Best, *Ephesians* 461. Best cites Lincoln (308), too.
- 84 Winger, *Ephesians*, 520. "'Anger/wrath' and in the present context is an entirely negative emotion that should not characterize relations between Christians." Paul uses the metaphor of life as a walk seven times (2:1, 2:10, 4:1, 4:17, 5:2, 5:8, 5:15).
- 85 Cf. Winger, *Ephesians*, 185. "The worldview of the Ephesians suggests it refers to heaven as multilayered (Eph 4:10), a diverse playing field for good and evil spirits (6:12, cf. 2:2);" Cohick, *Ephesians*, 1.
- 86 Eph 1:3, 20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12.
- 87 Paul uses the metaphor of life as a walk seven times (2:1, 2:10, 4:1, 4:17, 5:2, 5:8, 5:15).
- 88 This is evidenced by Paul's encouragement for them to build one another up in the church (cf. 4:1, 11-12, 15) and across marriages, families,

- and work (5:22-33, 6:1-9). Bitterness corrupts such relationships.
- 89 This does not deny personal responsibility. In 4:19, Paul writes “they have become callous and have given themselves up...” In 4:19 Paul writes: *ἔαυτοῦς παρέδωκαν*. The verb (*παρέδωκαν*) is active third person plural. In other words, “they” (the Gentiles) are the subject or the ones doing the handing over. Who are they handing over? “ἔαυτοῦς” –themselves. Cf. Winger, *Ephesians*, 509.
- 90 William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 99.
- 91 as if on the prowl, cf. 1 Pet 5:8.
- 92 Paul does not suggest “bitterness” means someone has lost the Holy Spirit or salvation. He does aim to cultivate vigilance and does not want the Ephesians to be naïve to the schemes of the Devil and tossed about aimlessly. My audience for this article is not “the grieving” –I recommend those grieving and battling with bitterness see a pastor or counselor.
- 93 Paul teaches: Christ is Lord, Christ has blessed them with every spiritual blessing, Christ has delivered them, Christ’s shed blood has forgiven their sins, Christ reveals the mysteries of God, Christ died, Christ rose again, Christ reigns over all things, Christ is head of his body the church, Christ makes them alive, Christ raised them up with him and seated them in the heavenly places with him, in Christ they are made new creatures, Christ makes different people into one new people, Christ is the realization of God’s eternal purposes, Christ is the cornerstone of God’s household, Christ dwells in their hearts through faith, Christ loves them, Christ descended to earth and gave them offices of ministry, Christ’s Apostle is Paul, Christ forgives, Christ’s self-sacrifice was a pleasing aroma to God, Christ is their master and they are his bondservants, Christ’s lordship has implications for all of their relationships.
- 94 Ibid, 524. “The reference to the devil is an appropriate further reminder of Eden. Paul’s meaning is ‘let not be Eden be played out again in your life.’”
- 95 “in him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit” (2:22); “to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God” (3:19).
- 96 Luke 11:33-36.
- 97 The Ephesians face difficulties and decisions which they discern as those in Christ. Their difficulties range from learning to live with formerly hostile ethnic groups (2:11-3:13), speaking the truth with one another (4:15), worrying about Paul’s imprisonment (3:13), discerning wise actions in an unhelpful cultural context (4:17-19), living as husband and wife (5:22-33), being a parent or a child (6:1-4), being a leader or subordinate (6:5-9), and suffering spiritual assault (6:16). It takes no effort to imagine how anger and bitterness might spring up in any of these relationships and when it does, Paul might whisper: “Christ the Lord is with you –keep alert.” Life exists in unavoidable relationships with spiritual forces of evil, sin, God, and other people.
- 98 I use McGilchrist’s terms following an Acts 17-esque pattern, not because I think they are exegetically most correct.
- 99 See also, Kolb & Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 457 & 460. Luther observes in his Large Catechism how, already in the 16th century, some preachers arose “who scream that baptism is an external thing and that external things are of no use” not seeing that **“faith must have something to believe –something to which it may cling and upon which it may stand. Thus, faith clings to the water which believes it to be baptism...yes, it must be external so that it can be perceived and grasped by the senses and thus brought into the heart, just as the entire gospel is an external, oral proclamation...without faith baptism is of no use**, although in itself it is an infinite, divine treasure. So this single expression, ‘the one who believes,’ [Mark 16:16] is so powerful that it excludes and drives out all works that we may do with the intention of gaining and meriting salvation through them.”; McGilchrist, *Master and Emisary*, 315. McGilchrist discusses these sorts of reformation-age preachers and suggests that Luther critiqued a divorce of the inner and outer world, whereas those who came after him (whom he leaves unnamed) erred and “took it to mean that the outer world was in itself empty, and that therefore the only authenticity lay in the inner world alone.”
- 100 Kolb & Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 462. “Luther writes ‘this is the reason why these two things are done in baptism: the body has water poured over it, because all it can receive is the water, and in addition, the Word is spoken so that the soul may receive it.’”
- 101 McGilchrist, *Master and Emisary*, 315.
- 102 Wengert, *Annotated Luther I*, 85.
- 103 Acts 20:28-31
- 104 Luke 7:40-43.
- 105 Cf. Revelation 12:7-17.
- 106 Peterson, *Maps*, 220. Quoting Nietzsche: “What is essential ‘in heaven and on earth’; seems to be...that there should be obedience over a long period of time and in a single direction: given that, something always develops, and has developed for whose sake it is worthwhile to live on earth; for example, virtue, art, music, dance, reason, spirituality –something transfiguring, subtle, mad, divine... the long spiritual will to interpret all events under a Christian schema and to rediscover and justify the Christian god in every accident –all this, however forced, capricious, hard, gruesome, and antirational, has shown itself to be the means through which the European spirit has been trained to strength, ruthless curiosity, and subtle mobility...”
- 107 For Paul there is only “one Lord” (4:5) and he was raised by God and presently reigns over every rule, power, authority, and dominion (1:20). Elsewhere, in 2 Timothy, Paul, on at least ten occasions expounds the Word of Truth, the gospel, or “testimony about our Lord” which he sets in contrast to “itching ears” accumulating teachers to suit their own passions and “wandering off into myths.”
- 108 Cf. Kolb & Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 494. An illustration of FC, Article II, paragraph 17.
- 109 Ibid, 461. Peterson, *Maps*, 8-9.
- 110 Ibid, 263-264. “a most remarkable image [i.e., opened or enlightened eyes of your heart]... hints at the origin of a Christian’s spiritual knowledge and introduce a theme that will play quietly throughout the epistle.”
- 111 William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 765. Παράκαλῶ: urge strongly, appeal to, urge, exhort, encourage.