

11-15-2017

# Institutional Racism, 'Horizontal Spiritual Warfare,' and Ephesians 6:10-17

Mark D. Owens

*Cedarville University*, [markowens@cedarville.edu](mailto:markowens@cedarville.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: [http://digitalcommons.cedarville.edu/  
biblical\\_and\\_ministry\\_studies\\_presentations](http://digitalcommons.cedarville.edu/biblical_and_ministry_studies_presentations)

---

## Recommended Citation

Owens, Mark D., "Institutional Racism, 'Horizontal Spiritual Warfare,' and Ephesians 6:10-17" (2017). *Biblical and Theological Studies Faculty Presentations*. 238.

[http://digitalcommons.cedarville.edu/biblical\\_and\\_ministry\\_studies\\_presentations/238](http://digitalcommons.cedarville.edu/biblical_and_ministry_studies_presentations/238)

This Conference Presentation is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@Cedarville, a service of the Centennial Library. It has been accepted for inclusion in Biblical and Theological Studies Faculty Presentations by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Cedarville. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@cedarville.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@cedarville.edu).

## **Institutional Racism, “Horizontal Spiritual Warfare,” and Ephesians 6:10–17**

Almost two decades ago, sociologists Michael Emerson and Christian Smith concluded white evangelicals tend to view racism as a problem within individuals that results from personal sin.<sup>1</sup> I would argue that while more white evangelicals today are open to the concept of institutional racism (particularly progressive evangelicals), there is still a strong inclination to question the viability of this concept. My primary goal in this paper is to foster greater dialogue on this issue because quite honestly, this is a very personal issue for me. In this paper, I will argue that there are biblical grounds for affirming the concept of institutional racism and viewing it as an aspect of spiritual warfare. I will also explore how Paul’s discussion of the “armor of God” in Eph. 6 might be appropriated as a biblical means of responding to this social issue. This paper will proceed in three major steps: 1) I will briefly discuss the nature of institutional racism; 2) I will address some biblical texts that correlate demonic activity with human institutions (specifically Deut 32:8–9; Dan 10; and Psa. 82); and 3) I will explore how Paul’s discussion of the “armor of God” in Eph 6:10–17 might be brought to bear upon addressing this pressing problem.

So we will begin by exploring the nature of institutional racism. Before we enter into this controversial subject, I need to remind everyone that I’m no social scientist and my academic expertise in this area is quite limited. Ultimately, I would define institutional racism as intentional and unintentional racial disparity that results from the work of human institutions. The term “institutional racism” was first used by Stokely Carmichael and Christopher Hamilton

---

<sup>1</sup> M. Emerson and C. Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), esp. p. 74–75.

in their book, “Black Power.” For Carmichael and Hamilton, the term was a way of capturing the potential for racial disparity to result from the work of human institutions such as governments, educational institutions, and businesses. For Carmichael and Hamilton, racism was more than just physical violence or the use of racial slurs; racism also occurs when a slumlord neglects his rental properties in a Black ghetto while adequately maintaining his property in an affluent White neighborhood. Eventually, social scientists began making the distinction between intentional racism and unintentional racism. In other words, it has been suggested that sometimes racial disparity occurs not because of the values and prejudices of those who make up a human institution but because of the policies and procedures within that human institution. For example, it has been observed that there is a disproportionate number of African American children within the US foster care system. One could argue that this disparity is the result of racist attitudes. However, it has been suggested that the problem lies not with social workers, who tend to be very good-natured, but with various policies and procedures. Another relevant example might be the significantly higher percentage of African American males that have been incarcerated in the prison system because of drug crimes. The central problem behind this particular racist outcome is likely the drug laws passed during the Clinton presidency, which one could assume were value-free.

I will now address some key biblical texts that correlate demonic activity with human institutions. The first text I will examine is Deut. 32:8. This is a natural entry-point into this discussion because Deut. 32:8 is foundational for Scripture’s discussion of this issue. We will first address the original reading of v. 8. According to 4QDeut., YHWH “set the boundaries of the peoples according to the number of the sons of god.” The LXX somewhat similarly suggests

YHWH “set the boundaries of the peoples according to the number of the angels of god.” The MT, on the other hand, suggests YHWH “established the boundaries of the people according to the number of the sons of Israel.” Most scholars follow the reading of 4QDeut. and this certainly seems to be the most viable conclusion. It is, after all, easier to explain why a scribe would alter “sons of god” to “sons of Israel” rather than vice versa. It is also generally recognized that the theological background for the reading “sons of god” is the ANE concept of the divine council. Within ANE literature, this concept took the form of an assembly of deities that ruled over the affairs of the cosmos (cf. *UT* 126.V.1–28; 128.II.2–7).<sup>2</sup> This notion is then adopted within the Old Testament as a way of depicting the relationship between the “Most High” and the angelic figures he has created (see Job 1:6; 2:1; Psa. 29:1; 82:1; 89:7). Ultimately, most scholars argue that the MT reading is best explained as an attempt to avoid a polytheistic understanding of v. 8.<sup>3</sup>

I’ll now address the theological significance of Deut. 32:8. When read with v. 9, the statements in Deut. 32:8 are intended to highlight the special status of the Israelite people by placing their divine election in the primeval period.<sup>4</sup> For the purposes of this present discussion, v. 8 is particularly significant because of the role it plays in the development of the concept of the “angel of the nations.” The dispersion referred to in v. 8 is likely an allusion to the Tower of Babel incident of Gen. 11:1–9. Essentially, v. 8 suggests that when the “Most High” scattered the nations and assigned them geographic territory, he allotted their territory in correlation to the

---

<sup>2</sup> See “Divine Assembly,” Anchor Bible Vol. 2, 214–217. Gordon, *Ugaritic Textbook* Rome, 1967.

<sup>3</sup> E.g. D. Christesen, *Deuteronomy 21:10–34:12* (WBC 6B; Nashville; Thomas Nelson, 2002), 796. Gordon McConville, however, suggests, “the motive for the change may not have been mere defensiveness against polytheism, since the divine-council idea was well known and understood non-mythologically. It may rather reflect an idea that entered Jewish interpretation, that the seventy descendants of Jacob (Gen. 46:27) matched the seventy nations catalogued in Gen. 10, and also that each nation had its own angel.” J. G. McConville, *Deuteronomy* (AOTC; Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2002), 454. Cf. Tg. Ps. -J.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. McConville, *Deuteronomy*, 453.

number of the “sons of god.” V. 8 thus establishes a correlation between angelic beings and political entities.

The Book of Daniel provides us with a bit more information about these “angels of the nations.” Within Daniel, angelic figures associated with the nations of Israel and Persia are referred to using royal language in Dan. 10:13, 20–21 and Dan. 12:1. More specifically, these texts refer to the angel Gabriel as “one of the chief princes” (τῶν ἀρχόντων τῶν πρώτων), the angel Michael as “your prince”<sup>5</sup>, and an anonymous “prince of the kingdom of Persia.”<sup>6</sup> It is worth noting that the Theodotian version of Daniel uses the Greek noun ἄρχων to refer to these angelic figures, which is the same noun used in the Gospels and in the Pauline corpus to refer to demonic figures (e.g., Matt. 9:34; Eph. 2:2).<sup>7</sup> Again, scholars generally argue the “divine council” concept underlies Daniel’s references to these three angelic figures.<sup>8</sup> These texts within Daniel’s prophecy thus postulate a continuing relationship between the angelic figures and political entities in Deut. 32:8.

Daniel’s prophecy also gives *some* clarity to the activity of these “angels of the nations.” Daniel 10 is a visionary description of a spiritual conflict between Israel’s “prince” and the “prince of the kingdom of Persia.” Central to this conflict is the attempt on the part of the “prince of the kingdom of Persia” to delay a message intended to inform Daniel of what would transpire in the “last days” (see v. 13–14).<sup>9</sup> In Dan 11:2–3, the angel informs Daniel that the kingdom of

---

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Th. Dan 10:21

<sup>6</sup> The LXX seems to historicize the reference to the “prince of the Kingdom of Persia” in v. 13, yet also simply refers to Michael as “the prince.” Dan Th more closely follows the MT.

<sup>7</sup> See Th. Dan. 10:21.

<sup>8</sup> E.g., J. Goldingay, *Daniel* (WBC 30; Dallas; Word, 1987), 291–92.

<sup>9</sup> From Dan 10:2, 12 we learn that Daniel has been in a season of prayer and intense mourning. The angelic figure mentioned in v. 12–13 has apparently been tasked with answering Daniel’s prayer by bringing him a revelation that

Persia will continue its course to dominate the ANE, but will eventually meet its demise at the hands of the Kingdom of Greece. It is this feature of the vision that likely formed the impetus behind the prince of Persia's attempt to delay the angel of Dan. 10:12–13. According to Ernest Lucas, “presumably the idea implied is that “the prince of Persia” tried to prevent the declaration of the message because the declaration of God’s intentions means its implementation.”<sup>10</sup> From this text, we see that these “angels of the nations” are able to do battle with other angels. We also see from Dan 10 that these angels actively work to protect the interests of the nations under their authority. Finally, we see that there is a correlation between the events that transpire in the spiritual realm and events that unfold on earth.

Is it possible to be more concrete regarding the activity of these angelic figures and their earthly impact? Psalm 82 may provide us with some answers to this question that are particularly helpful for the larger question I’m addressing in this paper. Unfortunately, Psalm 82 is not without its own set of complex questions, the principal one being the identity of the “gods” of v. 2 and v. 6.<sup>11</sup> Generally speaking, there are three primary ways these “gods” have been understood: 1) human judges; 2) angelic figures; and 3) earthly kings that claim divine status.<sup>12</sup> Most modern interpreters of Psalm 82 seem to interpret the “gods” of v. 2 and v. 6 within the framework of the ANE “divine council.”<sup>13</sup> This approach to the identity of the “gods” makes the

---

concerns what will happen to his people “in the last days” (ἐπ’ ἐσχάτου τῶν ἡμερῶν). The full content of this revelatory vision is not presented to the reader until Dan. 11:2–12:3.

<sup>10</sup> E. Lucas, *Daniel* (AOTC; Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2002), 276.

<sup>11</sup> According to Julian Morgenstern [“The Mythological Background of Psalm 82, *HUCA* 14 (1939): 28–29], “scarcely any psalm seems to have troubled interpreters more or to have experienced a wider range of interpretation and a more disturbing uncertainty and lack of finality therein than Psalm 82.”<sup>11</sup> Cited in W. Prinsloo, “Psalm 82: Once Again, Gods or Men?” *Bib* 72 (1995): 219.

<sup>12</sup> See W. Prinsloo, “Psalm 82: Once Again, Gods or Men?,” *Bib* 76 (1995): 219–228; J. Trotter, “Death of the אַלִּימִי in Psalm 82,” *JBL* 131 (2012): 228–33.

<sup>13</sup> E.g. Trotter, “Death,” 222–28.

most sense of v. 6, where God states, “nevertheless, like men you shall die, and fall like any prince.” This then seems to be best interpreted as a pronouncement of mortality upon angelic figures.

At the same time, Herbert Niehr has argued that the divine indictment expressed in Psa. 82 actually falls upon both angelic figures and human judges.<sup>14</sup> Niehr thus argues for a mediating position that prevents one from falling into the fallacy of the excluded middle. Niehr’s reading of this text ultimately seems to correlate best with the interplay between demonic influence and human agency in texts like Dan 10–12 and is probably the best solution to this difficult question.

Now that we have addressed the identity of the “gods” of Psa. 82, we may now consider the portion of the psalm most relevant to this discussion...the Psalmists statements in v. 2–5. There we see that the “gods” of Psa 82 have drawn the ire of Elohim because of their unjust treatment of the “orphan,” the “poor,” the “low” and the “needy” (see v. 3–4).<sup>15</sup> From v. 2 we can conclude the human and angelic “gods” of Psalm 82 apparently have shown favoritism to the wealthy over against the poor. The divine assessment of this pattern of injustice in v. 5 is also worth considering. According to v. 5, the biased “gods” lack knowledge, understanding, are aligned with the “darkness,” and have upset the fabric of justice that should pervade the affairs of this world. Verse 5 thus suggests the Almighty takes justice so seriously that the presence of injustice leads him to conclude “all the foundations of the earth are shaken.”<sup>16</sup> This admittedly

---

<sup>14</sup> H. Niehr, “Götter oder Menschen - eine falsche Alternative: Bemerkungen zu Ps 8,” *ZAW* (1987): 94–98.

<sup>15</sup> It is interesting, by the way, to note that language used to describe those whom the “gods” have aided in v. 2 is purely moral (ἀδικίαν and ἁμαρτωλῶν), as opposed to the purely socio-economic descriptors in v. 3–4.

<sup>16</sup> According to S. Terrien (*The Psalms: Strophic Structure and Theological Commentary* [CEC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003], 590), “Criminality and social irresponsibility upset the stability and goodness of creation. The earth will shake and quake in revulsion to human unfairness.”

brief statement on the part of the Almighty, when understood within the context of Psa. 82, provides a clear window into God's concern for justice and should cause present-day Christ-followers to consider seriously the opportunities they have to minister to the oppressed and downtrodden.<sup>17</sup>

I'll now briefly examine the theological implications of Psa 82, particularly as they relate to the activity of these angelic figures. For the purposes of this present discussion, it is critical to note that these angelic figures are again depicted influencing the outcomes of human institutions. Admittedly, the focus of Psa 82 is on the manifestation of injustice and oppression of the poor through the human court system. The psalmist therefore addresses the potential for these angelic figures to produce inequitable outcomes through a specific human institution. However, given the variety of human institutions, it is certainly within the realm of possibility to conclude that these angelic figures work to "shake the foundations of God's good creation" through other human institutions as well.

I'd like to now return to my definition of institutional racism. I began this paper by defining institutional racism as "intentional and unintentional racial disparity that results from the work of human institutions." This definition ultimately attributes racial disparity to two principal causes: intentional causes and unintentional causes. In some cases, the intentional causes may be laws, but in our context, they are primarily the values and prejudices of individuals working within human institutions. On the other hand, the unintentional causes are

---

<sup>17</sup> Having said that, I do want to take seriously the place of Jesus' call to make disciples within the Great Commission (see Matt. 28:18–20). The mission of the Church ultimately is to make disciples of all the nations. Social justice concerns thus should not take precedence over evangelism and discipleship. To anticipate my broader discussion of the "armor of God" in Eph. 6:10–17, I will briefly note here that Paul's comments in this text will actually help us balance these two disparate concerns.

the value-free laws, policies, and procedures that underlie the work of human institutions. For both of these causes, perhaps especially the unintentional factors, the reality of demonic activity may serve as a helpful way of accounting for the discriminatory outcomes that we see manifested in our world today.

I will now propose a biblical means for addressing institutional racism. Various approaches to countering institutional racism have been adopted within the secular arena. These means generally encompass some form of social action such as protests and for Millennials, social media activism. Yet if the discrimination and oppression associated with institutional racism does indeed result from the influence of satanic forces, then institutional racism is essentially a spiritual problem that must also be combatted with spiritual weapons. With this in mind, it is natural to then consider how Paul's description of the "armor of God" in Eph. 6:10–17 might be brought to bear upon this social malady.

Before I examine the relevance of Eph. 6:10–17 to this social and spiritual problem, I would like to make a few general comments about the interpretation of this popular text. First, I would like to comment on how this "battle" in v. 10–17 is typically understood. Generally speaking, this text is understood as a call for individual Christ-followers to don the spiritual resources that are available to them in Christ. Our "enemies" in this battle are identified in v. 12 and these enemies are typically understood as satanic forces, human institutions, or our fleshly desires.<sup>18</sup> Without offering a blanket approval for all that comes along with these varied understandings of spiritual warfare in this text, I would note that Paul's brevity and polyvalent

---

<sup>18</sup> See J. Beilby and P. Eddy, "Introduction," in *Understanding Spiritual Warfare: Four Views* (ed. J. Beilby and P. Eddy; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 32–43.

imagery allows for a variety of approaches to spiritual warfare. I will say, however, that these individualized understandings of spiritual warfare do not account for three important textual considerations: 1) the corporate nature of Paul's language in v. 10–17; 2) Paul's use of Isaianic tradition in v. 14–15 and v. 17; and 3) the relationship between this text and the new creation theme in this letter. I have elsewhere argued that when these three factors are accounted for, one is able to conclude that engaging in spiritual warfare ultimately extends the new creation inaugurated by Christ's sacrificial death.<sup>19</sup> In other words, as the people of God corporately don the "armor of God" and battles are won, the kingdom of God gains more "territory."

I will now briefly address Paul's identification of the "powers" in Eph. 6:12. Attempts to limit the identity of the powers to human institutions are extremely problematic and will not be discussed at length here. More pressing is Paul's introductory statement "our battle is not against flesh and blood." One can conclude from this statement that these "powers" are not to be strictly identified with human beings. Having said that, a distinction should be made between individual human beings and the human institutions that are formed when individual human beings come together to achieve certain social functions.<sup>20</sup> So, while Paul does remind us in v. 12 that "our battle is not against flesh and blood," we should remember that evil can be furthered through the work of human institutions and that evil may be at least partly attributed to the work of the "powers." This distinction between individual human beings and human institutions is important for two reasons. First, as we examine institutional racism, we are ultimately examining racist outcomes that can be attributed to the influence of demonic forces upon those within human

---

<sup>19</sup> M. Owens, "Spiritual Warfare and the Church's Mission according to Ephesians 6:10–17," *TB* 67 (2016): 87–103.

<sup>20</sup> According to the Oxford Dictionary of Sociology, a "human institution" refers to "a set of mores, folkways, and patterns of behaviour that deals with major social interests: law, church, and family for example."

institutions. I would describe this correlation between demonic forces and human institutions as “horizontal spiritual warfare.” Second, if we assume traditions like Psalm 82 would have influenced Paul’s understanding of the cause of evil, this distinction allows us to consider how the “armor of God” in v. 14–17 could be used to counter social evils like institutional racism. With that said, let us now look more closely at v. 14–17.

The first piece of armor mentioned in this text is the “belt of truth” (v. 14). The noun ἀληθεία and its derivatives are often used in reference to the gospel within Ephesians. For example, in Eph. 1:13 Paul refers to the “word of truth” and then defines it as the “gospel of your salvation” (see also Eph. 4:15, 21; Col. 1:5). The “breastplate of truth” (ἀληθεία) likely refers to the gospel (see Eph. 1:13; 4:15, 21). Paul is then likely encouraging believers to find strength and encouragement by reminding themselves of the truths of the gospel.

Paul next refers to the “breastplate of righteousness” in Eph. 4:14. The immediate and wider context favors reading the genitive objectively as a reference to God’s own righteousness. Having said that, it is quite likely that Paul conceives of this divine righteousness subjectively influencing believers as they engage the forces of evil. To put on the “breastplate of righteousness” would then be akin to putting on one’s new identity that results from receiving Christ’s righteousness and then living that identity out.<sup>21</sup>

The “gospel of peace” is also best understood in a defensive sense. The genitive phrase τῆς εἰρήνης is best understood as a genitive of product. We might then paraphrase v. 15 “and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel that produces peace”.

---

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 841; Best, *Ephesians*, 599; Muddiman, *Ephesians*, 291; Reinhard, “Ephesians 6:10–18,” 524; O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 474–75; Arnold, *Ephesians*, 453.

Interpreting the “gospel of peace” in this way tracks well with the Apostle’s portrait of Christ’s peace-making ministry in Eph. 2:11–18. Paul is likely therefore calling believers to gain strength and comfort by recalling Christ’s victorious death.<sup>22</sup>

Paul then turns to discussing the “shield of faith” in v. 16. Paul clearly gives this piece of armor a defensive function as he notes the shield’s ability to “quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one” (cf. 1 Thess. 5:8; 1 Pet. 5:8–9). There is still some room for debate in terms of whether the genitive refers subjectively to the individual faith of a believer or objectively to the Christian faith. The majority of interpreters lean toward the subjective reading and the closing phrase of v. 16 supports this reading.<sup>23</sup> Nonetheless, Paul does use the definite article with the noun πίστις (“faith”) in v. 16, which could then indicate he is referring to “the body of truths associated with the Christian faith.”<sup>24</sup> It may be helpful here to distinguish “objective reality” from “subjective application.” This distinction allows one to recognize that the faith of an individual Christ-follower must be firmly established in an objective set of truths.<sup>25</sup>

Paul then addresses the “helmet of salvation” in v. 17. Here the question is not so much the nature of the genitive, but the temporal dimension of “salvation” that Paul is referring to here. There is a something of a consensus that Paul here emphasizes (as he does in much of Ephesians) our present experience of salvation (cf. Eph. 2:5–6).<sup>26</sup> According to Clinton Arnold, to “take the

---

<sup>22</sup> This way of construing the significance of the “gospel of peace” in v. 15 fits much better with the phrase καὶ ὑποδησάμενοι τοὺς πόδας ἐν ἐτοιμασίᾳ|. In other words, while Paul’s statements in Eph. 6:15 are related to Isaiah’s new exodus, they are only related in an indirect way, such that believers are called to stand (pun intended) on the victory established through the death and resurrection of Christ. This reading of Eph. 6:15 then ultimately recognizes that Isa. 52:7 is fulfilled principally by Jesus Christ not Christ-followers.

<sup>23</sup> E.g. Schnackenburg, *Epheser*, 285; Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 846.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Best, *Ephesians*, 601.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Fowl, *Ephesians*, 207; Barth, *Ephesians 4–6*, 772–73.

<sup>26</sup> E.g. O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 481; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 450–51; pace Muddiman, *Ephesians*, 293. Paul, however, does not ignore the future dimension of salvation in this letter (cf. Eph. 4:30).

helmet of salvation” thus likely means “to realize and appropriate one’s new identity in Christ, which gives believers power for deliverance from the supernatural enemies on the basis of their union with the resurrected and exalted Lord.”<sup>27</sup>

Thus far, the “weapons” we have examined primarily have a defensive function. I will now briefly address how these defensive “weapons” might be utilized within this framework of “horizontal spiritual warfare.” These defensive weapons would primarily serve as sources of encouragement in the midst of spiritual attack or earthly suffering. Interestingly, Paul himself reminds the Ephesians of his own suffering shortly after this passage and asks them to pray to God on his behalf (see v. 19–20). One can certainly imagine that confronting the earthly “powers” that perpetuate institutional racism will lead to earthly sufferings of various kinds. During such times, Paul is calling believers to recall the spiritual resources that are available to them in Christ.

I will now briefly address the final piece of armor...the “sword of the Spirit.” Most scholars rightly note that this is an offensive weapon. Some argue Paul is referring to the use of Scripture during times of temptation, much like Jesus countered Satan in the wilderness (cf. Matt. 4:1–11; Luke 4:1–13). The noun *ῥῆμα* (“word”), however, only occurs one other time in Ephesians and there in Eph. 5:26 it almost certainly refers to the gospel of Jesus Christ.<sup>28</sup> The context of Eph. 5:26 strongly emphasizes the religious significance of Christ’s death, so it is then natural to understand the noun “word” (*ῥήματι*) as a reference to the gospel. Of these two

---

<sup>27</sup> Arnold, *Ephesians*, 460.

<sup>28</sup> The noun *λόγος* also frequently refers to the gospel in Paul (e.g. 2 Cor. 2:17; 4:2; Eph. 1:13; Col. 1:25; 1 Thess. 2:13; Titus 1:3).

options, the latter makes the most sense within the context of this letter. The phrase “word of God” in Eph. 6:17 therefore likely refers to the proclamation of the gospel.

How then might the gospel be understood as an offensive weapon? Two key points are relevant here. First, it is important to remember that the gospel accomplishes more than the salvation of lost sinners. If the gospel is a message that encompasses all that Jesus has accomplished on the cross, there is good reason to understand the gospel touching individual human beings, the entire created order, and corporate humanity (see Eph 2:11–22; Gal. 3:28; Rev. 21–22). Second, it is also important to remember that Paul’s discussion of the “armor of God” in this text likely has significant ties to the new creation theme within this letter. With that said, we should bear in mind that the gospel is implicitly related to new creation in Eph. 1:7–10, particularly as Paul describes God’s plan to “unite all things in Christ” (see v. 10). We should also note that Paul describes the corporate church as God’s means of expanding the impact of Christ’s death in Eph. 1:23. The corporate church plays an important role within this entire letter and Eph. 6:10–17 is one of Paul’s extended discussions of that role (recall my earlier observation that Paul uses corporate language in Eph. 6:10–17). With all that said, we can reasonably conclude that wielding the “sword of the Spirit” empowers the Church “to *extend* Christ’s victory and the new creation.”<sup>29</sup> In other words, as the gospel of the kingdom is proclaimed and takes root within the heart of an unbeliever, that individual is most certainly transformed, but there is also the very real possibility for societal change and transformation to also take place.

---

<sup>29</sup> The use of the verb “extend” in this sentence is intended to distinguish between the inauguration of the new creation through Christ’s death and resurrection (cf. 2 Cor. 5:14–17) and the process of expanding the impact of Christ’s victory through the church’s proclamation of the gospel. This process of extending Christ’s victory is expressed through the present tense participle πληρουμένου in Eph. 1:23 and is ultimately the means by which the *anakephalaiōsis* of all things is achieved post-Calvary.

One need only consider the Church's role in the Abolition and Civil Rights movement to see concrete examples of this truth, though others could certainly be noted.

If the gospel indeed impacts society at large, then we would do well to consider its importance for combatting institutional racism. There are undoubtedly earthly influences underlying institutional racism and there is therefore a place for using earthly resources to address this problem. However, if there are spiritual forces at play and institutional racism is to any degree an element of "horizontal spiritual warfare" involving the forces of cosmic evil, then any effort to address this spiritual problem with merely human "weapons" is fundamentally deficient. Far greater resources therefore are needed and the Church would do well to "take them up."

In conclusion, there do seem to be biblical grounds for embracing the concept of institutional racism. This is particularly true in light of the interplay between the demonic and earthly in Psalm 82. From my perspective, if this is even a remote possibility, God's people should then actively engage our world on this issue. From a biblical perspective, Paul would seem to suggest this should primarily happen through the proclamation of the gospel. Having said that, it would also be appropriate for believers to work actively to change laws, policies, and procedures that unintentionally lead to racial disparity.