

2 Corinthians 4:4: A Case for Yahweh as the 'God of this Age.'

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INTRODUCTION

The phrase “the god of this age/world” (2 Cor 4:4), according to most scholars, designates Satan or the devil.¹ Appreciation of this near consensus begins with an awareness of the historical development and considering additional evidence marshaled to support it. This paper will address the meaning of the passage as it relates to its context, point out its sapiential background, and link it with Isa 6:9-10. The goal will be to show that Yahweh is the “god of this age” and that “hardening,” mentioned in 2 Cor 3:14, is a non-transformational withholding of salvific wisdom (in regeneration) designed to perpetuate the spiritual blindness mentioned in 2 Cor 4:4.²

I will begin with the patristic period, move to the predominant modern assessment, evaluate the evidence for the devil/Satan view, link this text with Isaianic “fattening” (Isa 6:9-10), propose the divine act is best understood as deprivation of salvific wisdom, and argue that the phrase ὁ θεὸς τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου best fits with the activity of Yahweh not the devil/Satan.

EARLY PATRISTIC VIEWS AND RATIONALE

Four views emerge from the patristic literature and form the basis for later interpreters. (1) Yahweh blinds but is not the god ‘of this age’ (Irenaeus, Augustine, Chrysostom, and Theodoret of Cyrrhus). (2) The phrase refers to the devil (Tertullian, Origen). (3) Yahweh is the “god of this age” (Cyril of Jerusalem, Ambrosiaster, and possibly Didymus the Blind). (4) It may apply to either Yahweh or the devil (Pelagius).

¹ The following are only representative. George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, ed. Donald A. Hagner, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 339, 440, 449; Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 170, 248, 448 although he does say that total depravity covers the same area (ibid., 628) and refers to this passage while discussing Calvinism noting that it depicts a serious condition of man (ibid., 915) and that man's blindness is his natural state (ibid., 925); Ben Witherington, *Paul's Narrative Thought World: The Tapestry of Tragedy and Triumph* (Louisville, KY: Westminster, 1994), 15, 19, 21; Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His theology*, trans. John Richard De Witt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 91, 213, 352 but cf. 235; N. A. Woychuk, *God's Glory Displayed: Devotional Exposition of 2 Corinthians 4:1-18* (St. Louis, MO: Miracle, 1962), 65-69; French L. Arrington, *The Ministry of Reconciliation: A Study of 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 60-61; William Baird, *1 Corinthians & 2 Corinthians*, Knox Preaching Guides, ed. John H. Hayes (Atlanta, GA: Knox, 1980), 81-83; William Herbert Smith, “The Function of 2 Corinthians 3:7-4:6” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1983), 123-27; Kunnel Kurien Cherian, “Paul's Understanding of Diakonia as Proclamation according to 2 Corinthians 2:14-7:4” (Th.D. diss., Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, 1986), 122; Jeffrey A. Crafton, *The Agency of the Apostle: A Dramatic Analysis of Paul's Response to Conflict in 2 Corinthians*, JSNTSup, ed. David Hill and David E. Orton, vol. 51 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 65, 85; A. E. Harvey, *Renewal through Suffering: A Study of 2 Corinthians*, Studies of the New Testament and Its World, ed. John Barclay, Joel Marcus, and John Riches (Edinburgh: Clark, 1996), 54.

² I have argued elsewhere that Isa 6:9-10 involves a non-transformational and non-punitive act of Yahweh to deprive (withhold) rather than deplete salvific wisdom in order to guarantee non-repentance and thus bring on judgment. See Donald E. Hartley, “The Congenitally Hard-Hearted: Key to Understanding the Assertion and Use of Isaiah 6:9-10 in the Synoptic Gospels” (Ph.D. diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 2005).

A solution seeks to clarify the nature of “hardening” and “blinding” and what may or may not be permitted within the constraints of either view.

YAHWEH BLINDS, BUT IS NOT “GOD OF THIS AGE”

Irenaeus (A.D. 130–200; *Haer.* 3.7.1-2) renders the phrase “In whom god has blinded the minds of the unbelievers *of this age*” treating “of this age” as amphibolous.³ Problematic is attributing to Yahweh the phrase “of this age” and the implication of two gods. To offset any Marcionite interpretation (Marcion d. 160), he argues that Paul occasionally arranges words against their normal grammatical sequence (citing Gal 3:19; 2 Thess 2:8 via hyperbaton).⁴ Elsewhere (*Haer.* 4.29.1) he links together thematically similar passages dealing with the hardening of Pharaoh (Exod 4–14), the reason for parables (Matt 13:11-16; Isa 6:10), and occasions where man knowingly rejects God (Rom 1:28; 2 Thess 2:11).⁵

Augustine (A.D. 354–430; *Faust.* 21.1-2) charges Manichaeans with dualism, argues against the idea of two gods, and punctuates 2 Cor 4:4 like Irenaeus. Because Faustus designated the evil principle, Hyle or the devil, as “the god of this world,” Augustine countered that Yahweh judicially blinds and that the NT and OT god is the same (citing Rom 9:14-15, 22-23). Similar ideas are found earlier in Rom 1:24-25, 28 and elsewhere in John 9:39. “For among the secret things, which contain the righteous principles of God’s judgment, there is a secret which determines that the minds of some shall be blinded, and the minds of some enlightened.” He locates the cause within the inscrutable nature of God (Ps 36:6; Rom 11:33). *If* the devil blinds, it may only be referring to his beguiling nature and evil suggestions. The devil suggests, man consents, and God abandons (*Faust.* 21.9). Then again, he points to Phil 3:19 showing that ‘god’ may allow for false gods or that which is made into a god by man.

Chrysostom’s (A.D. 347–407; *Hom.* 2 Cor. 8) treatment is partly against Marcion who held that it referred to Yahweh, the god of the OT, who is just but not good and partly against Manichaeism that says it refers to the devil (another creator). Although he holds that ὁ θεός refers to Yahweh, he acknowledges that ‘the god of this world’ applied to Yahweh would not be limited to this world/age only. Yahweh only blinds after suffering and then permitting it (Rom 1). “For when they themselves first disbelieved, and rendered themselves unworthy to see the mysteries; He Himself also thereafter permitted it.”

Theodoret of Cyrrhus (A.D. 393–458) punctuates as Irenaeus. In his exposition he indirectly refers to Isa 6:9-10 by citing Mark 4:12 (albeit he translates the subordinating

³ Calvin comments on the treatment of the fathers regarding this clause, viz., its removal towards the end of the phrase modifying τῶν ἀπίστων rather than ὁ θεός. He points to their apologetic interests rather than exegesis. He holds that ὁ θεός may refer to Satan without detracting from the deity of Christ or implying the ontological deity of Satan (John Calvin, *The Second Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians and the Epistles to Timothy, Titus and Philemon*, trans. T. A. Smail, Calvin’s Commentaries, ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964], 53-55). Cf. Charles Hodge, 2 Corinthians, *The Crossway Classic Commentaries*, ed. Alister E. McGrath and J. I. Packer (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1995), 73-74.

⁴ This involves a transposition of words out of their usual order in a sentence. See E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1898; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1968), 692-98.

⁵ Irenaeus mixes Matt 13:10-17, which focuses on Isa 6:9-10, with other passages that although relate to ‘knowledge,’ either pertains to non-salvific knowledge (Rom 1:28) or involves retribution associated with deception (2 Thess 2:11). However, in a fragment that appears to be out of harmony with these statements (*Fragments* 46), Irenaeus refers to the “god of the world” as Satan “who was designated God to those who believe not.” He addresses Marcion in *Haer.* 1.27-28; 2.3, 28, 30, 31; 3.2, 3 (which records the words of Polycarp against Marcion), 4, 11, 12, 14, 25; 4.6, 8, 23, 24; 5.26. Cf. Justin Martyr (A.D. 110–165) in 1 *Apol.* 26, 58.

conjunction on the order of T. W. Manson).⁶ Ambrose (A.D. 340–97), Theophylact (d. 1107), and Herveius (12th cent. A.D.) express similar positions.⁷

The questions this view raises include whether the *syntax* is plausible, whether the *basis* of divine ‘blinding’ demands a human cause (retributational), and whether the *nature* of this act is best construed as transformational. The first question is whether the phrase “of this age” modifies τῶν ἀπίστων. Positively, Thrall says “that there are other verses in the NT where a noun on which another noun in the genitive depends is placed after the dependent genitive itself” (1 Pet 3:21 and Rev 7:17).⁸ But negatively these are not true parallels for “in none of them is it possible for the dependent genitive to be attached to some other noun which precedes it” and it is improbable that it would modify anything in 2 Cor 4:4 other than ὁ θεός.⁹ Absent any compelling counter evidence, modern commentators accept the phrase “god of this age.”

The *basis* of blinding is sometimes unclear (Irenaeus), retributational (Chrysostom), or non-retributational (Augustine). The *nature* of this blinding may be transformational (Chrysostom) of a depletive kind or possibly non-transformational (Augustine) via deprivation.

THE “GOD OF THIS AGE” IS THE DEVIL/SATAN

Tertullian (A.D. 155–220; *Marc.* 5.11) is aware of the ambiguity and Marcion’s interpretation. Tertullian offers a translation identical with Irenaeus, cites several Isaianic passages including Isa 6:10 and other wisdom texts, but opts for what he views as a simpler interpretation, namely, that the “god of this age,” is the devil. He later adds that the “god of this world” (2 Cor 4:4) is unsuited for the creator (*Marc.* 5.17). Instead, he links it with the character of Eph 2:2b and Isa 14:13-14 and concludes that this must identify the devil.¹⁰

Origen (A.D. 185–254; *Comm. Jo.* 11.14) holds that the “god of this world” blinds the minds of men, shows that people may make pleasure their “god” (Phil 3:19), and refers to the “prince of this world” (John 16:11). Blinding takes place as retribution for not believing in Jesus Christ.¹¹

This view only addresses the *basis* of divine blinding as retributive. Origen is clear but Tertullian is not. It may be safely assumed that the *nature* would include some form of transformation since it involves the devil/Satan.

⁶ Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *Paul’s Second Epistle to the Corinthians: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes*, NICNT, ed. Ned B. Stonehouse (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 128; Thomas Walter Manson, *The Teaching of Jesus: Studies of Its Form and Content* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 57-81. For a refutation see Matthew Black, *An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts*, 3d ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 211-16 and Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel according to St. Mark: The Greek Text with Introduction, Notes, and Indexes*, 2d ed. (London: Macmillan, 1966), 257.

⁷ Hughes, *Paul’s Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 128.

⁸ Margaret E. Thrall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, vol. 1, ICC, ed. J. H. Emerton, C. E. B. Cranfield, and G. N. Stanton (Edinburgh: Clark, 1994), 307.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Another possible reference in Tertullian is *Pud.* 9. The same identity to the god of this age is found also in the *Acts of the Disputations with the Heresiarch Manes* 13 and a *Fragment of the Same Disputation* 2. The latter also connects this blinding with Matt 13:13 which Archelaus cites against Manes in order to prove that the god of the NT also blinds even if 2 Cor 4:4 is ceded to the god of the OT only. There may also be two allusions in Lactantius (A.D. 250–325; *Inst.* 2:13, 15).

¹¹ In this context he also refers to those who have “not yet received the power of vision of themselves,” to parables in relation to understanding (Matt 15:11, 16-17), and hardening as it refers to the veil over the heart in 2 Cor 3:16-17.

YAHWEH BLINDS, AND IS THE “GOD OF THIS AGE”

Hippolytus (A.D. 170–236; *Haer.* 5.11) refers to “the god of this world” who rejected Cain’s sacrifice but accepted Abel’s. This same “god” became a man in the time of Herod in the person of Jesus Christ. Although he does not directly quote 2 Cor 4:4, he does provide clear evidence that the phrase could refer to Yahweh.

Cyril of Jerusalem (A.D. 315–86; *First Catechetical Lecture* 6.28–29) seems to be referring to the *Fragment of the Same Disputation* of Archelaus against Manes in proving that both the god of the OT and NT may blind (perhaps even Jesus). Unlike Archelaus he does not view the phrase ‘of this age’ as problematic when applied to Yahweh.

Ambrosiaster (A.D. 366–84; *Commentary on Paul’s Epistles*) says Yahweh blinds but only gives them what they want and “they move further toward not being able to believe what they do not want to believe.”

Didymus the Blind (A.D. 313–98; *Commentary from the Greek Church*) seems to teach that man is congenitally blind and enlightening overcomes this defect.

This view raises the question as to both the *basis* and *nature* of divine blinding. Ambrosiaster holds that the basis is unbelief (thus punitive) and the nature is transformational moving from being able but unwilling to believe to being entirely unable to believe (depletive). Others are unclear (Hippolytus, Cyril of Jerusalem) or imply that the nature of blinding, because it is congenital (Didymus), must be non-transformational (deprivation) and its basis either unknown or within the determining will of god.

THE “GOD OF THIS AGE” MAY BE YAHWEH OR THE DEVIL

Pelagius (A.D. 360–420; *Comm.* 2 Cor. 4) takes either view, namely, it can refer to the devil “on the ground that he has claimed to rule over unbelievers” or Yahweh in that he blinds “the minds of unbelievers precisely because of their unbelief.”¹² This view would hold the *basis* of blinding is unbelief and therefore the *nature* is transformational.

SUMMARY

Marcion held that “the god of this world” was the creator, the author of the Law, and thus inferior to the god of the NT. Mani held that evil springs from the devil who rules over nature and is the god of the OT Scriptures. To offset these dualistic conceptions of god, some fathers, beginning with Irenaeus, moved the phrase “of this world” to modify “unbelievers.” The goal was to distance the god of the OT from any hint of evil associated with “this age.” The closer the writer to these heretical movements the more likely this repositioning might occur. However, others do not concur and see no problem identifying the “god of this age” with Yahweh.

In nearly every case, except Augustine and Didymus the Blind, the *basis* of blinding is retributive while its *nature* is transformational (depletion). Although several see a connection with either the ‘hardening’ of Pharaoh or the ‘fattening’ of Isaiah, none make a clear distinction between the two or appeal to the wisdom tradition. More often than not, they do see a connection with Isa 6:10.

MODERN ARGUMENTS FOR THE DEVIL AS “THE GOD OF THIS AGE”

Most modern commentators identify the devil as “the god of this age.”¹³ Besides viewing “of this age” as pejorative¹⁴ and that Paul occasionally uses θεός in reference to

¹² Gerald Bray, ed., *1–2 Corinthians*, ACCS, ed. Thomas C. Oden, vol. 7 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999), 228.

¹³ Some writers are strangely silent. See Frances Young and David F. Ford, *Meaning and Truth in 2 Corinthians*, BFT, ed. James D. G. Dunn and James P. Mackey (London: SPCK, 1987), 235–61; Edmund Kurt Neufeld, “Christ and the Spirit in Galatians and 2 Corinthians 1–5” (Ph.D. diss., Marquette University,

entities other than the true god, three more arguments are added. It seems to be the plain sense, it sounds like John's "prince of this world," and it echoes the character of Belial.

IT SEEMS TO BE THE PLAIN SENSE

Hughes says, "It is plain that by 'the God of this age' Satan is meant."¹⁵ Martin asserts, "The god of this αἰών, 'age' is Satan, in Paul's demonology."¹⁶ Garland insists, "Paul must be referring to Satan as the god of this age."¹⁷ Shillington hints that it is absurd to propose Yahweh. "Imagine Paul as a missionary preaching that the God of his gospel blinds the minds of those for whom that gospel is intended."¹⁸ Many feel, therefore, that there is little need to search for any other referent. To them it is a settled matter.¹⁹

THE JOHANNINE "PRINCE OF THE WORLD" IS SATAN

The link to the Johannine expression 'prince of this world,' seems to be conceptually similar to the phrase in 2 Cor 4:4. The Johannine phrase occurs three times in John.²⁰ Since the referent is unambiguously the devil/Satan, it is argued that Paul no doubt has the same character in mind here.²¹ This is often supported by reference to Belial in intertestamental literature.

1986), 146-93; Larry Kreitzer, *2 Corinthians*, NTG, ed. A. T. Lincoln (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 93-131.

¹⁴ Various expressions occur in the NT. The *past ages* (Eph 3:9; Col 1:26). The *present age* is depicted by several formulas: (1) 'This age' (Matt 12:32; Luke 16:8; 20:34; Rom 12:2; 1 Cor 1:20; 2:6bis, 8; 3:18; 2 Cor 4:4; Eph 1:21); (2) 'The present age' (1 Tim 6:17; 2 Tim 4:10; Titus 2:12). (3) 'The present season' (Rom 3:26; 8:18; 11:5; 2 Cor 8:14). (4) 'The age of this world' (Eph 2:2a). (5) 'The present evil age' (Gal 1:4). This age is contrasted with the *future age* (Matt 12:32; Eph 1:21; Heb 6:5; Eph 2:7) or (Luke 20:35). There is both the end of the age (Matt 13:39, 40, 49; 24:3; 28:20) and the end of the ages (Heb 9:6). God is said to be the King of the ages (1 Tim 1:17) for he made all ages (Heb 1:2). The present and the coming age are in tension (2 Clem. 6).

¹⁵ Hughes, *Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 126. Similarly see Robert E. Picirilli, *1, 2 Corinthians*, The Randall House Bible Commentary, ed. Robert E. Picirilli and Harrold D. Harrison (Nashville, TN: Randall House, 1987), 305-06; Paul Barnett, *The Message of 2 Corinthians: Power in Weakness*, BST: The Bible Speaks Today, ed. John R. W. Stott (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 1988), 82-83; David J. Valleskey, *2 Corinthians*, The People's Bible, ed. Roland Cap Ehlke, Armin J. Panning, and Lyle Albrecht (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern, 1992), 61.

¹⁶ Ralph P. Martin, *2 Corinthians*, WBC, ed. Ralph P. Martin (Waco, TX: Word, 1986), 78.

¹⁷ David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, NAC, ed. David S. Dockery, vol. 29 (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 211.

¹⁸ V. George Shillington, *2 Corinthians*, Believers Church Bible Commentary, ed. Williard M. Swartley (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1998), 92. Of course, no one who takes this view says this. God blinds the minds of those for whom the gospel benefits are not intended.

¹⁹ David Abernathy, *An Exegetical Summary of 2 Corinthians* (Dallas: SIL International, 2003), 150.

²⁰ As ὁ ἄρχων τοῦ κόσμου τούτου (12:31; 16:11) or ὁ τοῦ κόσμου ἄρχων (14:30; cf. 1 John 5:19).

²¹ This is especially convincing to many when 'rulers of this age' τῶν ἀρχόντων τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου (1 Cor 2:6, 8) is combined with ὁ θεὸς τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου (2 Cor 4:4) and 'the prince over the power of the air' τὸν ἀρχοντα τῆς ἐξουσίας τοῦ ἀέρος (Eph 2:2b). But the former expression is in the plural and clearly refers to human rulers whereas only the singular usage in the latter refers to the devil/Satan but does not mention ages at all.

IT IS ANALOGOUS TO BELIAL AN APOCALYPTIC “RULER OF THIS WORLD”²²

BELIAL IN THE OT. Paul mentions Belial once (2 Cor 6:15, βελιάρ). The Hebrew OT mentions the term (בְּלִיָּא) twenty-seven times with at least two senses. (1) Belial refers to an evil being. Thus the ‘thoughts of Belial,’²³ the ‘word of Belial,’²⁴ or the ‘floods of Belial.’²⁵ (2) Belial may also be used to designate people who serve him as the ‘sons of Belial,’²⁶ ‘daughters of Belial,’²⁷ ‘men of Belial,’²⁸ or ‘witness of Belial.’²⁹ Belial may also stand for these people on occasion.³⁰ The Greek term βελίαλ only occurs once in the LXX (Judg 20:13).³¹ According to the OT, Belial is an intelligent being that may be behind natural catastrophes and has followers who serve him.

BELIAL AT QUMRAN. In Qumran the term undergoes more development especially in terms of the involvement in the affairs of men and as an agent of Yahweh. (1) Belial is an evil being. On occasion, God may use him to bring disaster.³² He sets traps,³³ schemes,³⁴ and raises up Jannes and his brother.³⁵ (2) Belial has a dominion.³⁶ This includes dominating over the spirits of men,³⁷ having a lot,³⁸ an army,³⁹ and a congregation.⁴⁰ Those under his dominion are men, sons, or spirits of Belial.⁴¹ Belial can indwell one’s heart⁴² or utilize the evil resident in the heart.⁴³ (3) Belial was created for

²² R. Bieringer and J. Lambrecht, *Studies on 2 Corinthians*, BETL, vol. 112 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1994), 301, 566.

²³ Deut 15:9; cf. *m. Seb.* 10:3 that may be translated “base thought.”

²⁴ Pss 41:9[8]; 101:3; cf. 4Q239 f2:8.

²⁵ 2 Sam 22:5; Ps 18:5[4]; cf. 4Q428 f5:4; 4Q432 f6:4.

²⁶ Deut 13:13; Judg 19:22; 20:13; 1 Sam 2:12; 10:27; 25:17; 1 Kgs 21:10, 13; 2 Chr 13:7; cf. *m. Sanh.* 10:4 that may be translated “base fellows.”

²⁷ 1 Sam 1:16.

²⁸ 1 Sam 25:25; 30:22; 2 Sam 16:7; 20:1; Prov 6:12; 16:27.

²⁹ Prov 19:28.

³⁰ 2 Sam 23:6; Nah 1:11; 2:1; Job 34:18.

³¹ Greek terms used to translate this include παράνομος, ‘lawless, wrongdoer’ (12 times), παρανομέω, ‘to act contrary to the Law’ (once), λοιμός, ‘pestilence, pestilent’ (5 times), ἄφρων, ‘fool’ (3 times), ἀνομία, ‘lawlessness’ (twice), and a number of terms used once including ἀνόμημα, ‘lawlessness, wickedness,’ πονηρός, ‘wicked, evil,’ ἐναντίος, ‘against, opposed, opposite,’ and παλαίω, ‘to wrestle.’

³² CD 4:13; 8:2; 19:14; 4Q 174 2:14.

³³ CD 4:15.

³⁴ 1QM 13:4; 1QHa 10:16; 12:13; 4Q177 4:11; 4Q174 3:8; 4Q286 f7ii:7; 4Q287 f6:2; 4Q299 f3aii b:5; 4Q397 f23:2; 4Q298 f14 17ii:5; 4Q399 f1ii:3; 4Q429 f4i:11; 4Q430 f1:1; 4Q432 f8:1.

³⁵ CD 5:18; 4Q266 f3ii:6; 4Q266 f3iii:25; 4Q267 f2:2; 6Q15 f3:1.

³⁶ 1QS 1:18-19, 23-24; 2:19; 1QM 1:15; 13:11; 14:8-9; 13:11; 18:1; 4Q177 f1 4:8, 12; 4Q256 2:7; 4Q290 f1:2; 4Q390 f2i:4; 4Q491 f8 10:6; 4Q495 f2:3; 5Q13 f4:4; 5Q13 f5:2.

³⁷ CD 12:2; 1QM 13:2; 4Q271 f5i:18.

³⁸ 1QS 2:5; 1QM 1:5; 4:2; 4Q177 4:16; 4Q256 2:13; 4Q257 2:1; 4Q496 f3:5; 5Q11 f1i:3; 11Q13 2:12.

³⁹ 1QM 1:1, 13; 11:8; 15:3; 16:11; 18:1, 3; 1QHa 11:29, 32.

⁴⁰ 1QHa 10:22.

⁴¹ 1QHa 13:26; 4Q174 3:8; 4Q175 1:23; 4Q177 2:4; 4Q177 3:10; 4:14; 4Q286 f7ii:6; 4Q287 f6:5; 4Q379 f22ii:9; 4Q386 f1ii:3; 4Q425 f1+3:7; f25:2; 11Q11 6:3; 11Q13 2:13; 11QT 55:3.

⁴² 1QS 2:5.

⁴³ 1QHa 14:21; 15:3[!]; 4Q260 5:2.

the pit.⁴⁴ According to Qumran, Belial is an evil opponent of Yahweh who is actively engaged in thwarting the divine purpose and opposing his people.

BELIAL IN THE OT PSEUDEPIGRAPHA. The composite of Belial (Βελίαρ) is not unlike that of Qumran. (1) Belial is an evil and tragic eschatological figure. He performs deceptive signs in the final days but ultimately suffers defeat from God.⁴⁵ Elsewhere Yahweh's army takes vengeance,⁴⁶ Yahweh binds him,⁴⁷ and the Messiah destroys him.⁴⁸ (2) Belial may be Nero or a Nero like figure (Nero *redivivus*)⁴⁹ and his (Belial's) defeat is associated with the fall of Babylon.⁵⁰ (3) Belial is linked with evil human qualities.⁵¹ Fornication, in particular, provides segue for him⁵² as well as murder.⁵³ Those under his control even seek to please him.⁵⁴ (4) Belial opposes the good. He opposes God,⁵⁵ reigns against the Law,⁵⁶ deceives,⁵⁷ but flees from righteous persons.⁵⁸ (5) Belial has a dominion. He holds men captive,⁵⁹ may indwell the heart,⁶⁰ and is referred to as "the ruler of this world."⁶¹ According to the OT pseudepigrapha, Belial is a tragic eschatological figure in opposition to Yahweh and a tyrannical ruler in terms of human oppression.

This brief survey illustrates the tentative nature of applying Paul's phrase to Belial. Lacking is the power of Belial to deprive of salvific knowledge or to render man unable to believe. The nature of Belial's dominion and his functional limitations when employed by Yahweh as an instrumental means on occasion appear wholly limited to either external phenomena or to those who are already his followers. He apparently lacks the ability to prevent anyone from becoming a follower of Yahweh.

POTENTIAL PARALLELS

Belial apparently has some power to blind. The phrase in question (ὁ θεὸς τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου) finds two potential parallels with respect to blinding the mind. The first is in the *Testament of Judah* 19:4 that reads, "For the prince of error has blinded me and I am ignorant." Here the "prince of error" (ὁ ἄρχων τῆς πλάνης) "has blinded

⁴⁴ 1QM 13:11; 4Q177 4:9; 4Q286 f7ii:1-12; 4Q287 f6:1; 4Q463 f2:3; 4Q491 f11ii:18; 4Q495 f2:3; 11Q13 2:13, 22, 25; 3:7.

⁴⁵ *Sib. Or.* 2:167.

⁴⁶ *T. Levi* 3:3.

⁴⁷ *T. Lev.* 18:12.

⁴⁸ *T. Dan.* 5:9-12; *T. Benj.* 3:8; *Mart. Isa.* 4:14-22.

⁴⁹ *Sib. Or.* 3:63-74; *Mart. Isa.* 4:1-13.

⁵⁰ *Liv. Pro.* 4:21.

⁵¹ *T. Reu.* 2:2; *T. Iss.* 7:7.

⁵² *T. Reu.* 4:7-11; 6:3; *T. Sim.* 5:3; *T. Jos.* 7:4; *Liv. Pro.* 17:1-4.

⁵³ *T. Dan.* 1:7; *T. Benj.* 6:6-7:3; *Liv. Pro.* 17:1-4; *Mart. Isa.* 5:1.

⁵⁴ *T. Ash.* 3:2.

⁵⁵ *T. Levi* 19:1; *T. Iss.* 6:1; *T. Jos.* 20:2; *T. Benj.* 3:3.

⁵⁶ *T. Naph.* 2:6.

⁵⁷ *T. Jud.* 25:3; *T. Zub.* 9:8.

⁵⁸ *T. Dan.* 5:1; *T. Benj.* 6:1.

⁵⁹ *T. Zeb.* 9:8; *T. Dan.* 4:7; 5:11; *T. Ash.* 1:8; *Liv. Pro.* 4:7.

⁶⁰ *Mart. Isa.* 5:1.

⁶¹ *Mart. Isa.* 2:2-4.

me" (ἐτυφλώσεν . . . με) because of or resulting in "and I am ignorant" (καὶ ἀγνόηας).⁶² The second occurs in the *Testament of Simeon* 2:7. It reads, "And I set my mind against him to destroy him, because the prince of deceit [ὁ ἄρχων τῆς πλάνης] sent forth the spirit of jealousy and blinded my mind [ἐτύφλωσέ μου τὸν νοῦν], so that I regarded him not as a brother, nor did I spare even Jacob my father."

These texts support the notion that "the ruler of this world" is responsible, *in some way*, for a blinding that produces or is the product of ignorance.⁶³ But neither text identifies Belial as causing salvific ignorance and probably implies no more than a power to make certain appeals attractive because of the innate ignorance and sinfulness of man. Thus, the blinding power may refer only to Belial's beguiling nature and evil suggestions. It is unclear whether the devil/Satan/Belial ever blinds *in terms of altering man's nature or having the power to perpetuate that nature*. Rather, there is something missing *from man's nature* that causes him to buy into the rationale underlying these temptations.

SUMMARY

Many conclude that the devil/Satan is the "god of this age." Bruce argues, "This [2 Cor 4:4] is a reference to Satan, called [elsewhere] 'the ruler (*archōn*) of this world (*kosmos*)'" (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11 and 1 John 5:19b).⁶⁴ Because he dominates the present "age," it is therefore the "present evil age" (Gal 1:4) or "the epoch of Belial" in Qumran texts.⁶⁵ Barrett says ὁ θεὸς τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου is a bold expression for the devil "based on the commonplace apocalyptic presupposition that in the present age the devil has usurped God's authority, and is accepted as god by his fellow rebels; only when in the age to come God establishes his kingdom will the devil be driven out."⁶⁶ Martin indicates that, "The Jewish doctrine of two ages is important for the apostle; so Satan controls this age under God's decree. For Paul this malevolent power is seen in the blinding of human minds to prevent the light of the Gospel from penetrating."⁶⁷ Bultmann ascribes this rulership to the devil as a result of human decision.⁶⁸ Kruse maintains that it refers to Satan as the hinderer of God's work but only with divine permission.⁶⁹

⁶² Rudolf Bultmann, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians*, trans. Roy A. Harrisville (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1985), 104; Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Corinthians: A Literary and Theological Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (New York: Crossroad, 1987), 155.

⁶³ Barrett represents many when he says that the gospel is veiled because "the 'god of this age,' Satan, has 'blinded . . . unbelievers' to prevent them from 'seeing the light'" (C. K. Barrett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, BNTC [London: Black, 1973], 218). The pertinent phrase 'the God of this age' refers to Satan (*ibid.*, 219 fn. 45).

⁶⁴ F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, NCB, ed. Matthew Black (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 195.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ Barrett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 130. "Satan and his subordinates . . . attack Christians . . . and also prevent men from becoming Christians" (*ibid.*, 130-31). Barrett rejects Yahweh as the referent because "this does not seem to be what Paul means" (*ibid.*, 131). "Paul is adopting the language of gnosticism (γνῶσις, verse 6), but makes it clear that those who do not accept the Gospel are not to be dismissed as *by nature incapable of doing so*; they have been blinded by an alien power" (*ibid.*, emphasis added). Much stress is laid on the assumption of gnostic imagery where "the essential light-darkness dualism of gnosticism becomes a dualism of decision" (*ibid.*, 132). Cf. Bultmann, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians*, 104 who calls the phrase θεὸς τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου "the Gnostic concept."

⁶⁷ Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 78.

⁶⁸ Bultmann, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians*, 103.

⁶⁹ Colin G. Kruse, *The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC, ed. Canon Leon Morris (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 103.

However, other scholars express reticence about this conclusion. Thrall thinks the pejorative connotations of “this age” argue strongly for Satan who “possesses control over the present world order” but adds, “even though such a designation appears to have no parallels.”⁷⁰ Belleville adds, “This is the only place where Paul refers to the adversary of God’s people as a *god*.”⁷¹ The following seeks to further substantiate and supplement these reservations.

ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE VIEW THAT THE DEVIL IS “THE GOD OF THIS AGE”

O ΘΕΟΣ NEVER REFERS TO THE DEVIL/SATAN

If 2 Cor 4:4 refers to the devil/Satan, it would be the only place in Scripture where he is referred to as ‘the god.’ In contrast, Satan, the Serpent, and even Belial seem to be Paul’s preference in 2 Corinthians.⁷² This view also requires that Yahweh use this ‘god’ as an instrumental agent of blinding. But this interpretation introduces an unnecessary intermediary as well as assumes that blindness is *transformative* and *judicial* (retribution) rather than *deprivational* and *non-judicial*. If congenital hard-heartedness is held and divine hardening is construed as a circumlocution for withholding regeneration, then it would be difficult to sustain this view. It appears unlikely that Paul would use ὁ θεός in this sense without a great deal of confusion.

THE JOHANNINE EXPRESSION IS NOT EQUIVALENT WITH PAUL

The Johannine expression should be treated differently for five reasons: (1) John uses ἄρχων not θεός. (2) John uses κόσμος rather than αἰών. (3) There is no mention of blinding in John as it relates to the “ruler/prince of this world.” On the contrary, John depicts blindness as both congenital and an effect of a divine act (John 9:35-41; 12:38-41).⁷³ (4) It requires one to define Paul by John rather than Paul by Paul. (5) Paul elsewhere refers to the devil/Satan using the *same* term ἄρχων as John (Eph 2:2b) and this strongly argues against taking 2 Cor 4:4 as referring to the devil/Satan or at least shifts the burden of proof significantly. Paul may very well use ὁ θεός because he is referring to Yahweh not the devil/Satan. Although the references to Belial and his domain are indeed parallel with the Johannine expression and some of Paul’s too, it may not be legitimate to equate these with the phrase in question.

THE ALLUSION IS TO ISAIAH 6:9-10

Isaiah 6:9-10 is the backdrop for 2 Cor 4:4 and here Yahweh is the actor. He hardens (‘fattens’), blinds, and deafens, not the devil/Satan (not even instrumentally). Paul states in verse 3 that the Gospel is hid to those who are lost (state) and then develops this in terms of the divine intent in verse 4 (purpose). This is very similar to

⁷⁰ Thrall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 306. “It is Satan who prevents perception of the truth of the gospel. The prevention of perception is elsewhere ascribed to God (3.14; Rom 11.8), but in view of what Paul is going to say in v. 6 about God’s bestowal of inward illumination, the ascription to him of the blinding process as well might have seemed too much of a contradiction. It may well be that for Paul the ultimate causes of unbelief remained an unsolved enigma” (ibid., 308). See also David R. Hall, *The Unity of the Corinthian Correspondence*, JSNTSup, ed. Stanley E. Porter, vol. 251 (London: Clark, 2003), 141, 231.

⁷¹ Linda L. Belleville, *2 Corinthians*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series, ed. Grand R. Osborne (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 117.

⁷² See 2 Cor 2:11; 6:15; 11:3,14-15; 12:7. “Among the ancient writers ὁ θεός was used of the god of absolute religion in distinction from the mythological gods” (A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*, 4th ed. [Nashville: Broadman, 1934], 761).

⁷³ See D. A. Carson, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility: Biblical Perspectives in Tension*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994; reprint, Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2002), 127-28.

the *modus operandi* of Isa 6:9-10 and its traditional trajectories. It is to these issues that I now turn.

BACKGROUND OF FATTENING/HARDENING

A fundamental distinction may be made between ‘hardening’ and ‘fattening’ when it comes to the heart.⁷⁴ The former is illustrated in Exod 4–14 and the latter in Isa 6:9-10. Subsequent Greek literature tends to recognize this by using two sets of terms to designate each type of ‘hardening’ without blurring the two. The former addresses the *volition* and rendered with the σκλη- word group whereas the latter the *cognition* rendered with πωρόω, πώρωσις, or παχύνω.⁷⁵ Both aspects derive from Deuteronomy and progress in parallel paths.⁷⁶ They do, however, occupy a necessary relation. Cognition *logically* precedes volition and volition *necessarily* follows cognition. The *volition* is the *mind* choosing.⁷⁷ Isaianic ‘fattening’ deals specifically with the cognition, employs wisdom terms and concepts to define the ‘fat-heart,’ and ultimately points back to Deut 29:3[4]: “But Yahweh has not given you a heart to know, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, unto this day.” The argument of Isa 6:9-10 is that the act of *fattening* the heart guaranteeing the absence of wisdom preventing repentance is really a restatement of Deut 29:3[4] where Yahweh *withholds* this very heart of wisdom. The divine act in both is identical. To “not give” (Deut 29:3[4]) is equated with “make fat” (Isa 6:10). Because the former is via deprivation, this argues that the latter is also non-transformative.

Below is a brief summary of Isa 6:9-10 noting some streams of tradition necessary to establish a link to 2 Cor 4:4. Isaianic fattening/hardening is best understood as divine (rather than Satanic) deprivation of salvific wisdom. Given its interpretation and connection to Isa 6:9-10, it is best to construe ὁ θεὸς τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου as Yahweh not the devil.

ISAIAH 6:9-10

Isaiah 6:9-10 form the basis of many NT texts.⁷⁸ Their meaning is determined partly exegetically, partly inter-textually, and partly traditionally. Exegetically, the issue involves the meaning of “make fat,” the relation to the following verbal notions, and the connection with the ‘lest’ (ἵνα) clause. Inter-textually, the issue is how Isaiah uses this motif throughout the prophecy to illuminate the nature of this act. Traditionally, it is

⁷⁴ Even outstanding works fall into the trap of failing to make this pivotal distinction. For example, John Piper argues that the terms associated with hardening, namely, those in the σκλη- and the πωρ- word groups, are essentially synonymous (John Piper, *The Justification of God: An Exegetical & Theological Study of Romans 9:1-23*, 2d ed. [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993], 176). Further, the seminal semantic lexicon for NT students defines πωρόω in terms of causing “someone to be completely *unwilling* to learn and to accept new information” (L&N §27.51, emphasis added). The problem is that volition has crept into the semantic range of the term without any clear examples of such a meaning. The term is wholly and always associated with wisdom or cognition alone and never volition.

⁷⁵ This distinction holds for the Hebrew as well.

⁷⁶ These trajectories include the *cognitive/wisdom* (Deut 29:3[4]; Isa 6:9-10; 29:9-10; 44:18; Jer 24:7) and the *volitional* (Deut 5:29; 10:16 [functional]; 30:6; Isa 63:17; Jer 32:39-40; Ezek 11:19; 18:3 [functional]; 36:26) elements. Both aspects are combined in Jer 31:31-34.

⁷⁷ For the best treatment on the will and thorough expression of the doctrine of compatibilism see Jonathan Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, ed. Paul Ramsey, The Works of Jonathan Edwards, ed. Perry Miller, vol. 1 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1957). See also R. C. Sproul, *Willing to Believe: The Controversy over Free Will* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997).

⁷⁸ Texts associated with Isa 6:9-10 include the following: Matt 13:13, 14-15; Mark 4:10-12; 6:52; 8:17-18; Luke 8:9-10; John 9:39; 12:37-40; Acts 28:23-28; Rom 11:7-8; 15:21 (cf. 3:11); 2 Cor 3:14; 4:4; Eph 4:18.

essential to note the varying interpretive streams including translations, allusions, and NT usage. Underlying it all is the sapiential tradition.

EXEGETICAL ANALYSIS. Isaiah 6:9-10 records a commission of Isaiah. Verse 9 commands him to go to a people who do not *perceive* or *know*, although they hear and see. Then verse 10 instructs him to “cause their hearts to be fat, their ears to be heavy and their eyes to be shut” *otherwise* they will see with their eyes, hear with their ears, perceive with their heart and as a result, turn and be healed. Since verse 9 says they currently do not *perceive* or *know* and verse 10 says that fattening will cause them not to *perceive*, it is left for the interpreter to resolve the apparent redundancy. Why cause those who do not perceive not to perceive when they already do not perceive? This raises another question, namely, what type of causation is assumed here? Should the verbs be understood to be *ingressive* (“become fat . . . heavy . . . shut”) or *constative* (“remain fat . . . heavy . . . shut”)? Before addressing this specifically, a few observations may be made.

First, the structure of the passage is chiastic so that “make fat” is parallel with “perceive” stressing the cognitive realm or the wisdom tradition.⁷⁹ Second, the terms used in connection with “fattening” include *perceive*, *know*, and *understand* (the latter will come up in Isa 44:18) and these, along with their nominal forms, are all effects of wisdom. This means that lacking one aspect implies the entirety and to be without wisdom is to lack any of its particulars. Third, there is a distinction between the merely acoustic or optic versus noetic phenomena. Fourth, the wisdom here is specifically *salvific* because it invariably leads to repentance that leads to healing. Thus it is not just the lack of any kind of wisdom that identifies the heart as fat. Nor does possession of any other kind of wisdom mitigate the notion that absence of salvific wisdom is congenital or *ab initio*. Fifth, the order of operation is cognition to volition or possession of salvific wisdom to repentance. Although never separate, these must be distinguished so that “fattening” applies to the cognition and “hardening” to the volition. Finally, the role of Isaiah in “fattening” appears only contributory. Although the prophets speak of the new heart, they in no wise present themselves as operating on the level of efficient agents in this phenomenon. Thus discussions that focus on the nature or mode of Isaiah’s speech seem to be beside the essential point.

The verbs may take on an *ingressive* or *constative* nuance.⁸⁰ Those who see ‘fattening’ as a retribution and thus transformational, tend to take the ingressive notion so that these suffer punishment and *become* fat-hearted. The constative nuance takes the Hiphil as causing the continuation or perpetuation of a state of ‘fat-heartedness.’ The final cause is undoubtedly covenant breakage leading to captivity as the answer to Isaiah’s “How long” seems to confirm. The problem with the ingressive notion is twofold: first, these individuals are already without wisdom prior to any supposed ‘fattening’ as 6:9 indicates. Their unrepentance proves this. Thus the difficulty is categorizing these folk who have all the characteristics of being fat-hearted prior to the divine act of fattening. Second, the following $\text{if} \dots \text{then}$ clause makes the matter an either-or issue—either one is fat-hearted and unrepentant or not fat-hearted and repentant. This rules out any third alternative.

⁷⁹ This chiasm has been pointed out by J. L. McLaughlin, “Their Hearts Were Hardened: The Use of Isaiah 6,9-10 in the Book of Isaiah,” *Bib* 75 (1994): 5. For a fuller discussion see Hartley, “The Congenitally Hard-Hearted,” 178-208.

⁸⁰ Grammar alone cannot decide the issue. Waltke defines *constative* as “referring to the remaining or persisting in a state” (Bruce K. Waltke and M. O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990], 690). Ross questions the *ingressive* notion of this verb (Allen P. Ross, *Introducing Biblical Hebrew* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001], §30.3). In a personal correspondence, Waltke says, “I do not think the grammar can decide the issue of whether it is ingressive or constative. Stative verbs tend to go either way” (Bruce K. Waltke, Re: “Fatten” in Isa 6:10: A Question on the Hiphil [AOL Correspondence] [America Online, 2004, accessed June 24, 2004]).

This leads to the exact nuance of this לֵא clause.⁸¹ The logic of this clause follows the formula A otherwise B = not B if A.⁸² For example, Gen 3:3 reads, “You shall not eat of it *lest* you die.” This translates into A (do not eat it) otherwise B (you die) = not B (you die) if A (do not eat). The referent in these cases is distributed. Isaiah 6:10 would be A (fatten the heart, make ears heavy, shut eyes) otherwise B (see with eyes, hear with ears, understand with heart) = not B (see with eyes, hear with ears, understand with heart) if A (fatten the heart, make ears heavy, shut eyes). It is a disjunctive clause. Either one is fat-hearted and does not salvifically see, hear, and understand or one is not fat-hearted and does by necessity salvifically see, hear, and understand. This effectively rules out a third alternative and against a transformative view of “fattening” but supports a congenital and therefore non-transformational understanding of this divine phenomenon.⁸³

INTER-TEXTUAL MOTIFS.⁸⁴ There are two types of texts in Isaiah that reiterate the motifs of 6:9-10. The first are those that restate the divine “fattening” purpose while the second picture a reversal of this condition in terms of bestowing salvific wisdom for a future time and in relation to both Israel and Gentiles. Those that restate the motif include Isa 29:9-10, 42:18-20, 43:7-8, 44:18, and possibly 63:17 while those that reverse this motif include Isa 32:3-4, 42:6-7, and 52:13–53:12. The basis for the reversal of the “fat-heart” resides in the salvific work of the Messiah.

TRADITIONAL TRAJECTORIES.⁸⁵ These include Jewish treatments of Isa 6:9-10 particularly the DSS, the Greek translations, the Aramaic Targums, the Peshitta, other Jewish sources like the Mishnah or the Talmuds, and NT texts. The effect of these treatments is the emergence of two equally valid streams that find their affinity in the wisdom tradition. Some texts focus on the *purposive intent* of Yahweh to “fatten” the heart while others on the *state of the heart* as already “fat,” “dull,” or “stupid.” As demonstrated above, the latter sometimes precedes the former so that one is not fat-hearted due to a prior transformation. Neither does there appear evidence for textual “mitigation” of either notion or a desire to deny one stream by emphasizing the other. The focus on one aspect includes the other so that the general notion of Yahweh “fattening” by leaving the heart in its natural condition of “fat-heartedness” is thereby synthesized.

Some of these texts illustrate this. The Isaiah scroll (1QIsa^a) of Qumran differs with the Masoretic Text in three ways. (1) There is a double substitution of a causal לֵא for the negative particle לֹא , (2) the final $nûn$ is missing from the first verb of 6:10

⁸¹ For a fuller discussion see Hartley, “The Congenitally Hard-Hearted,” 189-91.

⁸² The construction of לֵא followed by the imperfect tense occurs 121 times in the Hebrew OT. The clause occurs 125 times altogether and only four cases are not followed by the imperfect (Deut 29:17^{bis}; 2 Sam 20:6; 2 Kgs 10:23). The only possible exceptions to the logical necessity are Deut 20:5, 6, 7 where the soldier is permitted to go to his house *lest* he die in battle and another man dedicate his house, use the fruit of it, and take his wife. Since not all men die in battle, these may be taken as counter examples to the necessary disjunction of Isa 6:10. At best, however, this would reduce the probability of the distributive (inclusive of all referents) clause in Isa 6:10 to 98% instead of 100%. It is likely that these “exceptions” are not exceptions at all but certain in relation to the referents.

⁸³ The “third alternative” understanding would take Isa 6:10 as follows: “Otherwise they (some not all) will see with their eyes, (some not all) hear with their ears, and (some not all) understand with their heart and (some not all) turn again, and (some not all) be healed.” Problems: (1) This creates the category of the non-fattened heart that does not perceive. But the very definition of the fat-heart is the inability to perceive. So in creating a third category it merely makes a distinction without a difference. (2) It assumes depletion, namely, some hearts would perceive and thus to prevent perception they are fattened. But this does not account for why they presently do not perceive if fattening is a depletion of this ability.

⁸⁴ For a fuller discussion see Hartley, “The Congenitally Hard-Hearted,” 312-45.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 192-208.

(הַשְׁמִין/הַשְׁמִין) transforming the Hiphil imperative ‘to make fat’ (שָׁמַן) into a Hiphil imperative ‘to make appalled’ (שָׁמַם), and (3) a substitution of ב for ו (וּלְבָבוֹ/בְּלִבּוֹ) serving to break the chain of verbal ideas in the הִנֵּה clause. It reads, “Go and say to this people, ‘Hear *because* you may perceive, see *because* you may know. Make the heart of this people *appalled* [at evil]. Turn away their eyes lest they see [evil] with their eyes and hear [of murder] with their ears. Let them perceive *with* their heart and turn and I will heal them.’”⁸⁶ Mitigation seems unlikely contra Evans.⁸⁷ Instead it is an instance of textual harmonization with Isa 33:15, a text known to be important to the sectaries of Qumran.⁸⁸ Each change is demanded by the application of the passage to the Qumran community rather than a rejection of strong divine causality implied in monotheism. That mitigation is not intended is substantiated by the other reused texts in the scroll unaffected by this sort of change.⁸⁹

The Greek versions differ from the Masoretic text by focusing on the present state of being “fat-hearted.” (1) Verse 9 predicts or concedes that although the people will hear and see, they will not understand (συνίημι) or perceive (ὁράω). (2) The verb in 6:10 for “fatten” is translated literally but altered to the aorist passive ἐπαχύνθη ‘has grown dull’ and thus depicts a forgone state.⁹⁰ The voice may be a ‘divine’ passive where the focus moves from ultimate to material. (3) Added is the explanatory γάρ to account for the absence of perception or understanding. So whereas the Hebrew text says they are without wisdom and that Yahweh will perpetuate their fat-heart, the Greek version explains that they are without wisdom because of their ‘dull-heart.’

Targum Jonathan differs from the Masoretic text in three respects. (1) There is the addition of a relative clause in verse 9 so that Isaiah is sent to a people “*who* hear but do not perceive and see but do not know.” This verse makes explicit the condition that verse 10 will say needs to be perpetuated by divine causality. (2) Verse 10 uses the verb analogous to the Hebrew imperative but less literally as “make stupid” (טִפֵּשׁ).⁹¹ This provides a direct reference to the wisdom tradition. (3) The final clause reads, “and it will be forgive them” instead of “and I will heal them” reflecting a more soteriological nuance. The implied redundancy of the Masoretic text is more explicit here. They are those who do not perceive or know (6:9) yet they are to be “made stupid” so they do not see, hear, or understand (6:10). The solution is to view divine “fattening” as perpetuating this condition rather than transforming the heart based on some idea of retribution.

These texts establish two discernable streams of tradition regarding the “fat-heart,” namely, *a state of being absent of salvific wisdom* and “fattening” as *the divine intent*

⁸⁶ See William H. Brownlee, *The Meaning of the Qumran Scrolls for the Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 186. For more details on the reason for these changes see James A. Sanders, “From Isaiah 61 to Luke 4,” in *Christianity, Judaism and Other Greco-Roman Cults: Studies for Morton Smith at Sixty*, ed. Jacob Neusner, vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 93-97; Craig A. Evans, “1QIsaiah^a and the Absence of Prophetic Critique at Qumran,” *RevQ* 11 (1984): 537-42; idem, “The Text of Isaiah 6:9-10,” *ZAW* 94 (1982): 415-18.

⁸⁷ Craig A. Evans, *To See and Not Perceive: Isaiah 6:9-10 in Early Jewish and Christian Interpretation*, JSOTSup, ed. David J. A. Clines and Philip R. Davies, vol. 64 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1989), 60.

⁸⁸ On textual harmonization see Paulson Pulikottil, *Transmission of Biblical Texts in Qumran: The Case of the Large Isaiah Scroll 1QIsa^a*, JSPSup, ed. Lester L. Grabbe and James H. Charlesworth, vol. 34 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 44-129. For Qumran texts that utilize Isa 33:15 see 1QHa 15:1-3; 21:5; 4Q510 f1:6; 4Q511 f10:3.

⁸⁹ The members were also aware of the ‘fat-heart’ and its characteristic of being absent of wisdom (4Q424 f3:6-8).

⁹⁰ Symmachus and S use a synonym ἐλιπύνθη (‘has become fat’) for ἐπαχύνθη (‘has become thick’) and is thus more literal. Cf. Deut 32:15; Neh 9:25; *Odes Sol.* 2:15; Sir 35:6; 38:11.

⁹¹ This verb is in the Pael stem and occurs nineteen times in the Targum (Num 12:11; 1 Sam 13:13; 26:21; 1 Kgs 8:47; Isa 6:10; 19:11, 13; 21:3; Jer 4:22; 5:4; 6:10; 9:4; 10:8, 14, 21; 29:26; 51:17; Ezek 45:20; Hos 4:6).

to perpetuate that state. These are essential for understanding the NT passages related to Isa 6:9-10. The focus below will be on salvific wisdom in general and how this relates to the phrase ὁ θεὸς τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου of 2 Cor 4:4 in particular.

2 CORINTHIANS 3:14

2 Corinthians 3:14 is ideologically tied to 2 Cor 4:4. In the former, Paul refers to divine hardening and its “veiling effect” while in the latter he moves directly to its noetic effects in terms of divine blinding. His central point is that unregenerate Gentiles are as blind to his exposition of the Gospel as unregenerate Jews are to the reading and exposition of Moses. It is not further explanation that is required but an internal work of the Spirit.

The Apostle’s assessment about the Jews is that “their minds were hardened” (ἐπωρώθη τὰ νοήματα⁹² αὐτῶν) by God and a “veil” (κάλυμμα) remains over their eyes during the reading of the OT, a veil that is only “done away in Christ” (ἐν Χριστῷ καταργεῖται) a fact “not yet revealed” to them.⁹³ Here the veil is no doubt a ‘veiled’ reference to regeneration rather than further explanation.⁹⁴ So the perpetual veiling must refer to the deprivation of this same benefit. The ‘hardened’ mind, therefore, is deficient of salvific noetic knowledge (= salvific wisdom) and this is figuratively expressed in reference to the eyes that are depicted as veiled and blind. This type of ‘hardening’ brings with it blindness which is the result or effect of the hardened mind (or heart). The usage of the πωρώω/πώρωσις not only demonstrates this but reveals the Isaianic or wisdom background.

Job 17:7 **πεπώρωνται** γὰρ ἀπὸ ὀργῆς οἱ ὀφθαλμοί μου πεπολιόρκημαι
μεγάλως ὑπὸ πάντων

For my **eyes** have been **dimmed** by reason of sorrow; I have been besieged by all.

Mark 3:5 καὶ περιβλεψάμενος αὐτοὺς μετ’ ὀργῆς, συλλυπούμενος ἐπὶ τῇ
πωρώσει τῆς καρδίας αὐτῶν λέγει τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ· ἔκτεινον τὴν
χεῖρα. καὶ ἐξέτεινεν καὶ ἀπεκατεστάθη ἡ χεὶρ αὐτοῦ.

And looking around at them with anger, being grieved because of the **hardness** of their heart, said to the man, “Stretch forth your hand.” And he stretched out his hand and his hand was restored.

Mark 6:52 οὐ γὰρ συνῆκαν ἐπὶ τοῖς ἄρτοις, ἀλλ’ ἦν αὐτῶν ἡ καρδία
πεπωρωμένη.

For they did not *understand* concerning the loaves, but their heart was **hardened**.

⁹² The noun νόημα, ‘mind, thought,’ occurs six times in the NT exclusively confined to Paul and almost entirely within 2 Corinthians (2 Cor 2:11; 3:14; 4:4; 10:5; 11:3; Phil 4:7). Christians are not ignorant of Satan’s ‘mind’ (=intentions) (2 Cor 2:11). Man’s ‘mind’ is hardened in that he cannot see the clarity of the OT Scriptures (2 Cor 3:14). The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers (2 Cor 4:4). Every ‘thought’ is to be in subjection to Christ (2 Cor 10:5). The ‘mind’ can be corrupted away from the simplicity in Christ (2 Cor 11:3). The ‘mind,’ along with the heart, is kept by the peace of God through Jesus Christ (Phil 4:7). It only appears twice in the LXX, both apocryphal books (3 Macc 5:30; Bar 2:8). See BDAG 675; MM §3540; Johannes Behm, “νόημα,” TDNT 4:960-61.

⁹³ On the participle see BDF §424.

⁹⁴ See Peter Ronald Jones, “The Apostle Paul: A Second Moses according to 2 Corinthians 2:14–4:7” (Ph.D. diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 1973), 95; Mark J. Goodwin, *Paul, Apostle of the Living God: Kerygma and Conversion in 2 Corinthians* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2001), 159.

- Mark 8:17 καὶ γνοὺς λέγει αὐτοῖς· τί διαλογίζεσθε ὅτι ἄρτους οὐκ ἔχετε; οὐπω νοεῖτε οὐδὲ συνίετε; **πεπωρωμένην** ἔχετε τὴν καρδίαν ὑμῶν;
And knowing [their thoughts] he said to them, “Why are you arguing that you have no bread? Do you not yet either *perceive* or *understand*? Have your hearts been **hardened**?”
- John 12:40 τετύφλωκεν αὐτῶν τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς καὶ **ἐπόρωσεν** αὐτῶν τὴν καρδίαν, ἵνα μὴ ἴδωσιν τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς καὶ νοήσωσιν τῇ καρδίᾳ καὶ στραφῶσιν, καὶ ἰάσομαι αὐτούς (Isa 6:10).
He blinded their eyes and **hardened** their heart in order that they should not *see* with their eyes and *understand* with their heart and turn and I would heal them.
- Rom 11:7-8 ⁷Τί οὖν; ὁ ἐπιζητεῖ Ἰσραὴλ, τοῦτο οὐκ ἐπέτυχεν, ἡ δὲ ἐκλογὴ ἐπέτυχεν· οἱ δὲ λοιποὶ **ἐπωρώθησαν**, ⁸καθὼς γεγραπται· ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς ὁ θεὸς πνεῦμα κατανύξεως, ὀφθαλμοὺς τοῦ μὴ βλέπειν καὶ ὦτα τοῦ μὴ ἀκούειν, ἕως τῆς σήμερον ἡμέρας.
⁷What is the conclusion? That which Israel seeks, this it did not obtain but the elect obtained it and the rest were **hardened**. ⁸Just as it is written, God gave them a spirit of slumber [Isa 29:10], eyes that they should not *see* and ears that they should not *hear*, unto this very day [Deut 29:3].
- Rom 11:25 Οὐ γὰρ θέλω ὑμᾶς ἀγνοεῖν, ἀδελφοί, τὸ μυστήριον τοῦτο, ἵνα μὴ ᾔτε [παρ'] ἑαυτοῖς φρόνιμοι, ὅτι **πώρωσις** ἀπὸ μέρους τῷ Ἰσραὴλ γέγονεν ἄχρι οὗ τὸ πλήρωμα τῶν ἐθνῶν εἰσέλθῃ
For I do not wish you to be ignorant, brethren, of this mystery, so that you should not be wise among yourselves, that a **hardening** has come to part of Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles arrives.
- 2 Cor 3:14 ἀλλὰ **ἐπωρώθη** τὰ νοήματα αὐτῶν. ἄχρι γὰρ τῆς σήμερον ἡμέρας τὸ αὐτὸ κάλυμμα ἐπὶ τῇ ἀναγνώσει τῆς παλαιᾶς διαθήκης μένει, μὴ ἀνακαλυπτόμενον ὅτι ἐν Χριστῷ καταργεῖται·
But their minds were **hardened**. For unto this very day upon reading the old covenant this same veil remains, not being uncovered because in Christ it is nullified.
- Eph 4:18 ἐσκοτωμένοι τῇ διανοίᾳ ὄντες, ἀπηλλοτριωμένοι τῆς ζωῆς τοῦ θεοῦ διὰ τὴν ἀγνοίαν τὴν οὖσαν ἐν αὐτοῖς, διὰ τὴν **πώρωσιν** τῆς καρδίας αὐτῶν,⁹⁵

⁹⁵ Hoehner says, “In reviewing these two verses [4:17-18] a series of causes and effects becomes apparent. The scenario could be reconstructed by reversing the direction of statements. The hardness of their hearts toward God causes their ignorance. Ignorance concerning God and his will caused them to be alienated from the life of God. Their alienation caused their minds to be darkened, and their darkened minds caused them to walk in the futility of mind” (Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002], 588-89). Earlier he says, “The original purpose of the mind was to be able to comprehend God’s revelation, *but due to the fall* a person’s mind is unable to accomplish this goal

Being darkened in their *understanding*, alienated from the life of God through the *ignorance* that is in them, because of the **hardness** of their heart.

Herm. 30:1 Ἡρώτησα αὐτὸν πάλιν λέγων Ἐπεὶ ὁ κύριος ἄξιόν με ἡγήσατο ἵνα μετ' ἐμοῦ πάντοτε κατοικῇς, ὀλίγα μου ῥήματα ἔτι ἀνάσχου, ἐπεὶ οὐ συνίω οὐδέν, καὶ ἡ καρδιά μου **πεπώρωται** ἀπὸ τῶν προτέρων μου πράξεων· συνέτισόν με, ὅτι λίαν ἄφρων εἰμὶ καὶ ὅλως οὐθὲν νοῶ.

I asked him again, saying, "Since the Lord considers me worthy for you to live with me always, allow me a few more words, since I don't *understand* anything and my heart has been **hardened** by my previous deeds. Make me *understand*, because I am very *foolish* and *comprehend* absolutely nothing."

Herm. 47:4 οἱ δὲ ἐπὶ τοῖς χεῖλεσιν ἔχοντες τὸν κύριον, τὴν δὲ καρδίαν αὐτῶν **πεπωρωμένην**, καὶ μακρὰν ὄντες ἀπὸ τοῦ κυρίου, ἐκείνοις αἱ ἐντολαὶ αὗται σκληραὶ εἰσι καὶ δύσβατοι.

But to those who have the Lord on their lips but whose heart is **hardened** and who are far from the Lord these commandments are hard and difficult.

These passages reveal several things. (1) The noetic inability as it relates to wisdom is consistent if not always related to salvific wisdom in particular. The collocation of noetic terminology with 'hardening' is also significant. (2) A contingent element is sometimes present within non-salvific contexts like Job 17:7 and Herm. *Mand.* 4.2[30:1]. Both involve what may be termed *functional-ontological* situations involving the gain or loss of further understanding.⁹⁷ (3) The situation of the disciples is also along the lines of *functional-ontological* in that Jesus' statement to them suggests that he intends it to be a rebuke about their state rather than an assessment of their status. (4) John 12:40 quotes Isa 6:10 equating *πωρόω* with *παχύνω*, a term used in the LXX and preserved in Matt 13:15 and Acts 28:27. Thus "to harden" is equated with "I grow thick, dull" and relates directly to the cognition not volition. Therefore, Isaianic "fattening" is related to the cognition in general and salvific wisdom in particular. With the wisdom and Isaianic tones in mind, the "veiling" may be a divine act that elucidates more clearly the effect of "hardening" that leans significantly in favor of non-transformation via deprivation.

(μάταιος)" (ibid., 584 emphasis added). Hoehner recognizes three essentials here. (1) The collocation of wisdom terms defines the hard-heart. (2) The cause of this ignorance is the hard-heart. (3) The hard-heart is the natural or congenital condition because it originates with the fall.

⁹⁶ *Barn.* 6:10 indicates the endowment of wisdom is the prerequisite for understanding secrets and parables. Explanation is required because parables are obscure to some (*Barn.* 17:2; Herm. *Vis.* 1.11:2; 5.25:5). The foolish (Herm. *Mand.* 10.40:3-4), the sluggish, or arrogant person cannot understand them (Herm. *Sim.* 5.56:1, 57:1-5, 58:1, 5; 59:8; 9.82:5, 106:4). Explanations come voluntarily from an angel after edification by the Spirit (Herm. *Sim.* 9.78:1). It may be remembered that the prerequisite for understanding parables, according to Sirach, is the understanding heart and hearing ears (Sir 3:29).

⁹⁷ Four concepts with regard to statements pertaining to the heart may be briefly noted. (1) *Ontological* refers to something inborn. Man is fat-hearted. (2) *Functional/dynamic* refers to actions irrespective of nature. The heart is 'hot' means it is angry (an action). (3) *Ontological-functional* refers to functions that necessarily flow from ontology. Justifying faith from a regenerate person or unbelief from an unregenerate. (4) *Functional-ontological* refers to an enhancement or actualization (positive or negative) of one's ontology. Growing in wisdom.

2 CORINTHIANS 4:4

Paul relates the activity of Isaianic blinding to the “god of this age.” It is evident, from a brief mention of Rom 11:7-8, that the Apostle links Isa 6:9-10 (via 29:9-10) with Deut 29:3[4]. Therefore, it is likely that he views the “fattening” of Isaiah in terms of divine rather than Satanic perpetuation of the absence of salvific wisdom. In addition, Paul notes that all men are without “understanding” (Rom 3:11) and he links this to a reversal passage in Isaiah that promises to bestow salvific understanding (Rom 15:21; Isa 52:15). Until that application, man is naturally fat/hard-hearted (Eph 4:18). 2 Corinthians 4:4 is therefore designed to explain why the Gospel Paul preaches is rejected by many. He lays the blame on man’s inability to salvifically perceive rather than to the Gospel’s obscurity, lack of perspicuity, or Paul’s inability as a communicator.⁹⁸ It is Paul, after all, who said, “the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit for they are foolishness to him, and he *cannot* know them for they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor 2:14).⁹⁹ This points to two types of wisdom, one of this age congenital to man versus that derived from the Spirit.¹⁰⁰ Thus divine ‘fattening’ (or hardening) may simply emphasize Yahweh’s prerogative to perpetuate man’s natural fallen condition for his own purposes and ultimate glory.

The verse of 2 Cor 4:4 has several additional points of interest that may contribute to the difficulty or clarity of the issue at hand. These include the awkwardness of the opening relative clause,¹⁰¹ the syntactical ordering of the genitive phrase ‘of this world,’¹⁰² the function of the infinitive as well as the meaning of ἀυγάω,¹⁰³ the nuance of φωτισμόν in relation to the infinitive phrase,¹⁰⁴ the string of

⁹⁸ Kenneth L. Chafin, *1, 2 Corinthians*, The Communicator's Commentary, ed. Lloyd J. Ogilvie, vol. 7 (Waco, TX: Word, 1985), 229.

⁹⁹ For an excellent study on the Pauline view of wisdom see Sigurd Grindheim, “Wisdom for the Perfect: Paul's Challenge to the Corinthian Church (1 Corinthians 2:6-16),” *JBL* 121 (2002): 689-709. See also 1 Cor 12:3; Rom 8:7-9.

¹⁰⁰ David A. deSilva, *The Credentials of an Apostle: Paul's Gospel in 2 Corinthians 1-7*, BIBAL Monograph Series, vol. 4 (N. Richland Hills, TX: BIBAL, 1998), 50.

¹⁰¹ The phrase ἐν οἷς, *in whom*, can leave the impression that it is a subset rather than a tautology of the preceding participle phrase τοῖς ἀπολλυμένοις. But this is unlikely and Bultmann equates the two (Bultmann, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians*, 105). Thrall says, although an awkward phrase, it points back to the participle and is co-extensive with τῶν ἀπίστων (Thrall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 305; Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT, ed. Gordon D. Fee [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997], 218 n. 39). For a contrary view see Samuel Davies, “Remarks on Second Epistle to the Corinthians 4:3-4,” *BSac* 25 (1868): 25-27. He argues that 4:3 should be translated, “But if our gospel be veiled, it is veiled by the things which are lost” where the “things lost” refer to the entire furniture and ceremonial of the Mosaic economy.

¹⁰² The two syntactic options (discussed above) are that it modifies either ὁ θεός or τῶν ἀπίστων. If the first then the phrase τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου is a genitive of *subordination* so that ὁ θεός is the god *over* this age (Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996], 103). If the second it can be a genitive of *possession* so that they are unbelievers *owned by* this age, a genitive of *source* unbelievers *dependent on* this age, genitive of *place* unbelievers *in/of* this age, or a genitive of *association* unbelievers *associated with* this age.

¹⁰³ C. F. D. Moule, *An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek*, 2d ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), 143.

¹⁰⁴ The infinitive is either adverbial of *purpose* or *result* with most commentators favoring the former. The verb ἀυγάω can have two general meanings dependent on whether it is treated intransitively or transitively. If intransitive it may be translated ‘to shine’ or ‘to illuminate’ where τὸν φωτισμόν would be treated as an *accusative subject of the infinitive* and an implied αὐτοῖς might be added. The second option is to treat it transitively and translate it ‘to see clearly’ where τὸν φωτισμόν becomes an *accusative of direct object* and an implied double accusative is assumed (αὐτούς). Most commentators treat it transitively. Bultmann calls the entire expression (φωτισμόν τοῦ εὐαγγελίου τῆς δόξης τοῦ Χριστοῦ) *plerophoric* (Bultmann, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians*, 105). Garland says the noun φωτισμόν “may

genitives following,¹⁰⁵ and finally the ideological source for the phrase ‘image of God.’¹⁰⁶ For the purpose of this presentation, however, the comments will be limited to the syntactical ordering of ὁ θεὸς τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου, its meaning, and its background.

THE IDENTICAL SUBJECT WHO BLINDS AND HARDENS

The *hardening* of the mind (of 2 Cor 3:14) is evidently attributed to Yahweh and this leads to the conclusion that the agent of *blinding* in 2 Cor 4:4, an effect of hardening, refers to Yahweh not the devil/Satan.¹⁰⁷ At least six factors favor this view.

(1) This text is reflective of Isa 6:9-10 which argues for Yahweh as the actor (not the devil/Satan). This extends to the reuses of Isa 6:9-10 as well. (2) The verb for blind (τυφλόω) occurs three times in the NT (John 12:40; 2 Cor 4:4; 1 John 2:11) and the first refers unambiguously to Yahweh, the second (for the meantime) is unclear, and the third to a state. A semantically similar term for ‘blind’ (σκοτίζω) is found in Rom 11:10 where Yahweh is also unquestionably the actor and Deut 29:3[4] with Isa 29:10 (a reuse of Isa 6:9-10) lie behind the text. Savage identifies the “light” here with that of the eschatological glory promised in Isaiah and the ‘hardness’ of 2 Cor 3:14 with Rom 11:7-8 and thus Isa 29:10 and Deut 29:3[4].¹⁰⁸ In this way the light in 2 Cor 4:4 may be identified

have a more active meaning, ‘an enlightenment that enlightens’” (Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 212). In light of the context, the role of wisdom, and the Isaianic tone, the intransitive sense would fit well. The infinitive phrase would be a further explanation of what blinding entails. *It is not merely an outward light that is not seen (it might include this) but an inward illumination that is withheld.* However, the transitive view also makes good sense. The transitive view can be construed as indicating that they do not see the outward light because inward illumination is withheld. Further explanation (external light) is thereby rendered obsolete.

¹⁰⁵ The string of genitives are usually categorized as follows: (1) τοῦ εὐαγγελίου is a genitive of source (Belleville, *2 Corinthians*, 116), called genitive of origin by some (Barrett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 131; Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 218 n. 43) or genitive of author (Bultmann, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians*, 106). (2) τῆς δόξης is usually taken as an *attributive* genitive called a genitive of quality (Bultmann, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians*, 106) or less likely a *descriptive* genitive (Belleville, *2 Corinthians*, 116). (3) τοῦ Χριστοῦ is treated as either a *subjective* genitive (Bultmann, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians*, 106) or an *objective* genitive (Belleville, *2 Corinthians*, 116). For a discussion on the concatenation of genitives with different meanings see BDF §168(2); Max Zerwick, *Biblical Greek Illustrated by Examples*, trans. Joseph Smith, Scripta Pontificii, vol. 114 (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1963), §47; Richard A. Young, *Intermediate New Testament Greek: A Linguistic and Exegetical Approach* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 24-25; Nigel Turner, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, vol. 3: *Syntax*, ed. James Hope Moulton (Edinburgh: Clark, 1963), 218; A. T. Robertson and W. Hersey Davis, *A New Short Grammar of the Greek Testament*, 10th ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1958), §343(b); A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, 503, 779.

¹⁰⁶ The phrase εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ combines a creation motif (Gen 1:27; 5:1; 9:6 LXX) with the sapiential concept of wisdom as the *means* of revelation and the *agent* of both creation and conversion (Wis 7:21, 26; Prov 8:22, 30; Col 1:15-20). See Barrett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 133; Kruse, *The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, 104; Belleville, *2 Corinthians*, 116; Ivo da Conceição Souza, *The New Covenant in the Second Letter to the Corinthians. A Theologico-Exegetical Investigation on 2 Cor 3:1-4:6 and 5:14-21* (Rome: Pontifical Gregorian University, 1978), 191. With the combination of εἰκὼν and δόξης emerges the wisdom idea of ἀπαύγασμα (Wis 7:25-26; Heb 1:3). See Bultmann, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians*, 106. Thrall says the source of this phrase could arise from a liturgical tradition, Gnosticism, wisdom speculation of Hellenistic Judaism, or a rabbinic tradition of Adam and his illumined face (Thrall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 311). Barnett says, “Such ‘seeing’ of ‘the light . . . of the glory’ is, of course, metaphorical for hearing” (Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 218). Philo is also brought in on the discussion of the logos as the image of God and firstborn of all creation and his role in bringing wisdom to God’s people (Philo *Opif.* 25; *Alleg. Interp.* 1.43; *Conf.* 97, 146; *Fug.* 101, 146; *Spec.* 1.81). See Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 212 fn. 521.

¹⁰⁷ These two texts combined convey a very similar purpose as Isa 6:9-10 in the NT and tied together may be viewed as parallel.

¹⁰⁸ Timothy B. Savage, *Power through Weakness: Paul’s Understanding of the Christian Ministry in 2 Corinthians*, SNTSMS, ed. Margaret E. Thrall, vol. 86 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 127-29, 134-35. He even identifies the subject of the divine passive in 3:14 (due to Rom 11:7) as the divine

not only with the light of Isaiah but the salvific wisdom that constitutes that light.¹⁰⁹ (3) There is no other place in the NT where ὁ θεός refers to anyone but the true God.¹¹⁰ The twofold articular use of θεός in this verse increases the likelihood of the same referent for the latter unambiguously refers to Yahweh.¹¹¹ (4) The phrase ‘of this age’ occurs eleven times in the NT and each time in the context of wisdom and suggests a sapiential dichotomy between the ages.¹¹² (5) A similar phrase “god of the age” refers to Yahweh on at least two occasions. Daniel 5:4 (LXX) uses the phrase (minus the pronoun) to refer to the true god as opposed to idols.¹¹³ It reads, “And they were praising the idols made with their hands and they did not praise the god of the age [τὸν θεὸν τοῦ αἰῶνος] who has authority over their spirit.” Here the point is that they should have praised him, an unlikely statement by a prophet of Yahweh unless it referred to the true god. Tobit 14:6 reads, “And all the Gentiles will truly return to fear the Lord god and they will bury their idols and all the nations will bless the Lord.” However, MS S adds τὸν θεὸν τοῦ αἰῶνος thus reading, “fear the Lord the god of the age.” Here Yahweh is termed “the god of the age” where the devil/Satan view cannot be sustained with much force. A final passage is in Sir 36:7 and reads, “And they will know, all those who dwell on the earth, that you are Lord, the god of the ages [ὁ θεὸς τῶν αἰώνων].” This has the plural form but may be used in support of the idea that if Yahweh is the god of the ages, he is also the god of this age. (6) Added to this may be the several early fathers who hold to the view that Yahweh is the one who blinds in 2 Cor 4:4.¹¹⁴

This interpretation finds few supporters today. James M. Scott is the only modern commentator (as far as I can tell) that takes the phrase “god of this age” in 2 Cor 4:4 as referring to Yahweh. He states that although this idea has Pauline precedence (2 Cor 3:14; Rom 11:8; cf. Acts 28:26-27 a speech of Paul), it is nevertheless “repugnant to the modern mind, as the Markan explanation of Jesus’ use of parables (Mark 4:12, citing Isa. 6:9-10). Therefore, commentators usually prefer to interpret the expression as a reference to Satan, even though such a designation seems to have no parallels.”¹¹⁵ He concedes (as do I) that the phrase *could* refer to Satan if the phrase ‘the prince over the power of the air’ (Eph 2:2b) is equated with ‘the god of this age’ (2 Cor 4:4) but it would require disregarding its Isaianic background and interpreting ‘hardening’ and ‘blinding’ in a way contrary to Pauline theology. Scott notes that extrabiblical data indicate that Belial (cf. 2 Cor 6:15) is the ruler of the world and age¹¹⁶ who may lead

passive. “If so, the failure of the law to reveal divine glory is doubtless the result of a veil which God himself has placed over Israel’s heart” (ibid., 135).

¹⁰⁹ He ultimately opts for Satan as the god of this age based on the usage of νόημα and that there is another Jesus and another wisdom (ibid., 154-63). However, there is nothing in the use of νόημα that demands such a conclusion.

¹¹⁰ Phil 3:19 refers to a non-personal entity, viz., their belly. So although the articular use in the singular can refer to *something* other than Yahweh, it never refers to *someone* other than Yahweh. The reference to false gods in Paul is always in the plural and anarthrous (1 Cor 8:5*bis*; Gal 4:8). On the other hand, Paul refers to Satan ten times (Rom 16:20; 1 Cor 5:5; 7:5; 2 Cor 2:11; 11:14; 12:7; 1 Thess 2:18; 2 Thess 2:9; 1 Tim 1:20; 5:15) and the devil six times (Eph 4:27; 6:11; 1 Tim 3:6, 7; 2 Tim 2:26; 3:3). He also refers to him as the tempter (1 Thess 3:5), the evil one (Eph 6:16; 2 Thess 3:3), the prince over the power of the air (Eph 2:2b), and Belial (2 Cor 6:15).

¹¹¹ It almost goes without saying that every case in the NT where ὁ θεός is followed (within thirty words) with ὁ θεός, it refers to the same divine being rather than a different one. This occurs some eighty-five times in eighty verses in the NT. There is not one exception.

¹¹² See Matt 12:32; Luke 16:8; 20:34; Rom 12:2; 1 Cor 1:20; 2:6*bis*, 8; 3:18; 2 Cor 4:4; Eph 1:21.

¹¹³ From James M. Scott, *2 Corinthians*, NICNT (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), 85.

¹¹⁴ Bray, ed., *1–2 Corinthians*, 228.

¹¹⁵ Scott, *2 Corinthians*, 85.

¹¹⁶ He cites *Mar. Isa.* 2:4; 4:2-6; *T. Reu.* 4:11; 1QS 1:23-24; 2:19.

people's hearts astray.¹¹⁷ But since the language is not exactly parallel to 2 Cor 4:4, he concludes, "We may give a slight preference to interpreting the expression as referring to God, who frequently hardens people's hearts against him (e.g., Exod. 4:21; 7:3, 13; 9:12, 35; 14:4, 8; Deut. 2:30; Isa. 63:17)."¹¹⁸

THE COHERENCE OF THE YAHWEH VIEW

YAHWEH IS THE "GOD OF THIS AGE"

Yahweh is the god of this age in at least two respects. (1) He is the creator of and efficient cause behind all ages, therefore, the god of any and all ages (Heb 1:2). If he is the god of any age, then he is the god of *this* (even evil) age. (2) Contextually 2 Cor 4:4 seems to stress Yahweh's powers of *preterition* in leaving those who are congenitally (not judicially) hard, deaf, and blind to their unhappy state thereby *perpetuating* the evil in the evil age.¹¹⁹ Although the opposite of this is regeneration, the opposite of regeneration is not *judicial* hardness, blindness, deafness, but rather *congenital* hardness, blindness, and deafness. Congenital hardness may be viewed as the necessary albeit not sufficient condition for regeneration. In every case it is Yahweh not the devil/Satan that is responsible for its bestowal or lack thereof.

BLINDING IS DEPRIVATIONAL NOT TRANSFORMATIONAL

Hughes argues that "The dreadful consequences, then, of unbelief . . . is that the mind is blinded . . . this is attended by the inability to perceive."¹²⁰ Unbelievers are "blinded by that no-god the devil" and are only then "incapacitated."¹²¹ But this explanation seems strained for at least three reasons. (1) It assumes a prior ability, retribution, and transformation via depletion. But this does not account for the unbelief that purportedly initiates the act. Indeed, it is this "unbelief" motivated by man's wisdom that defines the 'fat-heart.' (2) It misses the essential issue, namely, that man's unbelief is determined by his own wisdom—a wisdom that leads him to reject divine revelation. (3) This explanation attributes a role to the devil/Satan nowhere attested in Scripture.

The 'god of this age' blinds but the text is unclear on *how* or *why* this occurs. The view here is that this hardening (blinding, deafening) is not *depletive* or (its opposite) a *deposition* but a divine act of *deprivation* that is *non-transformative* and *non-retributive*. A major reason why the devil/Satan view does not work is because he cannot deprive of regeneration or bestow the opposite effects of the hard-heart. In order to deprive someone of something, one must be able to bestow its opposite. Since the devil/Satan cannot do this, he must not be "the god of this age."¹²² Therefore, he cannot be the god who blinds.

¹¹⁷ He cites *Jub.* 1:20; *T. Reu.* 4:7; *T. Jud.* 19:4; *Sib. Or.* 3:63-74; CD 4:12-19.

¹¹⁸ Scott, *2 Corinthians*, 86. The texts Scott cites show that he views *volitional* hardening as identical with *cognitive* fattening/hardening. However, the point he is making is not lost here.

¹¹⁹ Although it is normally recognized that the true god illumines in 4:6, the opposite is usually assumed as the god of this age who blinds in 4:4 (Steven J. Kraftchick, "Death in Us, Life in You: The Apostolic Medium," in *Pauline Theology*, ed. David M. Hay, vol. 2: *1 & 2 Corinthians* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993], 170). But if the true god refuses to illumine, then he may be the "god of this age" who blinds by leaving man blind.

¹²⁰ Hughes, *Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 129.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² That regeneration is what is deprived is seen by comparing the phrases 'blinds their *minds*' so that the Gospel does not 'shine' (2 Cor 4:4) with and the creative act of God "who shined in our hearts to give light of the *knowledge* of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor 4:6). To 'blind' is to refuse to grant to the

THE DEVIL/SATAN OCCUPIES NO ROLE IN HARDENING

It may be asked whether the devil/Satan has any role in hardening or blinding even if it is indirect. But this may be set aside for three reasons. (1) There is no evidence for intermediate agency in any of the passages in reference to Isa 6:9-10 or its reuses. (2) No *intermediate* role is possible in the *congenitally* fat/hard-hearted view—one does not deprive regeneration *through* any creaturely agent. Thus the very question of intermediary agency presupposes a *transformative* and *punitive* view. (3) If deprivation of the new heart is the correct view of fattening/hardening, then the devil/Satan has no role whatsoever.

Given the arguments above, there is a remote possibility that the phrase in question refers to the devil/Satan. But it seems that the burden of proof has significantly shifted.

CONCLUSION

Paul advances a notion that Yahweh is the cause behind the lack of 'success' in his own ministry especially as it pertains to the presence or absence of evangelical faith. He also perceives a threat to the gospel underlying his opponents' accusations, namely, that it is in some way deficient. If the interpretation above is correct, then Paul explains unbelief in terms of God withholding the *internal* light necessary to embrace the *external* light of the Gospel. His explanation reaches back to an old tradition that begins in Deut 29:3[4] and is reformulated in Isa 6:9-10. It is neither Paul's lack of success nor the Gospel's deficiency but man's inability to exercise salvific wisdom that defines the problem. Paul's opponents, who no doubt viewed themselves as wise, would not have received this explanation without rancor.

The devil/Satan view is unrelated to and finds scant support for it within this tradition. Moreover, it diverts attention from the condition of the human heart, blames the archenemy of God for unbelief, and seeks a human contingency for the divine action that is either direct or via an intermediary. That "the god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers" is to say that the true God reserves the right to pass over those not destined for salvation by withholding salvific wisdom leading to repentance. This interpretation avoids a celestial scapegoat (devil/Satan) and identifies the focal culprits of unbelief. Left to his own wisdom and apart from the divine initiative, man will always freely reject divine revelation.

There may be some practical applications to note as well. (1) The mark of success should not be gauged by the number of converts but faithfulness to God's calling. No one understood this more than Isaiah except perhaps Jesus and Paul. The success of Isaiah's message was marked by unrepentance and the devastation of Israel's towns and cities. This debacle would hardly stand out as an achievement on his *curriculum vitae*. Frustration in the face of unmet expectations or what some might label ministerial failure often leads to supplementing or truncating the gospel, adopting a "seeker friendly" approach to ministry, or shifting blame to God and others. But this evidences a kind of unbelief reminiscent of the 'fat-heart.' Not all "failure" is human. It may be by divine design. (2) A constant temptation facing pastors and teachers is the desire to dumb down the gospel. Behind this minimalism lies the notion that only the simplistic gospel is true—driven partly by the misguided assumption that a child must be able to understand it. As a result, significant doctrines are never addressed or the same passages are explained with little depth or insight for fear of losing someone. But the problem is not intellectual. The gospel may be presented in its true simplicity or wonderful complexity without avail. The simple-minded and the wise alike will always

mind saving knowledge which comes via regeneration ('shine'). The devil/Satan has no part in either producing or withholding regeneration.

treat divine revelation as foolishness—not because it is intrinsically, but because they are fools inherently. A wrong theological diagnosis leads to a misguided pastoral prescription. This passage sets the teacher and pastor free to present the whole counsel of God depending all the while on the Spirit to give wisdom. With God's wisdom, the child and the savant alike will salvifically perceive, understand, and know in such a way that solicits repentance. (3) Finally, the interpretation offered here strikes a blow to cults that use this passage to deny the deity of Christ. Since this passage does not refer to the devil/Satan but the true God, it may not be argued that Satan is a god in any sense similar to Christ.