



In the first chapters of Esther we see God caring for Esther and Mordecai, preparing them for the work he intends to do, and challenging them to trust and rely upon him. With Haman's threat against the Jews in the Empire clear and approaching, God is now calling Esther to confront her divided world to improve it. As we see all around our world, it's quite easy to confront division by adding to it, but making things better is difficult. It requires an unusual combination of love and honesty. Consider the following by the early 20th century British writer G. K. Chesterton:

Perhaps the most everyday instance of this point is in the case of women; and their strange and strong loyalty. Some stupid people started the idea that because women obviously back up their own people through everything, therefore women are blind and do not see anything. They can hardly have known any women. The same women who are ready to defend their men through thick and thin are (in their personal interactions with the man) almost morbidly lucid about the thinness of his excuses or the thickness of his head. A man's friend likes him but leaves him as he is; his wife loves him and is always trying to turn him into somebody else. Women who are utter mystics in their creed are utter cynics in their criticism. Thackeray expressed this well when he made Pendennis' mother, who worshipped her son as a god, yet assume that he would go wrong as a man. She underrated his virtue, through she overrated his value. The devotee is entirely free to criticize; the fanatic can safely be a sceptic. Love is not blind; that is the last thing that it is. Love is bound; and the more it is bound the less it is blind.

. . . No one doubts that an ordinary man can get on with this world: but we demand not strength enough to get on with it, but strength enough to get it on. Can he hate it enough to change it, and yet love it enough to think it worth changing?
G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*

What Chesterton describes is in many ways quite foreign to our society. If we like something, it doesn't need changing. If we don't like something, then replace it. We do it with things, friends, even nationality. In recent elections people have threatened to leave the country if the outcomes didn't match their preferences. This attitude may be easier short term, but it only diminishes loyalty, perpetuates pessimism, and erodes relationships at every level.

By contrast, Esther exemplifies what God calls us to in terms of relationships and commitment. She understands the risks of approaching the king and of remaining silent, but because of her time with God, she remains committed to obeying. Her knowledge of the risks and her laser focus on God's purposes then enable her to act very deliberately. Her actions don't serve her own preferences and impulsive desires, but rather her desire to save her people. We don't know what she thinks of Xerxes personally, but it's clear to her that their fate is wrapped up together. Despite his significant flaws, she is always respectful, patient, and desires the best.

Discussion Questions

How does our society incentivize seeing those who disagree with us with contempt? How can we respond with love and respect in what is often a toxic social environment?

Esther is motivated by her family's and her people's well-being while Chesterton's hypothetical wife is motivated by her love for her husband. What should motivate our willingness to engage conflicted people?

What can we expect when we enter spiritual conversations ignorant of the context and the risks involved? How can we prepare for encounters with others, confident that God is at work in their lives?