



As bad as Haman was, his destruction shows the far more sinister powers behind his actions. The Jews are still at risk of being destroyed themselves and God is still working to preserve them through Esther's intercession and their active self-defense. Though it manifests differently, the same battle continues today.

Paul's extraordinary description and his purpose in introducing spiritual warfare must not be left as a pleasant metaphor or an empty picture of unreality. His general point is clear, though what precisely he meant and how exactly he waged that sort of warfare is not spelled out. But the teaching of Jesus is simpler, more incessant and even more amazing. Again and again Jesus is explicit about the supernatural adversary he faced. But all it takes to defeat him, Jesus says equally repeatedly, is prayer—a simple matter of his followers asking the Father to do the things we pray for as we pray in his name, Jesus. Therein lies the authority, and therein lies the power. Jesus even tells us that we have the authority to “bind” and “loose” things on earth that will then be bound and loosed in heaven (Mt 16:18-19). Which is more stunning? That Jesus gave us his followers such power for us to use for the advance of the kingdom, or that with our chronically unmusical condition we are deaf to his words and barely take him seriously?

Walter Wink describes demons as the “drunk uncle of the twentieth century: we keep them out of sight.” But it is not only demons that embarrass us as sophisticated modern people. So too, it seems, does spiritual warfare and all the teaching and practices that go with it. But this is to our immense loss and our weakness in society. As Newbigin concludes, “The principalities and powers are realities. We may not be able to visualize them, to locate them, or to say exactly what they are. But we are foolish if we pretend they do not exist.” Fearful of appearing credulous before the world, we are foolish if we dismiss the words of our Lord as incredible. Restoring the art of spiritual warfare is a vital key to a faith that can prevail in the advanced modern world of titanic powers. Thanks to science and technology, human power today staggers the imagination. But there is a power more powerful than the Promethean forces of our day, and the good news of Jesus is that the offers to make it ours if we will only ask.

The second tool we need is a grasp of the history of ideas. There is no saying when we might encounter a new idea, opinion, or suddenly fashionable viewpoint that touches on our faith in some way or another. The idea might appear highly attractive or perhaps shocking, and maybe even threatening. But we have to think it through Christianly, pausing to ask the basic questions we should ask of anything we hear or read:

First, what is being said? Unless we ask this question with care, we may be responding to what we *think* a person said, or even worse still, what we *feel* about what we think the person said—a sure recipe for speaking past each other and creating unnecessary misunderstanding. Second, is it truth? In a day when truth is often overridden, this question is often overlooked, but it is crucial. And third, what of it? If we understand what a person is saying and believe it is true, the question then arises, What would be the consequences of what the person is saying? Many a claim falls at this point when its practical outcome is understood.

Impossible People

Discussion Questions

Jesus, Paul, and others throughout the Bible describe spiritual powers and authorities as genuine realities. Why are we often quick to minimize their influence, and how might doing so affect us and the church?

We often speak of the “power of prayer,” but the power rests in God himself. As with Esther's request of Xerxes, how does prayer set us in good relationship with God and grant access to his power and authority?

The Jews of Esther's day couldn't rely on others to defend them. What can happen when we let others think through our values and beliefs for us, and how can we think Christianly for ourselves instead?