

The Truth About Spiritual Warfare

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Any thorough discussion of the exclusivity of Christ should include the issue of spiritual warfare. Not the nonsense we see in the charismatic church, where a faith healer attempts to bind the demons of back pain and seasonal allergies through your television screen. True spiritual warfare isn't about parlor tricks or incantations. It's a tireless effort to which all believers have been called, an endless battle we must wage every day.

In his first epistle to the Corinthian church, Paul addressed a growing problem among the believers there. Not only was the church careless with their observance of the Lord's Table, but there were also many in the church who were still partaking in the idol feasts in the temples. Issuing a pastoral warning, Paul wrote, "What do I mean then? That a thing sacrificed to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, but I say that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God" (1 Corinthians 10:19–20). The point was simple: The idol itself might not represent a spiritual threat to believers, but the Corinthians should nonetheless respect the demonic realities behind such idolatry. Paul was making a comprehensive condemnation of all false religions. Worshiping anything other than the God of the Bible amounts to demon-worship.

Such a conclusion is incompatible with the view of those who contend that somehow Hindus, Buddhists, and people of all other religions and

worldviews can find their way to God through intuition, natural reason, and spiritual inclinations. If Paul is correct—and he is—those other faiths don't present alternative avenues to heaven, nor does human reason present an alternate means of obtaining grace. The Apostle bluntly says that those pursuits can't lead people to God because they're actually demon worship. And while devotees of other religions wouldn't self-identify as demon worshipers, demons are nonetheless behind all false religion and at work in all false systems. Satan is the father of lies who masquerades as an angel of light, and his ministers disguise themselves as angels of light and bearers of the truth (2 Corinthians 11:13-15).

We need to bring that understanding into Paul's second epistle to the Corinthians and the following exhortation:

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. (2 Corinthians 10:3–5)

Paul is describing how the church must respond to false religion, worldly philosophies, psychologies, theories, and every other ideological fortress that stands in opposition to the truth of the gospel. Spiritual warfare is a battle against all anti-God ideas. He's calling believers to fight against the religions of demons.

The word Paul uses to describe these demonic lies is fascinating. The word translated as "fortress" is *ochyrōma*; it speaks of a fortified stronghold. It could be a castle, a prison, or a tomb. All of those are fitting metaphors for false religions and faulty worldviews. Many people who pursue these alternative paths to God build their ideological fortress like a castle, but it quickly becomes a prison—and it ends up as their tomb, unless they're rescued and brought captive to Christ.

All of Satan's fortresses, regardless of how majestic and impressive they might appear, are damning prisons. All false religion is demonic, and people are not ascending to God through the means of demonic lies. No amount of good intentions, zealous piety, or reasoning capacity can claw anyone out of Satan's deceptive ideological tombs.

So when you encounter a person who devoutly follows some false religion, don't think that person is making the best effort he can to worship the true God. He is not merely on a more circuitous path to salvation; he is worshiping demons. God is not in those idols. Satan is in those idols, working to corrupt, distort, and confuse sinful man into believing he is pursuing truth. Paul says that's how we must perceive false religion, for the sake of those still caught in the clutches of Satan's lies.

In 2 Thessalonians 1, Paul gives us a powerful statement about God's judgment. Verses 7–9 speak of the return of Christ,

when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction.

That's unmistakable. Paul leaves no room for a universalistic wideness in God's mercy. There is no back door to heaven. If you don't know the true God and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, you will suffer the fury of God.

Natural theology cannot save anyone. All it can do is tie you to demonic lies and damn you—and it does so with stunning efficiency. It is perhaps the greatest grief of my heart that professing believers—those who claim to know and love the Lord—have severely impeded the church's missionary endeavor with this kind of heretical theology. At a time when God's people have the financial resources, the technology, and the means of transportation—when we have a global village that makes proclaiming the gospel easier than it has

ever been—Satan has convinced many that the lost are fine the way they are. In fact, some have gone so far as to argue that we shouldn't take the gospel to the far reaches of the globe, since those who don't believe will be guilty of rejecting more of the truth. In the backward economy of natural theology, ignorance is preferable to illumination and preaching the gospel is dangerous rather than a means of deliverance.

We are appropriately grieved when God's name is dishonored and when false religions corrupt His truth and twist Scripture. We're right to grieve for the people who are ensnared by those lies and lost in their sin. But it is all the more grievous when people actively undermine the gospel and call it "Christianity." It brings such dishonor on God's name, and it proudly leads sinners further away from the truth.

May it be that we are faithful to the truth of Scripture and faithful to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. And may God raise up a great force of people who, being faithful to that gospel, can be mightily used to bring that message of His glorious Son—the only name through which salvation is available—to the ends of the earth. In spite of these demonic efforts, Christ will be exalted among the nations. May God give the church a heart to take the gospel to the ends of the earth, because men will perish without it. And may we be a part of that, starting where we are.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Mark". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

(Adapted from *Good News*)

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