

Spiritual warfare in an urbanized world

Outside, the broad boulevard fronting our church building was blocked, creating a two-block space for the Red Moon Theatre's Halloween extravaganza "All Hallows Eve Ritual Celebration."

In the unseasonably warm dusk, people heading into our evening service walked through a smoky haze of ceremonial fires. The sounds of chants set to native drumming helped create a haunting atmosphere. The event flier referenced "guiding the souls of the dead into the next world."

Inside, I was preaching through Revelation. I had not foreseen Halloween falling on the Sunday we came to the text "... you dwell, where Satan's throne is" (Revelation 2:12-17).

No church drama team could have set the stage for this message more powerfully.

After Jesus, the apostle Paul must be considered the world's foremost authority on spiritual warfare. Though he references the battle with darkness often and in different ways, he never writes a whole book or even an entire chapter on the subject.

Demon preoccupation is not something Paul indulged in. Rather, he gave attention and writing space to the power of God, the glories of Christ, and the operation of the Spirit.

Paul, the urban evangelist/church planter, knew what it was to do hand-to-hand combat with the powers opposing God. From Acts 19 we know Paul was experiencing the power of God in significant ways while founding the Ephesian church. Here, he encounters evil spirits working through the seven sons of Sceva. Here, the Word of God prevails and "a number of those who practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them"

Later he writes to this church, "We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but ... against the spiritual forces in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12).

Two Pauline passages could be called significant on the subject. "For though we walk

in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh ..." (2 Corinthians 10:3-5) and, "Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil ..." (Ephesians 6:10-20).

This is my line of thinking. "God so loved the world." God loves people. He sent Jesus to save people. All of His efforts through the Gospel are aimed at people. God's Spirit centered his work on people, sending Paul to the cities.

Where is Satan, God's opponent, going to focus his work? Is it unreasonable or far-fetched to believe Satan centers his attention and efforts on people?

The description in Ephesians seems to indicate the forces of spiritual darkness are organized. Then surely there is an objective and a strategy. The objective is to oppose God's primary work on earth, the evangelization of humanity.

Is it far-fetched then, unreasonable, or eisegetic to think Satan and his forces are amassed and hardest at work where the masses are, the cities? Cities run the world. The powers, forces, and influences that dominate our world emanate from cities. Satan's work in the city follows the logic of God. God's work in the city is leveraged for greater impact and influence. Satan's work in the city gets more bang for the buck through the urban influence that impacts the rest of the world.

We live in an urbanized world. The forces at work in the cities now touch, color, if not dominate the rest of the world. Wherever we live, we breathe urbanized air. Urban winds create currents that rustle the leaves everywhere. The Satanic work that takes place in and around cities affects the whole culture.

Along with a host of other subjects foreign to American evangelicals, having distanced themselves from cities over the last 100 years, spiritual warfare has not received much time or attention, never mind been studied and taught.

Americans, in our slick, sophisticated,

westernized, anglicized, homogenized Christianity, have virtually ignored the reality of Satan and the power of demonic forces. We have relegated them to distant jungles and foreign subcultures ignoring the they are a reality in our everyday lives.

Across the country it seems our urbanized culture is eating the believer's lunch.

Is not Satan's chief weapon deception? Is not his chief deception to keep us from even knowing or recognizing he is present and working?

How, then, shall we prepare for spiritual warfare in an urbanized world?

1. Satan is no less real now than when he tempted Jesus.
2. Satan is no less active now than he was in opposing Paul.
3. Satan is no less deceptive now than he was in the Garden of Eden.
4. We are to be sober and alert (1 Peter 5:8-9).
5. We are not to give place to Satan in any way, shape, or form (Ephesians 4:27).
6. We are only to fight with spiritual weaponry (2 Corinthians 10:3-5, Ephesians 6:11).
7. We are to understand and operate specifically in the power of the blood of Christ (Revelation 12:11).
8. None of this is to be done alone. New Testament Christianity is in community. The authority of Jesus has been placed in the local church (Matthew 16:19, 1 Corinthians 5:4). We are to be spiritually connected and accountable so we can function in the authority of Jesus over the power of Satan (Luke 10:17).



by Charles Lyons, Pastor
Armitage Baptist Church,
Chicago, Illinois
charles.lyons@armitagechurch.org