

Demolishing Strongholds Video Series

God's Way to Spiritual Freedom

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Chapter 2, The Definition of Strongholds (Part 2 of 4)

"So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed"



Freedom In Jesus Series

(Part 2)

Chapter 2. The Definition of Strongholds

Now let's explore the whole issue of demonic strongholds. First, let's define them. A stronghold is a demonic fortress of thoughts housing evil spirits that:

- (1) control, dictate, and influence your attitudes and behavior;
- (2) oppress and discourage you;
- (3) filter and color how you view or react to situations, circumstances, or people.

When you entertain thoughts and participate in activities that are CONTRARY to the will of God, you open yourself up to demonic inhabitation IN THOSE AREAS. You're choosing to appease your flesh nature rather than walk in obedient trust.

When these thoughts and actions become HABITUAL, and we stress *habitual*, you allow a spiritual fortification to be built around that demonic spirit and its influence in your soul.

You become accustomed to responding to the influence and control of the spirit's "voice". In fact, you believe it's the voice of your own mind because it sounds just like YOU! That's where the deception comes in.

Keep in mind that demons monitor your activities and set up circumstances to tempt you. They agitate your thoughts and emotions until you're too confused to resist and pray.

Instead of turning away from those thoughts because they're nothing that Jesus would think, you give way to the inner struggle between good and evil that Paul refers to in his letter to the Romans. (Romans 7:18-21)

If you are a follower of Jesus, you no longer *have* to be a slave to your sin nature because you have the power of the Holy Spirit to resist! Remember from our last segment: Whenever you give way to temptation, your mind, will and emotions respond like a magnet to evil.

Day in and day out you're brought to a decision point when you're tempted. Will you listen to the Holy Spirit and follow God's will for you? Or, are you going to let yourself be drawn toward disobedience by your sin nature to follow Satan's will?

At any point during temptation, you can resist and turn away from those thoughts or actions. You *have* the power of the Holy Spirit to resist the devil and turn toward Jesus and His ways. But giving in to sin leads to HABITUAL disobedience, and that's when you give Satan a foothold for his demon servant to control you in that particular area of your life.

We want to emphasize again: Demonic spirits are RELATIONSHIP DESTROYERS. They cause you to misperceive situations in order to damage your relationships with others. Through demonic agitation you develop wrong conclusions about other people's actions toward you. You project evil motives onto them, and convince yourself that you're a victim!

Obviously, not all of your internal struggles are demonically induced. Many of your beliefs and attitudes that oppose God and His ways were learned through your environment. Your family circumstances, your home life, your relational experiences, and your educational influences play a big part in whether you'll cling to Jesus or yield to Satan.

Many people today acquire their knowledge from secular sources that attack biblical truth. Those lies lodge doubt and unbelief into your spiritual perspective.

All your thoughts can be traced back to beliefs that are based either on the *truth of Scripture* or on *Satan's lies*. When you habitually misinterpret God's purposes for what you're going through, or keep misreading the motives or intent of people around you, you're preparing a dwelling place for demonic activity in your mind, will and emotions.

A demonic stronghold is anything that's compelling enough to hold you in its power. It prevents you from receiving God's love and truth.

The demonic spirit that lives in a stronghold that's been erected in your soul arouses a defensiveness in you. You tend to RATIONALIZE thoughts and actions that are in opposition to God's Word.

(**Explore:** Newsletter 2003-06, "*Are You Suffering From the Woes?*")

How can you recognize if there's a stronghold in you? It will be that area of your life in which you CONSISTENTLY have problems and CAN'T live in victory. You can tell a spiritual stronghold is established because a habitual pattern of FAILURE or HOPELESSNESS exists.

This habitual hopelessness or inability to change isn't a one-time event or response, like slamming the door because you tripped over the dog! Instead, a stronghold steers you toward a consistent, UNGODLY thought pattern or action that seems just a part of who you are.

Your world view, which is your personal perspective of reality, colors all your decision-making. You've developed your own way of seeing things over a long period of time, long before you became a Christian. Through your sin nature, many of your innate responses to people and situations are rooted in the character of Satan, the father of lies.

Satan's demonic servants stir up wrong emotional responses to the circumstances you face. The circumstance itself doesn't cause the emotion, but what you BELIEVE about the circumstance does.

For instance, you may have believed a demonically-induced lie that your older brother always treated you cruelly while you were growing up. The truth is, though, you were a rebellious child! When your parents put your brother in charge when they were away, you caused a lot of trouble! Your brother's reports brought parental discipline on you, yet you blamed your brother for YOUR defiance. The spirit hiding in that stronghold seized the opportunity to turn your anger into a lie of cruel abuse, which you BELIEVED. Now, whenever you think about your brother, anger and bitterness flame up in you — over a twisted so-called "reality" that never happened!

Let me repeat this: A chief demonic goal is to destroy your intimate relationships. Your relationship with our Father and His Son, Jesus, with those in your household, and with those with whom you share close fellowship are targets for demonic disruption and destruction. Why? Because emotionally isolated people are easier for demonic spirits to influence, control, and oppress than people who have loving, supportive relationships.

Tempting Thoughts Lead You to Sinful Actions

Scripture reveals that you ARE able to suppress God's truth in your mind, and give way to deception. As Paul warned the Roman believers, those who have known the will of God can TURN AWAY to futile thinking.

When they consistently refuse to respond to the Spirit of Truth and REJECT those sinful thoughts, their hearts are deceived in that area. (See Romans 1:18-22.)

Yet these people believe that they really are *right!* Their own darkened concept of wisdom becomes more important to them than the truth of God. And those sinful thoughts that are lodged within their hearts then lead to sinful actions.

We shared earlier in the Preface that, "Once a person is deceived, he doesn't recognize that he's deceived, because he's been deceived!"

The apostle James describes a similar pattern to this deception: the mind's response to tempting thoughts brings about sinful behavior.

"No one being tempted should say, 'I am being tempted by God.' For God cannot be tempted by evil, and God himself tempts no one. Rather, each person is being tempted whenever he is being dragged off and enticed by the bait of his own desire. Then, having conceived, the desire gives birth to sin; and when sin is fully grown, it gives birth to death" (James 1:13-15).

(**Explore:** *Going to the High Places* study guide, Chapter 5. "Encounter With Pride")

Satan is the father of temptation. He uses spiritual strongholds in your soul to tempt you with a sinful thought. How you RESPOND to that thought determines if that area of your mind is taken captive and drawn to sin, or whether you resist and take the thought captive to do what Jesus would do.

The Process of Stronghold Development

Keep in mind that strongholds are developed through demonic influence and agitation. For example, reflect on some thought that you realize in your spirit is contrary to the mind of Christ, such as a sexual fantasy. At this point you have two options:

- 1) You can rebuke the unclean spirit that put the tempting thought there and fight back by bringing your thoughts into obedience to Jesus.
- 2) Or, you can entertain that thought a little longer.

At this point you begin to develop an *emotion* about that thought — lust, arousal, fantasy. As that emotion continues, you're moved to take some action, if not now, then at some ripe moment in the future.

The seed of fantasy will eventually grow into an opportunity to fulfill that emotional urge, and a sexual encounter may take place.

If you choose to ignore the warning conviction of the Holy Spirit, you'll continue in these actions until they become habitual. At that point, without God's power released in you by your repentance, you're then held prisoner to this habit by an unclean spirit. A spiritual stronghold has been built in your soul.

Remember, the “voice” of that unclean spirit sounds just like your OWN inner thought voice. You’re completely unaware of its presence because you’ve been deceived by it.

Since Satan can masquerade as an angel of light, his demons can sound just like your mind’s voice. We’ll come back to this a little later.

Let’s summarize the sequence of stronghold development:

- 1) Satanic-inspired THOUGHTS are introduced into your mind.
- 2) Entertaining these thoughts brings on EMOTIONS.
- 3) Giving in to these emotions eventually leads YOU to taking some sort of ACTION.
- 4) Continued participation in this action causes you to develop a HABIT.
- 5) Once a habit is developed, a STRONGHOLD is built by that spirit.

How Does God Get Shut Out By A Stronghold?

If you’ve embraced the true Gospel, the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus is living in you. You have the power to conform your mind to that of Jesus. You’re able to make decisions that are pleasing to God according to the truth of His Word... IF you choose to...

(**Explore:** The Gospel of the Covenant is the Pilgrimage to Salvation)

The weapons you use to wage war against the unseen forces of darkness are SPIRITUAL in nature. Let me repeat this all important passage:

“We have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God” (2 Corinthians 10:4,5).

The “knowledge” of God that’s referred to here is your experiential *insight and awareness* of your heavenly Father, not just a volume of facts ABOUT Him.

In other words, knowledge of the Bible *alone* isn’t the same as *knowing God*. The Germans of the 20th century were a biblically knowledgeable society, but that didn’t stop them from starting two world wars and committing all kinds of atrocities!

Tragically, so many today who *call* themselves Christian know a lot ABOUT God. But they’re not indwelt by His Spirit, nor are they experiencing any relationship with the Lord Jesus. Therefore, they haven’t any “divine power” with which to wage spiritual warfare. You don’t want to be in that boat. Make sure you’ve embraced the true Gospel that gives spiritual power.

Once your soul has been infiltrated by an unclean spirit, your mind, will, and emotions filter all your perceptions and thoughts through that demonic stronghold. This doesn’t mean you’re “demon-possessed”. You’re “*demonized*” in those areas you’ve habitually given over to sin.

This is worth repeating: If you’re a follower of Christ, you’re inhabited by the Holy Spirit. But those areas of your soul that you’ve WILLINGLY YIELDED to sin are fair game to become footholds for demonic involvement.

All of us need to heed Jesus' warning to us in Luke 11:35,36:

"See to it, then, that the light within you is not darkness. Therefore, if your whole body is full of light, and NO PART OF IT DARK, it will be completely lighted, as when the light of a lamp shines on you."

Strongholds: Arguments and Pretensions

Let's take a closer look at the passage with which we closed the last segment. We'll focus on the differences between arguments and pretensions that Paul speaks about when he writes,

"We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God" (2 Corinthians 10:4).

The walls around spiritual strongholds make them so difficult for us to deal with. These walls are arguments and pretensions.

ARGUMENTS are the reasoning, rationalizations, and intentions you entertain in your mind that are hostile to God's truth.

This part of a stronghold concerns the thought processes and patterns you use to deny that you even *have* a problem.

When you're confronted by someone about sin or problems in your life, you raise these arguments up like walls. You rationalize and justify your attitudes and behaviors. In that way you keep the humility that precedes repentance from seizing your heart and convicting you of sin.

PRETENSIONS are your ego and preservation of your inner self *just the way it is*.

This part of the stronghold reveals the *pride and rebellion* that you erect like another wall. Pretensions prevent you from seeking

the power of the Holy Spirit in personal prayer or through ministry to release you from captivity. Again, this is a captivity of which you aren't even aware!

You falter in the will or desire to break free from the spirit's influence because it seems so much a part of who you are. Again, the Love and Truths of God are blocked from penetrating your soul.

The stronghold in your soul is composed of the walls of arguments and pretension. These prevent you from receiving and experiencing God's Love and Truth.

The strongholds, with their arguments and pretensions, are able to exist in some particular area of your soul that has continued in sinful defiance of God's will. And, the demonic spirit's presence in your soul is protected by the stronghold "fortress".

Again, you're oblivious that the thoughts and feelings being whispered to you by the spirit within the stronghold sound just like the "voice" of your own mind. Walls of arguments and pretensions keep you from walking the way Jesus commands and loving Him with wholehearted obedient trust.

When someone confronts you to let you know that your decisions or actions are not of Christ, you *deny* that you have a problem. That's the ARGUMENT part of the stronghold. Then you rationalize that you have a *right* to the negative emotions or the activity that you're pursuing. That's the PRETENSION part of the stronghold.

The convicting work of the Holy Spirit would otherwise cause you to repent and confess your rebellion to God's ways. But His truth is blocked out.

HE'S faithfully presenting the truth to you out of His great love, but you've chosen by HABITUAL PATTERN to obey the familiar voice of the demonic spirit in its stronghold.

Strongholds Hinder Understanding

Another way of perceiving the effects of strongholds is that they block you from hearing the Holy Spirit. He would guide you to apply the biblical truth you read or hear. But WITHOUT the Holy Spirit's insight, you're unable to apply God's truth to your life. And, you lack the Holy Spirit's empowerment to even *want* to please God.

The apostle Paul furnishes us with a spiritual touchstone in our ability to understand truth from the Holy Spirit's work in us.

"This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words TAUGHT BY THE SPIRIT, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. The man WITHOUT the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he CANNOT understand them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:13,14).

When you speak words given to you by the Holy Spirit, only people who *have* the Spirit can understand those truths. Here's an example of how strongholds block out the Spirit's ability to give us understanding.

In the diagram on your screen, Person #1 is a pastor or elder seeking a message to share. (a) The Holy Spirit gives him a message to share that passes into his spirit.

(b) As he shares his message, the words pass through his soul and out of his body through his mouth.

(c) His words enter the body of Person #2 through his ears.

Person #2 may hear the words but fail to understand the spiritual truths and the application of those truths. Spiritual truths are from the Holy Spirit and must be "spiritually discerned" by the hearer.

(d) The understanding which the Holy Spirit would have given to Person #2 would have affirmed, strengthened, and brought into application the truth that was spoken and heard.

But, the arguments and pretensions of the strongholds have blocked both the understanding *and* the empowerment of the Holy Spirit to apply God's truth as it was spoken.

Many of God's children crave to hear His voice and feel His love but they're hindered because of the interference of strongholds. Remember my testimony from the Preface of this series? The spirits of deceit and rejection kept me from experiencing God's love for 45 years.

Even as the Holy Spirit seeks to bring a certain area of our lives into submission to God's will, the walls of arguments and pretensions surrounding the strongholds block the truth of God's love.

First, you can't clearly hear His will for your life with a pure heart when His truth and love are blocked by arguments and pretensions.

Second, from within the stronghold you're listening to the demonic spirit enticing you to sin.

That combination hinders your will to obey, and impairs your intimacy with our Lord Jesus.