

Demolishing Strongholds Video Series

God's Way to Spiritual Freedom

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Chapter 4, Steps To Identify and
Demolish Strongholds (Part 1)

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



Freedom In Jesus Series

(Part 2)

Overview of Types of Strongholds (Part 1)

We've now come to the key part of this workbook, identifying and demolishing the strongholds that may be plaguing you. First we want to introduce you to the various strongholds as they're listed on pages 36 and 37.

The BOLD words, deceit, bitterness, heaviness, and so forth, are the *strongholds* we've encountered. The words listed beneath each stronghold are the various *symptoms* these spirits can produce in you. This list is NOT exhaustive, so you may encounter a stronghold or symptoms that aren't listed.

As you'll see shortly, you can recognize that a stronghold exists when any of the symptoms produced by that spirit are HABITUALLY PRESENT in your life. Again, we stress *habitually present*.

In this segment and the next, we want to give you an overview of each of these strongholds. And then we'll review with you the instructions for filling in pages 41 to 62 in your workbook.

DECEIT

Lying
Fantasies
Delusions
Rationalization
Wrong Doctrine/
Misuse of Scripture
Flattery
Syncretism

The first stronghold, DECEIT, is both powerful and prevalent. As with my own testimony in the Preface, deceit kept me from recognizing the rejection that con-

trolled me.

Deceit is the very essence of the devil. Jesus wants us to know that, "When [Satan] lies, he speaks his native language, for he's a DECEIVER and the FATHER of lies." (John 8:44)

As we showed in Chapter 3, *How Adam's Fall Into Sin Has Harmed Us*, Satan deceived Eve to sin. And our Adversary has used deceit ever since to entice people down a path of destruction.

I remember an incident from years ago while we were at the retreat center and I was counseling congregation leaders. For several months the elders of a certain congregation kept calling me about problems they were having with a particular man. I'll call him "Duped." Duped came on a men's retreat during which I discussed the strongholds you see on pages 36 and 37. I gave the men instructions and sent them out by themselves to identify their OWN strongholds. Within 30 seconds Duped came to me and announced, "I can't find any on that list that pertain to me." I encouraged him to take a closer look at the symptoms under DECEIT. If that stronghold was present, he was to renounce it in Jesus's Name before he went any further. *Three hours later* he came back, a completely changed man!

Go over each symptom under this stronghold very carefully. If you hear a rationalizing voice in your mind trying to convince you that a particular symptom DOESN'T APPLY to you, it most likely does.

There's a strong connection between the stronghold of deceit and your sin nature.

It produces a lying assumption that there's an area of your life that can NEVER CHANGE.

(**Explore:** Newsletter 1998/06
"Repentance, Part 2")

The truth is that Jesus intends to transform EVERY AREA of our lives that we yield to Him until they conform to HIS nature and character!

Any time you believe an aspect of your character is UNCHANGEABLE, you're letting yourself be deceived.

The deception that something in you or your life CAN'T be changed is one of Satan's schemes against you. Don't believe it!

The stronghold of Deceit also masks over other strongholds. In this way people are attracted to one another by their common stronghold that's hidden by deceit. We've seen this in faith communities.

The people in a congregation are deceived into believing their interest in Jesus brought them together under the same steeple.

But it was the familiarity of the same stronghold hidden behind deceit that made them feel like they BELONGED to each other.

BITTERNESS/RESENTMENT

Racism

Unforgiveness

Anger/Hatred

Begrudging

Violence

Revenge

Chronic Grumbling

Presumption

In our years of conducting Demolishing Strongholds seminars, we've found the stronghold of BITTERNESS to be widespread among people who call themselves "Christian". It's rare to find people who are NOT beset by this spirit.

And, among bitter people, the *begrudging* type of bitter person is far more common than the angry type. Begrudging is a seething resentment you have against someone. This type of bitterness gnaws away deep inside you, and ultimately leads to all kinds of physical and mental illness. Your begrudging thoughts only empower the darkness in you.

Why is the stronghold of bitterness so common, especially among professing Christians? The stronghold of DECEIT cooperates with the spirit of bitterness to convince many Christians that they can remain bitter and still be okay with God. Not so! When you're bitter, you're REFUSING TO FORGIVE someone who's offended you.

You're holding onto a perceived right to NOT forgive. Yet you're expecting that our Father HAS to forgive YOU, no matter what your offense. That deception is spiritual quicksand.

Jesus warns us that our Father in heaven will NOT forgive anyone who refuses to forgive.

"But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."
(Matthew 6:15)

That's why Satan does all he can to make sure followers of Jesus WOUND each other and REFUSE to forgive!

(**Explore:** Newsletter 2000/09 “*Power To Forgive*”)

Satan doesn't care how much religion you practice or against WHOM you're bitter. As long as our Father doesn't forgive YOU in your bitterness, the enemy has accomplished his goal.

Think of the symptoms under the stronghold of bitterness as snares strategically designed to entrap you. In terminology that pervades the Hebrew Scriptures, you're committing SPIRITUAL ADULTERY with a demonic lover — bitterness!

It's serious enough that bitter, unforgiving Christians are not forgiven by the Father. But that bitterness also contaminates their relationships with the people who are close to them. That's why we're warned,

“See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many” (Hebrews 12:15).

The DEFILEMENT that's caused by bitter people is that they entice OTHERS to take up an offense against someone who's never hurt them personally.

In other words, a bitter person lures OTHERS to be bitter with them.

Let's say a friend comes to you with slander against her husband or boss or father. She shares the grisly details with you. You find yourself thinking how horrible that other person is, even though he or she has never done anything to YOU. Chances are, if you met that supposed evil scoundrel, you'd have some pretty negative thoughts inside. And, you'd be

hindered from relating to that person the way Jesus would have you, because now *you're* captured by bitterness.

One unexpected source of bitterness we've seen among Christians has been the prolific laying of hands on people during prayer. If gifts of the Holy Spirit's and His healing power can be imparted through the laying on of hands, so can the spirit of bitterness or any other evil spirits.

We've met many Christians who can recount the devastating bitterness that came on them after someone with that spirit laid hands on them. Many who were NEVER bitter suddenly BECAME bitter after having hands laid on them in prayer.

We encourage you to be careful about who lays hands on you or your children. The Bible provides for elders and fathers and those with healing gifts to lay hands on people.

Several years ago I encountered a woman who frequently offered to pray for other women as she laid hands on them. It's tragic how many, including ME, were suddenly overcome by bitterness, depression and illness afterward!

Again, scrutinize each symptom of this stronghold carefully. Satan uses the spirit of bitterness to not only keep you from full relationship with our Father, but also to defile others around you.

HEAVINESS

Depression
Despair
Self-pity
Loneliness
Unconfessed Sin
Suicidal Thoughts

Over the years we've found the major source for the stronghold of heaviness to be prolonged, unresolved, bitterness. The longer you remain bitter, the heavier your heart becomes.

The spirit of heaviness can grow to almost intolerable oppression if you don't rid yourself of the root of bitterness.

Heaviness will drive you into emotional and physical ISOLATION. And, isolated people are easier for Satan to deceive.

(Explore: High Places study guide, Chapter 9. "Great Precipice Injury")

Satan has his best recruits in Christians who are plagued by a stronghold of Heaviness. They've SHUT OUT the loving voice of the Holy Spirit and lack the love and joy He would produce in them.

Professed Christians with the spirit of Heaviness defame Jesus in the sight of others. If you're controlled by the stronghold of heaviness, you have no testimony of Jesus to share. Your relationship with Him has no joy.

In your hopelessness nothing about you attracts people to Jesus. In fact, quite the opposite happens!

We encourage you that if you find ANY of the symptoms of heaviness, take a good look at the strongholds of bitterness, and independence and divorce. They may be playing a big part in dragging you down!

JEALOUSY

Spiteful
Gossip/Slander

Betrayal
Critical Nature
Judgmental
Suspicious
UnChristlike Competition
Cruelty

The stronghold of jealousy reveals how focused you are on other PEOPLE rather than on God.

The spirit of jealousy traps you into unChristlike attitudes toward others — people for whom Jesus died. And these attitudes can erupt into verbal assault through gossip, or insinuation, or slander.

(Explore: Newsletter 2000/07 "Bad-Mouthing: Avoid Lashon Hara")

Don't be fooled by the pleasant countenance or smooth manner of those who are influenced by the stronghold of jealousy. In order for them to deal with the feelings of jealousy inspired by this spirit, they must recruit others to side with them.

Their technique is to discredit those of whom they're jealous, often by raising suspicion about them. The spirit of jealousy can incite you to malign someone just so you can feel better about YOURSELF in comparison.

Because this stronghold is so *horizontally focused* on people and the things of this world, it negatively impacts your whole family. If your children hear you bemoaning your lack of certain material goods, they too are going to zero in on wanting stuff. Whatever their friends have, your kids will nag YOU for it!

If you live in the Bible Belt, please pay careful attention to this stronghold. We've found that it's especially widespread throughout the Southeastern part of this country.

CONFUSION/DOUBT & UNBELIEF

Suspicious
Apprehensive
Indecisive/Double-minded
Skeptical
Unsettled
Easily Distracted
Lack of Commitment
No Love of Truth
Distorted Judgment

The stronghold of confusion, and doubt & unbelief is common among Christians who try to live out their faith solely through their MIND rather than through their spirit.

They believe that if they can parrot the right verses and spout the accepted denominational doctrine, they're fine with God.

You may recall that in the Preface of *Demolishing Strongholds* we shared, "That which is our strength in the physical world is also our hindrance in the UNSEEN reality. Our five senses — our sight, taste, touch, smell, and hearing — enable us to perceive and interact with our environment."

In the physical world, 89% of all we know has come through our sight. The remaining 11% is acquired through our other four senses.

As necessary as the five senses are to our lives in the physical dimension, they're detrimental to our understanding of the UNSEEN reality around us.

This is the world of the SPIRIT, and it must be discerned through your spirit.

If you study the Bible only to gain ever more knowledge, but don't personally rely on the Holy Spirit to APPLY its truth and commands, there's a strong possibility that you are under the influence of this stronghold. That's the difference between the Hebraic understanding of Scripture as truth to LIVE BY, and the Hellenist Greek model of truth to DISCUSS.

You can find the *Hebraic-Greek Comparison* you see on your screen on Roman numeral VI of the workbook. The tremendous demonic influence of the Greek philosophical spirit on Christianity cannot be overstated. This principle has contributed greatly to the epidemic numbers of those who suffer from confusion about what they believe.

Confusion, and doubt and unbelief are a major factor in why there are over 22,000 competing denominations today. This stronghold causes people to approach God through their mind, not the Spirit.

Satan knows that a confused and doubting person is easy prey. A confused "Christian" searches for more religious knowledge. But knowledge WITHOUT application only adds to their confusion.

(**Explore:** High Places study guide, Chapter 12. "*Into the Mist*")

You may remember that the earliest followers of Jesus got noticed because their trust caused them to pray with certainty. And that's what trust is — CERTAINTY in the unseen spiritual realm of our Lord and His faithfulness.

If you aren't experiencing the confirming and empowering work of the Holy Spirit in your life, then consider that some of the symptoms of this stronghold may be causing confusion and doubt in you.

REJECTION

Addictive Behavior
Compulsions
Seeks Acceptance
Unworthiness
Withdrawal
Shallow Relationships
Loneliness

You may recall that rejection is the stronghold that had been passed down in Mike's family as well as my own.

We've seen the spirit of rejection at work wherever people try to become MORE ACCEPTABLE to God through their good works or religious rule keeping. Through their efforts, they're trying to forestall the possibility that God might reject them.

The spirit of rejection is common among believers whose meticulous observance of God's laws is more important to them than lovingly relating to their Lord. They show more regard for their religious practices and observances, than in intimately relating to God.

The spirit of rejection is one of the prevalent strongholds in the Messianic movement today, along with strongholds of bitterness and rebellion.

Rejection is the OPPOSITE of the acceptance and freedom that Jesus offers those who are in union with Him. Trying to become acceptable to God through your own efforts gets you nowhere.

It's much easier to rid yourself of the stronghold of rejection than compensate for it through good works.

Paul must have seen this trap among the Colossian believers. That's why he exhorted them,

"Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: 'Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!' These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence" (Colossians 2:20-23).

(**Explore:** Newsletter 1997/11 "*Judgment Throne*")

Just know this: No religious rule keeping EVER keeps you from giving way to your sin nature. Don't even try it!

You may be plagued by addictive behavior that's been a painful part of your life.

But that alcohol or drugs is just a way to dull the pain of your past or help you escape your present. The spirit of rejection makes sure those darts pierce your mind frequently enough to drive you to whatever helps you forget.

The ruts in your road of response are so deep that you're convinced you don't have any hope for change. That spirit keeps whispering "You're hopeless", and you keep believing its lies.

Earlier in this series Mike and I shared with you about our own bouts with the stronghold of rejection. That's why we *know* that there's UNFAILING HOPE in Jesus to cast down these unclean spirits!

We can joyfully assure you that, with the spirit of rejection gone, a love of God that has height and breadth and depth will fill that very area of your soul.

PRIDE

Ungrateful
Self-righteous
Self-centered
Insensitive
Materialistic
Seeks Positions
Stubborn
Mocking
Vain
Spiritual Adultery
Impatient

How Satan must snicker when people are under the influence of a stronghold of pride. Pride makes his work so simple. Our adversary knows all too well that, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6).

What a triumph for Satan: To trap a Christian so that he or she is opposed by God.

We know all too well from the Bible that our Father cherishes the humble and pours out His grace on them. And it's His GRACE that makes all the difference in our ability to experience His love.

The self-centered absorption of pride acts like a barrier keeping you from truly seeing yourself as others do. It's as if you have bad breath, and everyone but you knows it.

It doesn't take much perception to recognize the SELF-CENTEREDNESS that characterizes people influenced by the stronghold of pride.

"Spiritual" pride is just as pervasive, and it's as old as our Israelite ancestors. They too believed that they were SPECIAL compared to other people. But rather than using their chosenness to serve God's purposes, they used it to gratify their own sin nature.

Paul writes in dismay about prideful believers who have HEARD the truth but still go on sinning!

It's the same scenario today. The pride of being a churchgoer covers over the reality of hidden sin.

And how hard the stronghold of pride is to recognize when it permeates the people with whom you fellowship.

If you aren't experiencing the grace of God at work in your life, examine each symptom under pride very carefully. Our Father just might be waiting for you to cast down pride and become poor in spirit so that He can stop opposing you.

RELIGIOSITY

Religious Busyness
Knowledge Without Love
No Spiritual Power
Spiritual Blindness
Hypocritical
Legalistic Perversion
Presumes on Grace

Have you ever stopped to consider that religiosity is really pride in religious disguise? Let me repeat that: Religiosity is pride in religious disguise.

Religion is man's testimony to himself like the tower of Babel. Through religious forms and practices man develops his own way to approach God without having to relate to Him.

(**Explore:** Newsletter 2000/10 "*We Must Go Back Before Going Forward*")

The spirit of religiosity encourages many to seek personal gratification in their religious forms and practices. The megachurch phenomenon relies on the spirit of religiosity to grow. Satisfied people, like satisfied customers, keep coming back.

But man's ways and God's ways have nothing in common because the GOAL is entirely different. To follow Christ, as the early disciples did, means emptying yourself in total SERVANTHOOD to the interests of Jesus. You follow Him for His sake, not yours.

On the other hand, the spirit of religiosity causes clergy to measure success by "nickels and noses" — that means the people who attend and how much they give. The goals of many congregations are more like those of corporate America. We'll come back to this more when we discuss the stronghold of idolatry and worldliness.

If you're plagued by any of the symptoms that make up this stronghold, you're probably very at ease with religious settings and programs. The more smoothly the services and activities run, the better you feel.

INDEPENDENCE AND DIVORCE

Insensitive
Aloof
Selfish Ambition
Devil's advocate
Withdrawn

Makes Excuses
Lack of Trust
Willful

We want to stress right away that the stronghold of independence and divorce is not limited to breaking a marriage covenant. This spirit influences anyone who is SHIELDING himself from relational pain.

Within its stronghold the spirit of independence and divorce seems dormant until certain CONDITIONS occur in your life as a catalyst to awaken it.

Maybe this anecdote will clarify how this stronghold operates. Our retreat center in Connecticut was also a working farm. In the spring of our first year there I noticed a lot of moss growing in the pasture where grass should have been. One day an older farmer stopped by. I mentioned my problem with moss and asked him what kind of grass seed I needed to plant. He told me, "You don't need grass seed. The seed's already in the ground. You need to change the nature of your soil — it's too acidic. Put lime on the pasture and watch the grass and clover come up."

We did just as the farmer recommended, and sure enough the grass seed came up. It had been there all along, just waiting for the RIGHT CONDITIONS. And that's how it is with the stronghold of independence and divorce.

Those hurts, let-downs, and misunderstandings from your past that you haven't DEALT with biblically are like demonic seeds. Satan doesn't stir them up until he can do maximum damage in your relationships.

Whenever you enter a relationship that calls for a deeper level of accountability, such as a marriage, close friendship, or home fellowship, the spirit of independence and divorce is activated.

(**Explore:** Newsletter 1996/05 “*My Brother’s Keeper*”)

As the responsibilities in your relationship with others deepen, and more is required of you, something happens. You find that as your relationship grows stronger, you have to make some personal changes to accommodate one another.

At some point the spirit of independence and divorce agitates your soul. You start to chew on negative thoughts. “Why do I have to change? I have rights! I don’t have to put up with this!” You get the idea...

The nagging little voice of that spirit of independence and divorce *goads* you. It not only wants to estrange you from those you care about. It also intends to callous you from ever letting yourself get close to anyone again.

This stronghold rallies other strongholds when possible. It especially relies on strongholds of bitterness, rejection, or fear and insecurity to cut off relationships.

Even though this stronghold is not limited to marriage, one of the indicators of this spirit’s widespread presence in the Christian community is the flood of divorce.

As we stated earlier, the Bible Belt has a divorce rate that’s 50% higher than among non-Christians in this country.

And over 85% of divorces are initiated by women. If you’re a Christian woman going through this workbook, be especially diligent as you examine each of the symptoms under this stronghold.

Because this stronghold operates so differently than the others, let me go over the operation of this stronghold one more time for you: The spirit of independence and divorce forms over time when you don’t deal with emotional hurts as the Bible requires. This spirit bides its time in your soul until a relationship becomes important to you. Then it agitates you, disrupting your sense of connectedness with the other person or people. Rather than being glad you’re developing a deeper bond, you begin to resent that closeness. You feel imposed upon and start to grumble inside, nitpicking every little fault you find.

If you’re married, you find yourself pulling away more and more from intimacy with your spouse. You’re more like a married single than a loving covenant partner, and you yearn for the days when you weren’t responsible for anyone else but YOU.

If you’re a Lone Ranger Christian who’s more comfortable in your shell of self-reliance than interacting with others, you’re probably being influenced by this spirit.

Your relationships are shallow, and you have little sense of relational intimacy with the body of Christ in your midst.