

DEMOLISHING STRONGHOLDS
MEN'S CONFERENCE 2012
2 Cor 10:3-5

INTRODUCTION: Wuest Word Studies translates, *“for the weapons of our warfare are not human but mighty in God’s sight, resulting in the demolition of fortresses, demolishing reasonings and every haughty mental elevation which lifts itself up against the experiential knowledge (which we believers have) of God, and leading captive every thought into the obedience to the Christ.”*

The **“strongholds”** (fortresses) in view here are not demons, but ideologies. The battle is with the false ideologies man and demons propagate so that the world believes them. Men and women that have never trusted Christ alone for salvation are inside their fortresses of ideas, which become their prisons and eventually their tombs, unless they are delivered from them by belief in the truth.

Paul further defined sinners’ strongholds of ideas as **“every high thing.”** that is, every unbiblical system of thought exalted as truth, that is, **“exalts itself against the knowledge of God.”** Spiritual warfare is a battle for the minds of people who are captives to lies that are exalted in opposition to Scripture.

The objective of our warfare is to change how people think, **“taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.”** To do so, the proper weapon is necessary. To assault and throw down the **stronghold** of false religions, opinions, beliefs, and philosophies, only one weapon will suffice: **the truth.** That is so obvious that Paul does not mention it. Only one thing exposes and corrects lies: **the truth.**

The only offensive weapon in the Christian soldier’s armor is **“the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”** (Eph 6:17)

Spiritual warfare is an ideological conflict, fought in the mind by assaulting the proud fortresses of ideas that sinners erect against the truth.

The only hope for the unsaved is the Gospel that leads to *repentance* – a change of mind.

How about the *believer* who has a stronghold?

“Every temptation originates with a thought which turns into a desire. And then we are presented with a choice.”

Charles Stanley

Proverbs 4:23

“Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it spring the issues of life.”

Proverbs 23:7, “For as he thinks in his heart, so is he.”

*“Sow a thought, reap an action.
Sow an action, reap a habit.
Sow a habit, reap a character.
Sow a character, reap a destiny!”*

This passage magnifies the believer’s walk, war, weapons, and warfare. Paul often used the image of a soldier to describe the Christian’s journey.

I. STRONGHOLDS LEAD TO DENIAL/DECEPTION.

Key Words: Rationalizing, justifying, and minimizing our behavior; also blame.

“Temptation is Satan looking through the keyhole of my life and desiring to come in. Sin is opening the door and inviting or allowing him in.”

We sometimes choose to open doors and windows into our lives that are very easily opened, but very difficult to close. The enemy resists us when we try to close, but helps us when we try to open.

“Most strongholds develop as repetitive attempts move away from pain and more toward pleasure.”
Three components: the lies, painful emotions, and self-defeating behaviors. These are strongly defended (thus a stronghold) through a variety of defense mechanisms such as denial, rationalizations, minimizations, and blame.

“The task is to persevere in my solitude, to stay in my cell until all my seductive visitors get tired of pounding on my door and leave me alone.”

Henri Nouwen

To find **freedom**, many are willing to do something, but few are willing to do what it takes. For example, merely confessing (partial obedience) the sinful behavior (one piece of the package) and promising/determining not to do it anymore (in one’s own strength, the flesh) leads to more failure (more shame and isolation) and doubt in the faithfulness of God, the truth of His Word, and the power of His Spirit (thus leading to more hopelessness and vicious cycle continues).

The reality is that Jesus’ way is difficult, but ends in life (or getting your life back). Satan’s way is easy, even fun at first; seemingly meeting some needs, but ends in death. People choose the seemingly fun/easier/pleasureful even to the point of idolatry. (It becomes bigger than God).

It is usually some **crisis** that causes a **stronghold** to get found out; the sin they covered gets exposed.

Proverbs 10:9, “ He who walks with integrity walks securely, But he who perverts his ways will become known.”

Galatians 6:7-8, “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.”

DEFINITION OF A STRONGHOLD

The enemy exploits the normal processes that occur within the mind of every person. When left undetected, the enemy’s activity results in a cluster of deeply held misbeliefs (lies) that directly or indirectly attack the character of God, and imply that He can’t be trusted and/or that I am not, or cannot be loved by Him; these misbeliefs can operate on a conscious or unconscious level. These misbeliefs were accumulated through our life experiences and are charged with painful emotions. As a result, the lie feels much more powerful than the truth. These painful emotions are managed with/through a variety of self-defeating/sinful behaviors (coping strategies; flesh) that initially brought a sense of relief and therefore became deeply engrained into one’s lifestyle. However, in due time, these coping strategies become part of the problem, reinforcing one’s self-destructive/sinful lifestyle and deepening a person’s sense of helplessness, hopelessness, shame, and alienation from God. Outright demonic oppression exacerbates this process, furthering one’s feelings of defeat and difficulty trusting in the Lord’s goodness.”

II. PAUL’S DISCERNMENT. 3-5

A. STRUGGLE. 3.

“we walk in the flesh”

1. PHYSICAL SENSE.

Galatians 2:20, “the life which I now live in the flesh...”

Philippians 1:22, “But if I live on in the flesh...”

This is a reference and reminder that we all possess a human body with all its present frailties. The ministry does not protect us from human ailments, sufferings, and mistreatment. Christians and non-Christians alike exist in a human body. We are subject to both physical infirmities and all sorts of temptations. **(Rom 7:14-25)**

2. SPIRITUAL SENSE.

“we do not war according to the flesh” (sometimes I do); **“according to the flesh”** means to pattern one’s lifestyle after the impulses (strong) of the lower unredeemed nature.

“war” – engage in battle; A.T. Robertson – old word to lead an army; military metaphor.

Why not **“according to the flesh”** – it would be driven by pride, lust, and greed.

A spiritual war cannot be successfully fought with fleshly weapons. It is not human ingenuity, human ideology, or human methodology. If we try to use human methods to defeat demonic forces, these are doomed to fail.

This text in **“large letters”** warns us of our struggles with supernatural demonic forces.

Ephesians 6:12, “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.”

In **2 Corinthians** the work of Satan is unveiled:

- Satan seeks to gain an advantage over the believer **2:11**
- Satan blinds lost people to their lostness **4:4**
- Satan opposes the gospel of Jesus Christ **4:4**

Therefore, the spiritual walk is impossible on the level of the flesh.

B. STRONGHOLDS. 4

1. DEFINITION

A stronghold is a fortress erected in a territory from which the enemy may launch attacks behind a defense.

In the territory of our souls, it would be a mental attack (Satan has them convinced). Satan attacks through an attitude or an act, turning them into habits. By this he makes a person his servant.

2. DESCRIPTION.

Ephesians 4:27, “nor give place to the devil.”

“place” – an opportunity; a base of operation, he desires to find a ***place*** behind your lines of defense.

In **Ephesians 4**, Paul listed some of the strongholds, land we gave up that needs to be reclaimed.

Intellectual Foolishness (4:17-18) – futility of their minds, understanding darkened (no discernment/wisdom), alienated from the life of God (heaven seems as brass), blindness of their heart.

Greed and Impurity (4:19, 22) – speaks of uncleanness; deceitful lusts

Dishonesty (4:25) – lying

Uncontrolled Anger – (4:26)

Unforgiving Spirit -(4:26, 32) - wrath (note **2 Cor 2:10-11**)

Stealing (4:28) – work so you can give to the needy

Laziness (4:28)

You give place to the devil and he will enslave you with a **stronghold**. Satan builds a fortress, a pattern of thinking that only the power of Jesus and the blood of Jesus can overcome.

2 Cor 10:4 is powerful in showing us that human ingenuity cannot rescue sinners from the “**dominion of darkness**” or transform believers into Christ’s likeness. Such weapons gain only superficial, temporary, and deceptive virtues at best.

It’s been said that Satan inhabits our habits

3. DANGERS

Undetected and un-removed, they will eventually destroy you. No treaty with Satan.

III. STRONGHOLDS CAN BE DEMOLISHED.

“weapons of our warfare are not carnal (of the flesh), but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds (the enemy’s base of operation is our thought life). Casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God (misbeliefs or accusations about the character of God) bringing every thought into captivity (catching and evaluating our thoughts) to the obedience of Christ (replacing the lies with truth).”

HOW TO DEMOLISH:

Proverbs 28:13, “He who covers his sins will not prosper, But whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy.”

A. POWER.

mighty – powerful; unequaled power, power in fact to do anything.

“mighty in God” – through God, powerful for God; used by the Holy Spirit to accomplish God’s purpose.

Paul spoke earlier of what led to victory in his struggles:

2 Corinthians 6:6-7, “by purity, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by sincere love, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left”

B. PROMISE.

“pulling down” – demolish, casting down, to take down, to tear down walls and buildings. Carries on the military metaphor, to destroy by force.

ILLUSTRATION: Dixie Speedway concession stand during tornado

“weapons” – translates instruments in Romans

Romans 6:12-13, “Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.”

Romans 6:19, “I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness.”

We claim God’s promises (His truth) to cast down the wrong thinking that was keeping people from surrendering to God.

C. PRINCIPLES.

“knowledge of God” – Paul aims to pull down the top most perch of audacity in their reasonings against the knowledge of God. Many place their own explanations above God’s revelation; human speculation versus divine revelation. Paul is speaking of the battle for the minds of people who are captive to lies that are exalted in opposition to Scripture. Paul knew these fortresses well, having lived most of his life before his conversion in one of them. However, on the Damascus Road, his vaunted fortress crumbled under God’s power, and he was led captive to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Romans 6:16-18, “Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one’s slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness? But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.”

You changed Masters!

D. PERSON

“to the obedience of Christ” – using God’s truth, believers smash enemy fortresses to the ground, march the prisoners out, and bring them into subjection (obedience) to the Lord Jesus Christ. When Paul was converted, the rebellion of his sinful, proud heart was ended; the walls of his fortress crashed down in ruin, and Jesus conquered his heart.

1. Convicted that the stronghold is sin and you cannot defeat it in your strength (flesh).

**1 Thess 1:9, “how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.”
(not from idols to God)**

2. Confess to God and others. Note: 1 John 1:9 and James 5:16

Isolation promotes bondage, but true spiritual community promotes freedom.

Proverbs 18:1-2

**“A man who isolates himself seeks his own desire;
He rages against all wise judgment.
A fool has no delight in understanding,
But in expressing his own heart.”**

3. Receive the gift of Godly sorrow (repentance).

Humbly invite the Lord to allow us to see our stronghold through His eyes, promoting the gift of Godly sorrow that leads to a true repentance;

NOTE: 2 Corinthians 7:10

“For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.”

4. Move from the fruit to the root.

Share with a trusted friend, allowing the roots of the pain to be exposed.

5. Receive God's comfort.

2 Corinthians 1:3-4, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God."

6. Take your thoughts captive.

Examine your thoughts by holding them up to the truth of God's Word.
(II Cor 10:5).

7. Replace the lies with God's truth.

Reject lies, receive truth, replace lies.

NOTE: Phil 4:8-7

8. Cultivate a lifestyle of intimacy with God and with others in His family.

ILLUSTRATE:

Jeremiah 29:11-13, "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. 13. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart."

Strongholds keep us from enjoying God's best.

Prodigal Son – Luke 16:11-32

- 1. Thought his greatest resource was his "portion of goods," but his greatest resource was his Father.**

Strongholds are illusions!

- 2. Far country always seems to beam with enchantment.**
- 3. Far country always leads to wasteful living and severe famine.**
- 4. Prodigal living always gives less than promised; "feeding swine."**
- 5. He spent everything and it gave him nothing in return, "no one gave him anything."**

Finally,

- 6. "Came to himself" – began to think**

"I perish"

"I will arise and go to my father"

180° repentance.

“I am no longer worthy” – Humbleness

7. He had words of confession.

“I have sinned...”

8. Father had compassion.

“ran and fell on his neck and kissed him”

9. Best robe, ring, sandals, fatted calf, party.

This is the type welcome repentant sinners can expect when they come to the Father. The Prodigal brought his thoughts captive to the obedience of his Father.

Obedience gives you authority, credibility, and momentum to confront the enemies of truth. Captive thinking is pure thinking.