

SPIRITUAL WARFARE

Dealing With Strongholds

Ken Birks

I. Introductory Remarks.

Romans 13:12 *The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light.*

In this message I would like to talk about how you can pull down the strongholds that Satan has built in your lives. I would also like to talk about the kind of stronghold that we can build that will not allow Satan to gain any kind of a foothold in your life.

It is time for us to cast off the works of darkness and to walk in the armor of light not giving place to the devil. Too many of us have allowed the devil to have a foothold in our lives. We have let him have free reign to harass, oppress and bring us into bondages that God desires us to walk in a freedom to. God should be our rock and stronghold, but the problem is too many have allowed the enemy to control the strongholds.

2 Samuel 22:1-2 *Then David spoke to the LORD the words of this song, on the day when the LORD had delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul. And he said: "The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer;*

2 Corinthians 10:4-6 *For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled.*

Francis Frangipane writes in one of his books, "What men call "salvation" is simply the first stage of God's plan for our lives, which is to conform us in character and power to the image of Jesus Christ. If we fail to see our relationship to God as such, we will allow too many areas within us to remain unchanged. Pulling down strongholds is the demolition and removal of these old ways of thinking so that the actual Presence of Jesus Christ can be manifested through us."

II. What Are Strongholds.

1. Old Testament Definition.

In the Old Testament, a stronghold was a fortified dwelling used as a means of protection from an enemy. We find that David hid from King Saul in wilderness strongholds at Horesh.

1 Samuel 23:14,19 *And David stayed in strongholds in the wilderness, and remained in the mountains in the Wilderness of Ziph. Saul sought him every day, but God did not deliver him into his hand....Then the Ziphites came up to Saul at Gibeah, saying, "Is David not hiding with us in strongholds in the woods, in the hill of Hachilah, which is on the south of Jeshimon?"*

These were physical structures usually caves high on a mountainside, and were very difficult to assault. It was this imagery in mind that the inspired writers of the Bible adapted the word "stronghold" to define powerful, vigorously protected spiritual realities.

A stronghold can be a source of protection for us from the devil, as is the case when the Lord becomes our stronghold as it did for David. Or conversely, a stronghold can be a source of defense for the devil's influence in our lives, where demonic or sinful activity is actually defended within our sympathetic thoughts toward evil.

Romans 6:16 *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 to death, or of obedience to righteousness?*

2. The Apostle Paul's Definition of a Stronghold.

The apostle Paul defines strongholds as speculations or lofty things raised up against the knowledge of God. It is any type of thinking that exalts itself above the knowledge of God, thereby giving the devil a secure place of influence in an individual's thought-life.

2 Corinthians 10:5 *...casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ...*

3. Another Definition.

Ed Silvoso defines a stronghold as a mindset impregnated with hopelessness that causes us to accept something that we know is contrary to the will of God.

Romans 6:6 *knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.*

It is important to recognize that when we speak of strongholds, we are not talking about random thoughts or occasional sins. We are talking about areas in your life that you are in bondage to and are having a hard time breaking loose from.

III. How Strongholds Take Root.

In order to fully understand how to pull down strongholds, it is first important that we understand how it is they first took root in our lives.

1. Strongholds Come From Worldly Influence.

1 John 5:19 *We know that we are of God, & the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one.*

Many strongholds are a result of an accumulation of uncrucified thoughts and unsanctified attitudes that have ruled our lives during our formative years. As children growing up in a world that is under the influence and the sway of the enemy we received a steady stream of information and experiences that continually shaped our childhood perceptions. This is why the Bible says our minds need to be renewed once we are born again of God's Spirit.

The amount of love (or lack of love) in our home, our cultural environment, peer values and pressures, as well as fears of rejection and exposure--even our physical appearance and intelligence, all combine to form our sense of identity and our view of life.

Many of our opinions about life are ours only because we know of no other way to think. Yet we protect and defend our ideas, justify our opinions as though they were born in the wombs of our own creativity.

Proverbs 23:7...*for as he thinks in his heart, so is he.*

In other words, the essence of who we are is an accumulation of our thought life. For example, many of our thoughts and opinions were shaped by our parents and school teachers. As good of people as they may have been, if their opinions were not God's than they were wrong.

Isaiah 55:7-8 *Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, and He will have mercy on him; and to our*

God, for He will abundantly pardon. "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways..."

We have a mindset that has been shaped by our parents and educators as well as the ungodly environment in which we live. As Christians, the only truth suitable for eternity is the truth of Christ. If we fail to realize this we will be like our teacher, never doing more than the deeds of our fathers. When we come to Christ, all that we are in nature and character is destined to change.

IV. Common Strongholds Many Deal With.

Just because we are Christians does not exempt us from having strongholds that must be dealt with. There are still many strongholds within us. I have listed a few strongholds that are common to most Christians.

- ▶ Fear
- ▶ Resentment
- ▶ Bitterness
- ▶ Unforgiveness
- ▶ Apathy
- ▶ Unbelief
- ▶ Depression
- ▶ Anxiety
- ▶ Lukewarmness
- ▶ Sinful thoughts
- ▶ Lust
- ▶ Pride
- ▶ Greed
- ▶ Drugs
- ▶ Alcohol
- ▶ Pornography

Because we all have a tendency to excuse ourselves so readily, it is difficult to discern the areas of oppression in our lives. After all, these are our thoughts, our attitudes, our perceptions--we justify and defend our thoughts with the same degree of intensity with which we justify and defend ourselves. As a man thinks so is he. Therefore, before any deliverance can truly be accomplished, we must honestly recognize and confess our need.

When identifying your strongholds, survey or examine the attitudes in your heart, every area in your thinking that glistens with hope in God is an area which is being liberated by Christ. Any system of thinking that does not have hope, which feels hopelessness, is a stronghold, which must be pulled down.

V. Faith Principles For Pulling Down Strongholds.

2 Corinthians 10:4-5 gives us two important things that help us to tear down strong holds. The first one is bringing our thoughts into conformity with Christ's and the second one is obedience to His Word.

2 Corinthians 10:4-5...*the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ..*

1. We Bring Our Thoughts Into Captivity To Christ's.

Jesus Christ is the model of what God considers typical for the new-creation man. He is not just our Savior, He is the Indwelling One who conforms us to His image, the first-born of a family of glorious sons. When our thought life is in agreement with unbelief, fear or habitual sin, the enemy has rest and seeks out those places that are in harmony with his environment.

Therefore we must learn to look objectively at any thoughts or attitudes that fail to conform to the likeness and teachings of Jesus. Those thoughts must be captured and wrong attitudes crucified. We must make way in us for the coming of the Lord. We must allow the "increase of His government" to expand until we are so absorbed into His Spirit that we not only believe in Him, we believe like Him. His love, thoughts and desires flow out from within us.

To bring down or cast down the "stronghold of our past experiences" we must let God be found true and every man a liar.

Romans 3:4 *Certainly not! Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar. As it is written: "That You may be justified in Your words, and may overcome when You are judged."*

The only one who has the right to shape our lives is Jesus Christ. We must determine to allow nothing and no one to shape us, not even our personal experiences unless they are consistent with the promises of God. eg. if you were not healed, a stronghold of unbelief could set in, but if you bring your thoughts into conformity with God's thoughts, the stronghold will break and faith will come forth. If we have a problem with a brother or sister and forgiveness is not enacted, bitterness and resentment will settle in.

2. Obedience Brings Us Into the Stronghold Of Christ's Likeness.

The Father's goal in breaking the strongholds in our lives is much more than simply seeing our burdens or the devil taken off our backs. The specific purpose toward which God steers the working of all things in our lives, is our conformity. "*..to the image of His Son.*"

Romans 8:28-29 *And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.*

The way to realize God's ultimate victory is to reach toward His ultimate goal, which is complete transformation into the likeness of Christ. We must recognize that it is not you that the devil is afraid of, it is Christ in You!

Victory begins with the name of Jesus on our lips. It is consummated by the nature of Jesus in our hearts. If you are troubled by fear, resentment, depression, sinful thoughts, apathy, lukewarmness or whatever, submit those areas to God, repenting of your unbelief and then yield yourself to Christ's faith within you. Are you troubled by lust and shame? Present those areas of sin to God, repenting of your old nature, drawing upon the forgiveness of Christ and His purity of heart.

James 4:7 *Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.*

We must learn that on a personal level, it is better to develop godly virtues than to spend our day praying against the devilit is the joy of the Lord that defeats depression ...it is living a life of faith that destroys unbelief ...it is aggressive love that casts out fear.

As we continually yield ourselves to Christ, surrendering ourselves by faith to His nature and His words, we literally build the impenetrable stronghold of His Presence around us. The way into the fortress of the Almighty is simple. Victory begins with the name of Jesus on our lips. It is consummated by the nature of Jesus in our heart.

3. Building A Stronghold Of Christlikeness Involves A Struggle.

The process of getting free of worldly and fleshly strongholds involves a season of inner conflict and turmoil. This is a good sign, signifying the desire of your will to be free. We should expect a time where we must exercise our authority in Christ as we "resist" the devil.

1 Peter 5:9 *Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.*

As you continue to yield yourself to Christ, He will remove Satan's armor from your mind. he will show you what you need to bring down. You will see that the weapons of your warfare are mighty, to the pulling down of strongholds!