Winning the War in Your Mind - Part 4

# Demolishing Strongholds

## (2 Corinthians 10:3-5)

We’ve been in this series “Winning the War in Your Mind” for several weeks and today we’re going to wrap it up identifying and demolishing strongholds in our lives. For those of you just joining us, we’ve been talking about the continual battle, the skirmishes and fights in our minds, wrestling between thoughts of faith and thoughts of the world. And today we’re demolishing strongholds in our minds, and so we’re going into this headfirst, we’re taking the Word of God, the sword of the Spirit, and we’re asking the Holy Spirit to lead us, believing that everything else is going to follow.

Week after week in this series, we’ve been reinforcing those things that we’ve learned, preparing like good soldiers so that we can win the war in our minds. And so, we’ve been training with the word of God, because it is such a powerful weapon. In fact, the Bible describes it this way,

“The word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12).

And so, it’s a weapon in the hands of a believer and we’ve learned much about this battle from the ultimate thought warrior, the apostle Paul, who has written more in Scripture regarding spiritual warfare than any other writer. As we turn to our Scripture for today, the Spirit of God tells us in second Corinthians, chapter ten, beginning at verse three that…

“Though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:3-5).

This is important to understand because there are many of us who are prisoners in our own minds, locked up by deception, and so this is where the rubber meets the road.

We’ve been talking about winning the war in your mind and the apostle Paul calls this place a stronghold. It’s a fortress for the devil, a mindset that can influence generations, and we’ve experienced these in many forms in our own families. We know this in our own lives, strongholds that have been passed down, some of you may call it an addictive personality. And so, whether it’s in the eating disorder, smoking, drugs, or alcohol, you know the damage that it has caused in your life and in your family. For others of you, maybe it’s lust, adultery, or an abusive temperament, but whatever it is, whatever you call it, if you don’t break it, you’re likely to pass it on to the next generation.

Certainly, none of us are able to escape the financial repercussions, the trail of broken relationships, and the damage to both our physical and spiritual well-being. It’s for that reason that we’re going to go on the offensive and we’re going to attack that stronghold, demolishing that stronghold, and winning the war in our minds. And so, we want to defeat that stronghold, crushing it, obliterating it, and demolishing it, but how are we going to do that? What is going to be our strategy? Well, the Spirit of God tells us going back to verse three,

“For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does” (2 Corinthians 10:3).

And that’s a good thing, because this world is messed up. In fact, over the years I’ve discovered that the only thing that makes an unbeliever different from a believer is that a believer has help dealing with their mess.

You see, it’s not that we’re any better than anybody else, but we don’t wage war as the world does because we’ve got the Holy Spirit as our helper. We’ve got the power of the Spirit of God within us, helping us work our way through this mess that we’ve made of our lives because of the enemy’s strongholds. And it’s within that context as we come to this passage of Scripture that the apostle Paul is talking to the believers in Corinth about their mess.

In fact, let me see a show of hands, how many of you have read the first letter to the Corinthians?

If you have read first Corinthians you know that they had their share of problems socially, emotionally, and theologically. And so, as Paul writes to them in this second letter, he goes right to the root of the issue, he talks about demolishing the strongholds in their lives.

He says, “We do not wage war as the world does.” And so, how does the world wage war against strongholds in their minds? How does the world fight this battle, what kind of strategy or weapons do they use? Well, most often, the world wages war with counseling, programs, books and classes, maybe a little Dr Phil added in for good measure. And all of these things in and of themselves are not necessarily bad, but there is a greater, more powerful way to fight, and that is with the weapons of God. Paul says in verse four,

“The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world.” He says, “On the contrary, they have divine power,” and that word power is the Greek word from which we get our word dynamite. And so, when we take up the weapons of God, “they have divine power” to blow up, to destroy, to obliterate, or “to demolish strongholds” (2 Corinthians 10:4).

In other words, it’s the power of God, and we see this on the cross. That’s what the Bible says in Colossians chapter two, that everything that was against us and that stood opposed to us,

“God took it away, nailing it to the cross, and having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross” (Colossians 2:14-15).

And so, as followers of Jesus we’re able to effectively tear down strongholds, casting them down, because when they hit the truth of God’s word, they’re destroyed, they’re demolished, they’re shattered and disarmed, no longer having power over us.

And yet, what’s really interesting is that when most of us think of strongholds, we think of them more in terms of an external reality, than a deeply rooted internal fortress. But as we look closer at these verses, the Holy Spirit is talking about a stronghold that’s established in the mind. Verse five says,

“We demolish arguments” which are a way of thinking, right? “And every pretension” which again is a way of thinking. And so, the Spirit of God is not talking about an external reality, but a stronghold that establishes itself in the mind. And it’s this stronghold, this epicenter of unbelief standing in opposition to the truth of God, that’s opposing that which is true knowledge, that’s exalting itself “against the knowledge of God” as revealed to us through Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5).

And so, we’re waging war against the enemy’s stronghold, this stronghold which is rooted deeply in our minds. This stronghold which according to the Greek dictionary is a military term for a “fortified place.” And so, it’s a castle, a fortified structure, a secure place. But I think in this context Paul’s use of this word may be more similar to the Tower of Babel in Genesis chapter 11, where this fortress that should offer the greatest protection becomes a mindset of confusion, contention, and resistance to the things of God.

And so, I believe what Paul is describing here, talking about strongholds, is really describing a way of thinking, a value system, or belief system based upon a lie which holds us captive. It’s a thought process that keeps you locked up as a prisoner by deception, and it prevents you from maximizing your potential in every area of life. In other words, he’s talking about those who have functionally become believing unbelievers as James wrote,

“You believe that there is one God. That’s good! But even the demons believe that…” (James 2:19).

And so, these are those that come to church all dressed up, talking the talk; you know, hallelujah this, and amen that, but there are places in their lives that have been locked off from God’s glory for a very long time. This is what a stronghold does, it causes you to be a functional unbeliever in different areas of your life, and as followers of Christ we can’t have compartmentalized lives.

That’s the context of this statement, that’s why the apostle Paul said in verse two,

“I beg you that when I come I may not have to be as bold as I expect to be toward some people who think that we live by the standards of this world” (2 Corinthians 10:2).

He says, you’re believing a lie as if it were true, but it’s just a stronghold, because we don’t live by the standards of this world. And I know that there are some of you who think that you’re above all of that, you believe in God, you pray every day, and you know the word of God, but I’ve been praying for you, praying that you would see different areas of your life that you’ve purposefully and strategically made off limits to the Holy Spirit. Certain parts, areas of your life that haven’t seen the transformation and the power of God to help initiate the total surrender that he has called you to through Christ.

You see, what Paul is referring to here as a stronghold, is you holding firmly to an argument, a pretension, a falsehood firmly planted in your mind by Satan to establish misconceptions about the plan, the purpose, or the character of God. And so, while many of us think of strongholds as outward sins, different forms of bondage, addictions, lusts, and immorality, what Paul is referring to is something much deeper than our human perspective of sin. Because what he’s talking about is a war in your mind, an accusation or misconception of the character of God, which has become a way of thinking or a mindset that you have developed towards the things of God that has become an alternative belief system.

That’s why this is so dangerous, it’s a form of idolatry, and that’s why Paul was confronting the Corinthians, because their lives were a mess, and they didn’t understand God’s holiness or righteousness. That’s why in his first letter he warned them not to be deceived saying,

“Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men (nor women with women) nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Corinthians 6:9-10).

And so, he warns them not to be deceived because they were far from the kingdom of God, they were living out of their flesh and not according to the Spirit. In fact, if you read through first Corinthians chapter 5 and chapter 6 Paul names just about every kind of sin you could think of committing. That’s why he says in verse two, “Some of you think that we live by the standards of this world” but then he says,

“Though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does” (2 Corinthians 10:3).

And he points out that all those external sins are really rooted in a stronghold of unbelief that has been set up in their lives. Arguments and pretensions that have been set up against the knowledge of God. Lies that have been planted by the devil, so that these “quote unquote” Corinthian Christians can functionally live outside of God’s kingdom while thinking that they’re in.

And it’s unfortunate, but this isn’t the first time that God has seen this kind of reprobate mind, the psalmist said it this way in reference to Israel. He said they were,

“A stubborn and rebellious generation, whose hearts were not loyal to God, whose spirits were not faithful to him” (Psalms 78:8).

And so, here in Corinth we find another generation claiming to believe in God, to worship God, and yet there not in a relationship with God. They’re blindly living out their own philosophy of life and they’re deep in a stronghold because they can’t even see life beyond where they are. But it’s not just them, it’s not just the Corinthians, because many of us are doing the same thing, just doing life, doing the best we can, without even realizing that we’ve been deceived and we’re far from God.

That’s why I’ve been praying for you this week, praying for the church, praying for those of you online, praying that you would see different areas of your life that you’ve made off limits to God. Because I’m afraid that some of you have been held captive by a stronghold and you need to come to the knowledge of the truth. That’s what the Bible says, Paul said, “I come…

“In the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will” (2 Timothy 2:25-26).

And here’s what happens, Satan’s trap is to establish a stronghold in your mind, so that you’re a prisoner of his deception. You’re no longer seeking the will of God, because you’re his prisoner, you’re held captive to do his will. And so, that stronghold which began in your mind is now manifested in the flesh.

This is exactly how Satan trapped Adam and Eve in the garden, it began with just a lie in your mind. And so, what we want do is ask God to help us to identify any place where we may have become a prisoner to Satan’s deception. And I know there are going to be a few of you who are going to put up a wall thinking this doesn’t apply to you, that you could never be deceived, that you’re above all this, but don’t be deceived because pride is nothing more than idolatry. And so, I want you to hang in there, keep following me, because any place where we’ve believed a lie, we’ve opened the door stepping into Satan’s trap.

I want to give you just a few examples where you may have believed a lie. Maybe it’s something like, “If only I had more ‘whatever’, then I would be happy.” “If only I had ‘blank’, then I would feel secure.” Or, “I just need this ‘whatever’ to relax, to be at peace, or to be satisfied.” And I don’t want to leave anybody out, because I know that we’ve all got strongholds, and so we’re on the front lines today, we’re engaging in the war in our minds. And so, maybe for you you’re worried about what others think about you, you never feel like you’re good enough. You don’t like the way you look, you wish you were different, maybe bigger, smaller, or just rearranged.

You see, we’ve all got strongholds, places in our lives where we’ve believed a lie, and so maybe for you, you just have trouble trusting God. You have difficulty connecting with others, you don’t relate well with those around you, because you’re afraid of getting hurt. Or maybe you just always want to be in control, and so there’s this spiritual stronghold, because you want to manipulate everything, and when things get out of control you begin to panic because you don’t really trust God. But if we’re going to win the war in our minds, we’re going to have to humble ourselves, and the first thing that we need to do is identify the stronghold.

Today I want you to consider with the help of the Holy Spirit what is your biggest stronghold? You need to identify the stronghold, because if you don’t aim at anything, you’re never going to hit it. But the moment you have a target, you’re going to attack, because the Bible says,

“A wise man (or woman) attacks the city of the mighty and pulls down the stronghold in which they trust” (Proverbs 21:22).

And so, we’re going to go on the offense, we’re not going to wait, we’re not going to hope things get better, hoping something happens, but we’re going to attack that stronghold with God’s weapons. We’re going to go on the offense against the schemes of the enemy, strong in the Lord and in his mighty power, because the weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. They have divine power to demolish strongholds, and so we declare war, we attack with God’s weapons, and he gives us some offensive weapons.

Now, I know that many of us are familiar with the armor of God in Ephesians chapter 6, but armor protects, armor is defensive, and so you may be asking, “What are the weapons God gives us?” Well, it’s in there, it’s in Ephesians chapter 6, verse 17 tells us to take,

“The sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests…” (Ephesians 6:17-18).

And so, our weapons include prayer and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Paul tells us to pray in the Spirit on all occasions, and as we identify a stronghold, we begin praying, and God starts working.

In the first week of this series, we talked about replacing the lies, and as we begin to wield the sword of the Spirit, the word of God, we demolish strongholds with God’s truth. We learned in week two to apply the Scriptures, applying the truth, so that we’re able to renew our minds. And Paul tells us, that as good soldiers of Jesus Christ,

“We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5).

In other words, we wipe out and demolish everything that is not of God, and so we take every thought captive, not some, but every thought captive. And therefore, we place all things, every thought under the authority of the Word of God, under the truth of God’s Word, and we let the power of God change our thinking. Now we’ve got the upper hand, and instead of us being a prisoner to the lie, we take the lie as our prisoner, and we make it obedient to Christ. Because he said,

“Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32).

Today I want to ask you, what’s that lie, that deception, that argument or pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God in your mind? What’s that one thing that is shrouding the truth in your mind, causing you to think that you’ll never be good enough, you’ll never get over it, you’re always going to be this or that? Whatever it is, it’s all lies, deceptions, and strongholds, but there is a truth that is greater and more powerful, and that truth will set you free.

In fact, Jesus declared, “That the Spirit of the Lord is on me, he has anointed me to preach, and sent me to proclaim freedom for the captives” (Luke 4:18). And so, his Word will do what you can’t, his power can do whatever it takes, and his truth will set you free. Today, it’s time to fight back, it’s time to pull down the strongholds of lies, whatever it is that we’ve believed that is not in line with God’s word. We’re going to tear down that stronghold and we’re going to take every thought captive.

Today, every unauthorized thought that we’d trusted, right now we’re going to take away its authority, because it’s a lying thought, a deceiving thought, and we’re going to renew our minds with the truth of the Word of God. We’re going to teach ourselves the Word of God, so that we begin to think on whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, lovely, and admirable. We’re going to think about such things, because we’re no longer captives to those other thoughts, no longer captive to that stronghold, and so let’s begin to pray.

Pastor John Talcott

Christ’s Community Church

303 West Lincoln Avenue

Emmitsburg, MD 21727

(301) 447-4224

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