

Section IV

Leaving Guilt Behind: Strongholds

As we go further into this study, it is my hope that you will see our enemy is real; and while we claim victory over him through our Saviour, Jesus Christ, we shouldn't take the enemy lightly. Though he has been defeated by the shedding of Christ's blood on the cross, he is a powerful adversary who, by his nature of trickery and deceit, continues to confuse those whose hearts have not been fully yielded to Christ. Spiritual warfare and the enemy is a reality, not merely a threat, in the life of a believer dedicated to following Jesus.

We have looked at two of the three tools that Satan uses to keep us in the midst of guilt and ultimately blocking us from reaching our goal of glorifying God with our lives. The first two were condemnation and the power of thoughts. The last tool of strongholds is one of the most powerful that Satan uses and, therefore, makes it hard to overcome. Why? Because it is when Satan has set up fort in an area of your life and you have allowed him, whether knowingly or not, to have free rein to strengthen and extend his control over that area of your life. So much so that he is dominating that part of your life.

What is a stronghold?

Satan sets up strongholds in an area of our lives when we do not strive to submit to the Holy Spirit in regards to that part of our life. We set ourselves up for such an attack from the enemy when we don't focus on fully submitting every part of our lives to God. The enemy's strongholds often capitalize on our weaknesses. Compulsions, worldly obsessions, fears, lusts, jealousies, uncontrollable tempers, etc. are often signs of a stronghold that is either being built or is firmly established in our lives. In most cases, we will recognize that something is out of control, but we may catch ourselves making excuses to why we cannot gather control over it. We should submit all areas of our lives to the Holy Spirit and His grace will in turn strengthen us to battle the enemy – especially in the areas of our weaknesses.

Read 2 Corinthians 12:7-10.

What was the Lord's response to Paul in regards to him asking the Lord to remove the thorn in his flesh?

Why does Paul state that he will boast about his weaknesses?

Paul states that “*For when I am weak, then I am strong.*” It is in our weaknesses that we realize we can not do things on our own and we need help. We are strengthened when we submit to the Holy Spirit and allow Him to work through our weaknesses. However, when we do not turn to the Holy Spirit for strength we focus on our weaknesses and feel hopeless. That is where Satan uses our weaknesses to his advantage; where we allow him to get a foothold in the door that leads to a stronghold in an area of our life.

Does guilt build a stronghold?

One of the ways the enemy cultivates guilt in our lives is to create a thought process of being afraid of God. He will begin to implant thoughts in the believers mind that God is a cruel taskmaster. This in turn brings the believer to the point of self protection by placing a wall up that makes it hard for them to receive God’s love and draw close in their relationship with Him. When we view someone as a mean person, it is hard for us to receive their love. Once Satan can get us believing this lie, he begins working with other misleading thoughts about God. All along he wants us to have a collection of feelings about God that make our perception of God distorted. When we carry the guilt of sins we have committed in the past, this perception of God builds even further to the point that Satan has created a stronghold. Ultimately this stronghold is a faulty thinking pattern based on lies and deception. All these are building blocks to establish the stronghold that blocks you from God’s best.

God is a loving God not a cruel taskmaster. In reality He loves you immensely and you have great value in His eyes. Establish the value that God has for you by reading the following scriptures. Beside each scripture complete the following sentence – “I have value in God’s eyes because . . . “

Genesis 1:26-27:

Isaiah 64:8:

Psalms 8:3-5:

John 3:16:

Psalms 139:1-18:

Romans 12:1-8:

Tearing Down Strongholds

For a Christian the presence of a stronghold can have severe consequences causing us to drift away from God through lack of fellowship with Him, lack of fellowship with other Christians, self-doubts, etc. For the unbeliever the stronghold is Satan’s weapon for blocking the voice of the Holy Spirit, Who seeks to draw the sinner to repentance and to saving faith in Christ. These consequences alone make it imperative that we tear down the stronghold Satan has created in our lives.

Strongholds are initiated and dwell in deception. Therefore, the cure is to bring the truth of God’s Word forward in your life.

Read 2 Corinthians 10:3-5. What power do the weapons a believer fights with have on strongholds?

What does Ephesians 6:17 tell us is the sword of the Spirit?

John 17 records Jesus' prayer for His disciples and ultimately for us. What does He say about God's Word in John 17:17?

Hebrews 4:12 tells us that God's Word is sharper than a two-edged sword. What does this verse tell us that God's Word penetrates?

God's Word is truth and the only way that we can battle Satan's lies of deception. As we marinate in God's Word, we sharpen the sword that He has equipped us with to battle Satan. When there is a stronghold in an area of our lives, we have gone past the point of battling the thoughts that Satan initially placed in our minds to the point of believing his lies. We begin to demolish such beliefs by constantly being in the Word of God and by placing into action Ephesians 6:18. Write Ephesians 6:18 below.

We must pray on all occasions because our enemy is well aware of what God's Word says. He will use God's Word as he battles against us just like he did when he tempted Jesus. However, after we have equipped ourselves by reading God's Word, when we pray the Holy Spirit will guide us by bringing the truth of God's Word to mind. Prayer that is fervent, endless, and purposeful will motivate us into action and we will then engage the assault on the stronghold that we seek to bring down.

If Satan has used guilt (or something else) to create a stronghold in your life, ask the Holy Spirit to guide you as you:

1. Identify the stronghold to its fullest.
2. Claim the truth of 1 John 4:4 which says, *“You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the One who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.”*
3. Realize there is a spiritual warfare and accept your responsibility as a soldier of the King of kings to put on the armor everyday and engage the enemy in the battlefield of prayer.
4. Seek the Word of God and godly wisdom.
5. Stand strong in prayer and pray without ceasing. Enlist other prayer warriors to join you if necessary.
6. Trust that God will respond as He has promised, and that the defeat of the enemy has already been accomplished through the blood of Christ.
7. Claim the victory from the beginning. Begin in your prayers to claim the victory and God will honor your efforts to trust in Him even before you see results in your life.

Final Reflections: When the enemy begins to use guilt to create a stronghold in our life, he does it in such a deceiving way that we do not even know he has placed us in his snare. These strongholds are real and should not be dismissed or ignored. However, there is no stronghold that Satan has over us that can not be defeated by God. As you begin to defeat the enemy by battling against him and the stronghold, you are encouraged not to over-emphasize the stronghold either. In fact, you should give your greater amount of focus toward the comfort and hope that God brings through His forgiveness. Focusing on Jesus leads to this overwhelming comfort and hope. As we focus on Him we can expand our understanding of all the ways in which He strengthens us in our lives. This focus on Jesus is what brings the joy and peace that many of us seek in our lives.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I have let the stronghold of guilt hold me hostage for too long. I will no longer believe the lies of deception that the enemy has led me to believe. I claim victory over the enemy through your Son, Jesus Christ. I am weak and unable to break down this stronghold without You. Give me wisdom to overcome. Strengthen me and guide me through Your Word and by Your Spirit. It is in Your victorious Son’s name I pray. Amen