

SPIRITUAL STRONGHOLDS

Power Struggle Series - Part 4

Ben Rudolph

Good morning Life Fellowship. It is good to see you here this morning. Turn in your Bibles to II Corinthians Chapter 10 where we are going to be this morning. I hope that you have been enjoying this series. For the last two weeks Pastor Dan has just done an amazing job. He talked about the power over sin two weeks ago and then last week the power over schemes as we have been looking in this series on spiritual warfare. We need to realize that as we live our lives we don't just live in the material world, we don't just live our lives freely walking with God, but we need to understand that there is an enemy that attacks us every moment of every day.

One of the reasons why we were doing this series is so that we will be aware of how the enemy works. But even more so is the reason that we can have faith in what God is doing in spite of the enemy's attacks. Part of this series is not so that we look upon the darkness of spiritual forces, and that we get scared and we retreat; the point of this is to understand what the enemy wants to do, how he is working and how he is active, and then understand how God is working in greater ways over the enemy of darkness. Amen? (*Amen.*)

So that is why we are studying this. One of the fears of studying spiritual warfare is that we can get so caught up in looking at what the enemy is doing we fail to look at what God is doing. And every sermon in this series is 'power over.' So we have looked at power over sin, power over schemes and strategies of the enemy, and today we are looking at power over strongholds. And we will be in II Corinthians Chapter 10 which is a really important message. It is an important message for me because I don't think I know of anyone that does not have some issue in their life that feels bigger than they are.

Maybe it is addiction, or a struggle, or a sin issue, but there is something inside of us that feels like we are constantly battling. Maybe we battled against it when we were young, and we are still battling against it today. It doesn't matter when we came to know Christ, there is an issue, there is something internally that feels so much bigger than we are, and it doesn't matter how much we pray and how much we try, there may be times when we feel overwhelmed by this sin and by this struggle. The Bible calls this a stronghold.

And in this passage that we are going to look at in II Corinthians Paul is addressing this issue of strongholds, because what he wants us to understand is that the strongholds in our lives that are there, God has given us the power to overcome them. I think one of the biggest things that God wants all of us in this room to understand, as well as those of you who are watching online, is the belief that God has the power to overcome the things in us that have plagued us sometimes for decades.

And we have to begin to believe that God wants us, and expects us, to live a life of victory and not defeat. Sometimes that seems very hard, because maybe walking in here this morning you have felt that defeat. You have felt that struggle. You have felt that overcoming that stronghold that reared its head in your life this week was not

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possible. And for most of us how we deal with it is to ignore it, or we try to bury it, or we try to justify it, or we just give up and think it is a part of our life.

So Paul is addressing this in II Corinthians Chapter 10. Now Paul is talking to this church in Corinth and he has a very real relationship with this church because he helped plant this church. Paul spent more time with this church than any other church he helped plant in the New Testament. Of all the churches Paul planted he spent more time with this church than any of the other churches. And this church was the one that had the most problems. If Paul's church plants were kids, Corinth would have been the prodigal son. It was the church that always caused him heartache, pain and discouragement.

So Paul has this relationship with this church where he is always addressing the issues. Within this church they were starting to doubt and question Paul's authority, Paul's effectiveness, and Paul's ways of leading them. So Paul writes in verse 1: "***I, Paul, myself entreat you, by the meekness and gentleness of Christ.***" Not that is important. We know there is a letter between I Corinthians and II Corinthians that is called 'the harsh letter.' It was a letter that Paul wrote probably out of anger and in the flesh and not in the spirit, because it was not saved for us. But this church has caused him so much heartache, heartbreak and pain that he is writing in II Corinthians the second version of 'the harsh letter,' addressing the problems, but in a kinder and gentler way.

He says: "***I who am humble when face to face with you, but bold toward you when I am away!***" So again he is saying that he has heard this said of him, that he was bold when he was away from them but when he was with them he was very humble. Verse 2: "***I beg of you that when I am present I may not have to show boldness with such confidence as I count on showing against some who suspect us of walking according to the flesh.***"

Here is what he is saying. The problems that he is writing about, the sin issues that are in the church, he is praying that they will resolve those issues so that when he comes they will not be bound by them anymore. Now look at verse 3: "***For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds.***"

Paul is saying that all the problems that are in this church, all the sin issues that are there, such as getting drunk at communion, the sexual immorality that was going on, all of the problems that he has written about, he wants them to know that he is dealing with those things not in the way that a man would deal with them, but he is addressing them as issues as strongholds. Paul is saying that these things were spiritual strongholds that were in this church, they must be addressed, and that he is not dealing with them in a human way.

And what we need to understand is that the problems and strongholds in our lives should not be dealt with in human ways, because then we will only get human results.

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Instead we need to realize that the strategies and schemes of the enemy must be overcome by divine power. We have weapons that are not of the flesh but divine power can destroy strongholds. Verse 5: ***“We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete.”*** So we are going to talk this morning about how to overcome the power of strongholds.

And in this passage we see two things that are very, very clear. The theme of this passage number one is that Paul uses a lot of military terms in this text. There are a number of military terms like, *waging war, weapons of our warfare, strongholds, destroy, and taking thoughts captive.* Those are just some of the words that are military terms that were used in that day. And we also see another theme in here and that is the theme of the mind, that there is a battle of strongholds that takes place in our mind. So when we talk about defeating these strongholds we have to address this issue that it is not just behavior we have to confront; it is the beliefs that are ingrained. It is what happens here first that plays itself out in our actions.

There is a show that my family and I have gotten really into during this season and it is the show, ‘Alone.’ I am not sure how many of you have ever seen that show, but it is a reality show where they take about ten contestants, they put them in some arctic wilderness, and they strive to be the last person that survives in these harsh conditions. It is an intense show. I have watched this with awe just mesmerized because I know I would only last a couple of hours. But some of these people really know what they are doing. They have ten contestants and every single one of them on the show during the first episode think they have the skills, the ability, the mindset to do this and they think they can win this.

And then invariably there is always someone on the first episode that taps out. We watch this show and have realized that many times the problem that these people face causing them to tap out is not physical, it is mental. You can see it happening when they start saying things like, ‘*I really miss my family,*’ or ‘*I just don’t know how much longer I can do this.*’ And right there, the moment that thought enters their minds you see this decline, and within hours or days that they are tapping out.

The battle of our victory over strongholds begins in our minds. So this morning we are going to try and understand three things - the nature of strongholds, our weapons against strongholds, and the victory over strongholds. We have to understand what is going on inside our minds when these strongholds are at work.

So let’s look first at the nature of strongholds. And we need to understand how strongholds are formed and what they are. I believe that Paul is strategic in using this word ‘stronghold’ that is used here in verse 4. ***“For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds.”*** Paul uses that word but it is

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the only time in Scripture it is used. And I believe Paul used it to paint a picture for the people of Corinth of something that they all knew.

I want you to see this picture of what is called the Acrocorinth. The Acrocorinth is this huge rock outcropping over Corinth. It was surrounded by water and then there is a plain. From the plateau of the town everyone could look up and see the Acrocorinth. And you can see fortifications in the picture. Those were probably built in the Middle Ages so it didn't look like that in biblical times. But there has always been a fortress there since the Hellenistic times.



If Corinth was attacked this was the last line of defense, the last place people would run to for safety. This was a place that was impregnable to enemy armies. Not only was Acrocorinth a fortress, it was a place of worship. The temple of Aphrodite was there where it employed 1,000 prostitutes both men and women.

When Paul was saying stronghold, the people of Corinth thought of Acrocorinth. When Paul said that we have divine power to destroy strongholds, he was saying this. This thing that was in their viewpoint every single day, what they woke up and saw every day, this outcropping of the Acrocorinth, they couldn't imagine it not being there. But he was telling them that God had the power to destroy that. That God had the power to overcome whatever man, or whatever evil had tried to create inside of them.

When Paul said that we have the power to destroy strongholds, he was saying that there was something inside of us that feels so big, that feels so great, that it becomes a part of our landscape, a part of our lives, and many times we are not even aware of how ingrained the struggles of the enemy are.

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What is a stronghold? A stronghold is an ungodly belief, plus demonic activity, plus time. Okay? A stronghold is an ungodly belief, and ungodly beliefs can come into our lives when we are young when something happens to us or someone says something to us. There is just something that swirls and then all of a sudden an ungodly thought and belief enters into our mind, and we believe that it is true. And then the enemy reinforces that with their attacks, those fiery darts that Dan talked about last week. And over time it becomes a stronghold.

I love what it says in Ephesians Chapter 4 verse 26 where Paul says: “***Do not let the sun go down on your wrath,***” because if you do it will give a place or a foothold to the devil. Listen, a foothold just becomes a stronghold over time. Paul says if one day you go to bed without dealing with your anger it creates a place for Satan. And over years there is unconfessed sin and an unresolved belief that you have inside, and what that is going to turn into is a stronghold.

These ungodly beliefs are made up of two things. Paul describes these ungodly beliefs or strongholds in verse 5: “***We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion***” So arguments and every lofty opinion can be ungodly beliefs or strongholds. Different versions of the Bible translate arguments as calculations. It is how we calculate things. If this happens then this must happen. We have planned out in our mind how we think life will turn out if we do this or we do that. It is a belief. It is an ‘if then’ belief. ‘*I can’t do that because if I do that then this would happen to me.*’

So we hold onto these ungodly beliefs, and there are so many types of strongholds we can have whether it is pride, or anger, or fear, or lust, or deception, or control, or arrogance, or covetousness, or unforgiveness, of bitterness, or shame, or guilt or doubt. I could go on and on and on. But one of those words I just mentioned the Holy Spirit may be saying, ‘*That’s you,*’ because we all have strongholds. There is no one in this room that doesn’t have a stronghold in their life.

So we have arguments and lofty opinions. The word argument means calculations, and lofty opinions literally means ‘a bulwark or the wall of a fortress that is really high.’ So Paul is saying that these walls are in us like they are up in the Acrocorinth, these strongholds that are in our minds. And over time we have come to believe these thoughts that are around these sin issues and around these ungodly beliefs and they are entrenched.

So what we have to do is understand that these lofty opinions and these arguments are against God. It says: “***We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God.***” What does that mean? Raised against the knowledge of God means that the knowledge of God is not just understanding who God is even though that is important. But we have to understand who God is and that He is great, but we also have to understand His character, His love, and why He sent Jesus to come for us. And why He wants to bless us.

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We have to understand everything about the nature of God, but it is not merely about the nature of God. We are also to understand the way God thinks. These lofty opinions, these arguments, these beliefs, these ungodly beliefs are entrenched in our minds and we believe they are true. And it doesn't matter how many sermons we have heard that God will forgive us and He is gracious toward us still does not affect us because we can't let go of our shame.

See there are all these things that we have to confront in our lives. And it doesn't matter how many times a preacher says something, it doesn't matter how many times we read something in the Word of God, we have to confront these things in our lives, these arguments that set themselves up against the knowledge of God and what God thinks about it. How does God think about that ungodly belief that we have? What is the truth? And you know as much as there is a stronghold of ungodly belief that leads to behavior, we also see there is a stronghold of God.

I want you to imagine this knowledge of God. There is the reality and the truth of who God is and the way that God thinks that is more real than the reality you have created in your mind. That is what we need to understand. We need to confront this reality every single day because in Isaiah 55 it says that as far as the heavens are from the earth, is the distance between God's ways and God's thoughts to our ways and thoughts. If that is true then we have to constantly confront our thoughts, and we have to always go to God and ask what are the ways that we have that are so different than His.

And we have to confront these things and we have to identify them because for most of us when we have these strongholds in our lives and they play themselves out in our behavior and how we live, we must realize that we cannot just attack these by behavior modification. We have to identify these beliefs and we have to compare them to the reality of who God is and what God thinks about that. And we have to address them.

So one of the things we must understand is that these ideas, no matter how they have been formed, or where they came from, the enemy wants us to believe that we are defeated. And that territory that he has claim over in our lives becomes off limits from God. And if we were to give that over to God, if we were actually to attack that, we don't know what would happen because that stronghold feels like such a part of us.

So we must believe that there is something greater, and we must take everything and place it under the authority of Jesus. That is the nature of strongholds. We have to identify the ungodly beliefs in our lives. What is so great in this passage is that it is a passage of victory. It is a passage of hope and a passage of help. Paul is saying that we don't walk according to the flesh. These problems that they were having in their church at Corinth were not without hope because they have these weapons. He says: ***"For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds."***

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Listen, Paul wants us to understand that we have weapons that are divine powers. We are not alone. No matter what has happened to us, no matter how many times we have fallen, and failed, no matter how many times we have struggled, no matter how many times we have felt defeated, there is a reality in Jesus Christ that He wants us to understand that He has power waiting for us. We just have to understand what that power is.

One of the things that the enemy wants us to feel is that the power of the darkness is greater than the power of light. He wants us to feel helpless when maybe we have prayed so hard, we have come forward many times, and we have even gone to counseling, but we are still struggling. Listen, all I can say is when we try human methods and we believe that there is an equation humanly speaking to overcome these problems we will have human results. There is something that we must do and that is bring everything that we have, all the problems that we have, under the authority and the reality of who Jesus is. And we wage war. In says in verse 3, “***we are not waging war according to the flesh.***” Waging war is literally a military campaign. We bring those thoughts, these strongholds and we say, ‘*It is time I attack that.*’ For so many of us we have lived defensive lives against these issues inside of us, these issues, these sins, these struggles, these addictions.

Have you ever seen people with hats on saying things like, ‘Vietnam War Veteran,’ or ‘Operation Enduring Freedom,’ or ‘Desert Storm?’ When we see people with these shirts, or these hats, or pins, we remember our country has been at war. And the soldiers didn’t just run at the enemy, there was a plan, there was a strategy, and there was a military campaign. And what we have to understand is that there must be a military campaign that we must make against these strongholds.

We just talked about how we need to identify what the strongholds are, but then we have to decide what our weapons are. What kind of weapons do we have to use against these strongholds? And we need to know that we have divine power. And I found six divine powers that we have according to Scripture. Now this is a whole six part series right here, and I wish I could preach six weeks on these things, but I don’t have the time.

These are the divine powers that we have. Number one is the name of Jesus. The name of Jesus is powerful. Jesus said that all authority in Heaven and earth has been given to us. We saw the disciples moving and acting in the book of Acts, and we saw them declaring the name of Jesus. And we have to start proclaiming the name of Jesus over the strongholds and ungodly beliefs in our lives. It says in Philippians Chapter 2, “***At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.***”

There is something powerful in the name of Jesus and we have to start using it. Number two, there is a power in the blood of Jesus. In Revelations Chapter 12 it says

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that we will overcome by the blood of the Lamb and the Word of our testimony. When it says that we will overcome it is talking about the accusations of the devil. And when the devil wants us to live in that stronghold, and the stronghold is controlling the way that we think, controlling the way that we act, what we need to do is claim the blood of Jesus over that sin, over that issue of ungodly belief.

I love what it says in Hebrews Chapter 12 and verse 24: ***“Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word.”*** His blood speaks a better word. What we need is to stop listening to the voice and the lies and deceits of the enemy that feeds our ungodly beliefs and we need to start listening to the blood of Jesus. Remembering who He is, what He has done for us on the cross, because only by His blood are we set free. Only by His blood are we cleansed. It is the blood of Jesus that we need to start claiming.

Number three is the resurrection of Jesus. I don't have time to go into all these passages but I love this passage in Ephesians Chapter 1 because it talks about the reality of who we are in Christ because of our salvation. He says this in verse 16: ***“I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him.”*** What Paul says is that he prays that we have the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him. What did we say sets itself against the knowledge of God? It was the arguments and the lofty opinions.

So what Paul is saying is there is a process of understanding the knowledge of God. Not only the knowledge of who He is, but the way He thinks. It is a process by which we must pray for and actively ask God to show us the way that we see things in our lives and in the world. Verse 18 says: ***“Having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which He has called you, what are the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints, (and listen to this), and what is the immeasurable greatness of His (of His what) power toward us who believe.”***

If you are a follower of Jesus, if you believe that Jesus is your Lord and Savior, and you have given Him your life, there is a power working toward us who believe. And listen to this: ***“His power toward us who believe according to the working of His great might that He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the Heavenly places.”*** This is the power that raised Jesus from the dead and is working inside of us. There is no stronghold, there is no power that the enemy has over us that is greater than the power that rose Jesus from the dead.

Look at verse 21 where Paul brings it real. He says it is working inside of us, this power that raised Jesus from the dead. ***“Far above all rule and authority and power and dominion.”*** This is a spiritual warfare reference. He is saying the resurrection of Jesus shows a power over darkness. He disarmed the principalities and powers described in Colossians Chapter 2. He disarmed them, triumphing over them. In Jesus there is a

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power from the resurrection that we must start claiming, we must start living and believing in.

There is a fourth power and that is the Word of God in Scripture. Next week Pastor Dan is going to be preaching on the power over temptation. And when Jesus was tempted by the enemy, the weapons that He used were the Word of God. And the way that we combat ungodly beliefs, the way that we confront these things is we must take the Word of God and make it a part of our minds and transform our thinking. And there is so much I could say about that if I had the time.

There is a fifth power and that is prayer. James Chapter 5 says *“the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous person avails much.”* We must pray and we must pray and we must pray and we must pray and never stop praying. We don't pray for a day, we don't pray for a week, we don't pray for a year, we don't pray for a decade, we pray every moment of every day without ceasing, and we pray against every stronghold in our life. And we never stop praying.

And then there is a sixth power that I found yesterday, and that is the love of God. Again we don't have time to look at this one but at the end of Romans Chapter 8 Dan preached on this two weeks ago. There is nothing that can separate us from the love of God. No power and no principality can separate us from the love of God. There is a power in the love of God that when we find ourselves feeling separated from Him, feeling something such as ungodly belief, the love of God reminds us that there is a bigger reality, that there is a true reality.

All these powers that we have are greater than the power of the enemy. One of my favorite places to go in Europe is Salzburg which is in Austria. It has one of the most beautiful castles there. I have been there with my family a number of years ago when we were visiting and it is just a beautiful place. This castle took 400 years to build. And one of the things that I found fascinating when you tour the castle complex is looking at how massive it is. I remember reading that it had taken them decades to build the walls so it was around the 15th century before they finished the walls. And unfortunately by the time they finished the stronghold and the castle, the modern weapons of warfare had rendered the walls obsolete. Isn't that interesting? It took them hundreds of years to build this thing and by the time they finished it, there were cannons that could have destroyed it. Now listen, whatever stronghold that is in your own life that feels so impregnable, the power that we have in Christ is greater, and we have to believe that.

I love what Paul says here in this passage because Paul doesn't mince words. He uses the word 'destroy' twice. In verse 4 we have divine power to destroy strongholds, and then we destroy arguments and lofty opinions. When it comes to war there are two kinds. There is limited war and then there is total war. And I am not going into the details of each of those, but total war means we are throwing all of our resources, all of

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our power, all of our might, all of our energy and completely demolishing this enemy that we have.

The last few wars we have fought as a nation have not been total wars. They have been limited wars, because our lives haven't changed. We have been living our regular lives while there is a war going on over there in the Middle East, or in Afghanistan, or Iraq, or wherever, but we haven't really been affected by and large, except for the people who have gone over there to fight. Total war means every ounce, every part of our national unity and structure and identity goes into defeating this common enemy, kind of like World War II, which was a total war situation.

We have to confront our strongholds with a total war mentality. Mentality that says, *'I am going to destroy this.'* And destroy means literally to tear something down to its foundations. It means we will not leave a brick standing. Remember that picture of Acrocorinth? When we look at this picture how many stones do you think were there? There were a lot of stones. How long do you think it would take for you to take down those walls? It would take quite a long time.

Paul says he wants us to destroy our strongholds. And how do we do that? He tells us that we are to destroy arguments and to take every thought captive to obey Christ. Every one of those rocks, every one of those stones is a thought. And those thoughts don't stop, they come at us every day. They come to us out of the blue. But just as strong and as big as that stronghold looks, we have to believe that the work it is going to take to overcome the strongholds in our lives, is that kind of work. These are not problems that we resolve by coming forward because we are emotional on a Sunday morning. And I am not downplaying that, but I just think we have to change our mindsets. We have to change our mindset by understanding the victory over strongholds must be complete. And we must take it seriously, we must be offensive, we must take time, we must be intentional, and it must take perseverance.

Some of the strongholds in our lives are deep and they are big. But they are not bigger than God. They are not bigger than the power that we have. And when Paul says we need to destroy arguments and every lofty opinions, that is an offensive term that means this has to happen. And what God wants us to believe is that there is a greater work that He is offering us, there is a greater power that He is offering us than the power we have been living. Let's not let another day go by that we don't identify, confront and attack the strongholds in our lives. The enemy wants us to feel defeated. The enemy wants us to feel overcome. The enemy wants us to feel like a failure. The enemy wants us to feel like there is no hope. The enemy wants us to feel like whatever sin, whatever addiction, whatever struggle we have is just going to be a part of our lives. The enemy wants us to feel hopeless and helpless, but Jesus' blood speaks a better word.

The application is this. Number one - how do we practically do this? We need to write down and identify the lies and agreements we have in place in our mind. This is

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something you might want to do this afternoon or maybe tomorrow morning. Just get out a piece of paper, or your journal, draw a castle and label that castle with whatever your stronghold is. Maybe it is pride, financial security, worry, fear, shame, or whatever it is. Once you have labeled that stronghold, start writing down the ungodly beliefs that are a part of you. Ask God to reveal the ungodly beliefs you have. What are the things that you believe in that are not true to Him.

Number two - pray and apply the power we have in and through Jesus. Start praying through those ungodly beliefs and write a corresponding godly belief that confronts and attacks that ungodly belief.

Number three - never stop capturing thoughts. We dismantle that stronghold brick by brick, thought by thought, belief by belief. Keep doing it, keep doing it, and after that stronghold is destroyed, begin attacking the next stronghold. And then the next one, and the next one, until Jesus is Lord and authority over more of our lives day by day, year by year, and decade by decade. Let's believe and have hope this morning because what God is offering us is power over our struggles.

The preceding transcript was completed using raw audio recordings. As much as possible, it includes the actual words of the message with minor grammatical changes and editorial clarifications to provide context. Hebrew and Greek words are spelled using Google Translator and the actual spelling may be different in some cases.