

Demolishing Strongholds

(Demons; evil angels; bondage; sin)

Dr. Jerry Nelson

II Corinthians 10:4-5

February 2, 1992

Two weeks ago I began my sermon, with a story about John.

I indicated that I called him, a man I knew to be a Christian, to ask if he would meet regularly with a new Christian and help him grow in his spiritual life.

As I said, John declined the offer giving me some excuse but I detected that the real cause was a fear in him.

I later learned the source of that fear, John had struggled for years with lust fueled by pornography. He just couldn't seem to ever get victory over it.

In fact it seemed to so overwhelm him that he found that all of his relationship to God and other Christians were hindered by this bondage.

Yes, Bondage is the word, John felt like he was a slave to these desires and actions.

As I have indicated the last two weeks - I sense that there are many Christians who are very defeated in their Christian lives.

Believing the lies of Satan that when they sin they have blown it, they are no good, they are hopeless, they are doomed to defeat in their lives - they just give up - living saved but sorry - if they even still believe that they belong to God.

Believing the lies of Satan and the way the world around us thinks - that we must perform, that we must live up to a standard, and then we will become something - we succumb to that kind of thinking about our relationship to God as well- that the only way we are acceptable to God is if we perform well enough.

But I tried two weeks ago to lay a foundation for these three messages by declaring from the Bible that God accepts us on a completely different basis -

We don't become His by performing -

We have become His by His grace through Jesus Christ therefore we are able to please God and live useful, fulfilled lives.

That message was to declare who you are if you are trusting in Jesus Christ as your saving Lord.

It is an understanding of who you are in Christ that forms the basis for getting out of the rut, the bondage of the "saved but sorry" existence that so many Christians live.

Last Sunday I continued this discussion of being freed from this defeated Christian life by reminding you that even though you have become a Child of God there are two powerful

forces still working against your spiritual life and growth:

FIRST of all is SIN - Those old patterned ways of thinking and acting built into you from conception and strengthened by your training and your circumstances.

This would include such patterns as that old retaliatory attitude that just pops up when you are offended by someone.

The SECOND powerful force still working against you is SATAN The Bible says Satan and his demons are persons who know your weaknesses and they work them against you.

I tried to show you last week that whether it is that sinful propensity still within you or whether it is Satan or one of his demons - the battle against those forces is engaged in the same way:

The battle is in our minds:

If we believe the lies from those old sinful patterns or if we believe the lies or half-truths from Satan we will act on those lies and engage behavior that is inconsistent with what our Lord wants - we will sin.

And how do we resist those lies? With Truth!

We looked at Ephesians 6 and saw that the spiritual armor with which God has provided us is truth about God and about our relationship to Him - and with this truth we can resist Satan's and sin's temptations.

I call this the usual or normal process of sanctification - the usual way for Christians to have their minds renewed so that they will not be conformed to the way the world thinks and acts.

The renewal that comes from knowing the truth about God and ourselves and applying the truth when we are tempted to believe lies and therefore yield to sin.

Believe me when I say that I get no commission or royalty off sermon tapes that are ordered by you BUT I would recommend that if you did not hear the last two message, you order the tapes as it indicates on the face of your bulletin.

But what about John, whom I introduced two weeks ago and again this morning?

I believe that there are some Christians who have so often and so long yielded to certain sins, certain ungodly habits, or have so long believed the lies of Satan and their old sinful patterns THAT they are in a kind of bondage from which they feel they cannot be freed.

They just can't seem to break patterns in their lives that have them totally defeated.

The difference between these Christians and the ones I described last week is probably only one of degree.

But these Christians have been slaves to these sinful desires and actions for so long that they have given up hope that there is any freedom.

On what Biblical basis can I make the claim that there is a deeper bondage and an unusual slavery to which some Christians fall prey?

Please look with me at II Corinthians 10:3-5. READ

First of all we recognize that words and phrases such as "Weapons", "strongholds" "demolishing" and "taking captive" are metaphors. They are references to physical warfare to make the point about spiritual warfare.

In verse 5 we find that the weapons of the world are "arguments" and "pretensions" "that set themselves up against the knowledge of God". Understood this way, Paul is talking about the same kinds of lies, half-truths, false arguments, and deceitful tricks of Satan and our old sinful patterns that we discussed earlier.

In verse 4 Paul says that we don't fight with those weapons instead we fight with different ones. He doesn't here spell those weapons out as succinctly as he does in Ephesians 6 (the full armor that we looked at briefly last week). Those weapons are truth!

What I want you to see now is the end of verse 4 where Paul says that these weapons have divine power to demolish "strongholds". In ancient days people of a city would defend themselves by first of all building strong walls. And then in the event of the wall being breached and the enemy invading the citizens would build a "stronghold" - usually a fortified tower that could be easily defended. Such "strongholds" were nearly impregnable.

Using that metaphor, Paul says that such "strongholds" - pockets of false thinking and sinful actions - are built in the minds of people.

Look at 11:3 "But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's (Satan's) cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ."

How does this happen? Vs 5 You put up, you accept, false teaching or lies. You let it take root in your minds, you fall for the deception, you desire the fruit it falsely claims it will provide.

Back to 10:4 and 5: What does Paul say is the result of these false arguments and these pretensions - these lies and half truths that people accept as true: They become or are "strongholds" - seemingly impregnable pockets of false thinking and sinful actions.

Now the beauty of it, that we are going to look at in a few minutes, is that these "strongholds" (fortresses in the NASB) can be demolished and as it says in the remainder

of vs 5 those very arguments that Satan has used against, and those prideful pretensions that we have erected in our minds (those "thoughts") we can "take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."

But before we do that I want you to see further how Satan or his demons participate in the building of these "strongholds" and stand guard over them trying to keep you from understanding what is happening and trying to keep you from knowing and applying the truth that will demolish those "strongholds":

To do that let me ask and answer some questions:

1. Can a believe be attacked by Satan or a demon?

Paul in chapter 12 of II Corinthians refers to his thorn in the flesh as a "messenger of Satan" - the word "messenger" is the same word that is used 186 times in the New Testament and nearly everywhere else is translated as "angel" - in this case an angel of Satan - a demon. In every case in the N.T. it refers to a person - a created angel (in this case an evil angel).

Can a Christian be attacked by a demon? Yes, Paul was!

Jesus, Himself, prays that we will be protected from the Evil One - Satan. A wasted prayer if it couldn't happen.

Other passages that prove that truly Christians can be attacked by Satan are I Pt 5:8; James 4:7; and much of Ephesians 6 that we saw last week.

2. The second question is can Christians fall to Satan's attacks?

Clearly all the passages that speak of the attack of Satan make it clear that succumbing to that attack is entirely possible.

In Acts 5 it is stated outright that Satan filled Ananias' heart so that he lied to the Holy Spirit and to the people of the church.

Why would Paul warn believers in Ephesians 6 to put on the Armor of God if falling to his attacks couldn't happen?

Yes, Christians can fall to Satan's temptations to sin.

3. Can Christians become trapped in Sin?

In Romans 6:12 the Bible says that we are not to let sin "REIGN" in our lives. What's the point? It might, so don't let it!

In Romans 8:15 the Bible says that God doesn't want us to be slaves again to fear. The point? You might, so be careful!

The point of much of the letter to the Galatians in the Bible is that these Christians had been "bewitched" as Paul puts it in chapter 3:1 so that they were captive to a whole different way of thinking and acting than they had learned from the Gospel.

The point? Stop it! Get out of that bondage!

What part does Satan or do demons play in building or protecting those "strongholds" of deception and sin?

Now I must have you hear clearly that I am not suggesting that "the devil made me do it".

That is not true. AS I said last week, there are two powerful sources of influence against our spiritual lives: Not only Satan but SIN.

Satan takes advantage as we will see in a moment but we are the ones who allow him to do so.

We are responsible, but being guilty doesn't alone help us know how to get free.

Look with me please at Ephesians 4:26-27. READ

Very clearly this passage teaches that in this case, the human is the one who sins when he allows his anger, his unforgiveness, to smolder - BUT notice what Satan does -

he takes advantage of it - he gets a place, a foothold.

Now again these words "foothold" or "place" are metaphorical.

The point is that by prolonged anger (or unforgiveness) we give Satan a starting point from which to build a "stronghold".

At lunch this past week, a friend told me of a person she knows well who so harbored unforgiveness in their mind and heart that it eventually led to the abandonment of their family and the ruin of their spiritual life.

For many reasons there are Christians who are harboring unforgiveness against their parents, their spouses, former friends, or past business associates.

The longer these attitudes are maintained the stronger becomes the "stronghold".

Satan or his demons support that unforgiveness by continually reminding you of the offenses against you and of the lie that you have a right to remain angry and unforgiving.

I Timothy 6:9 shows us another potential "stronghold". READ

The longer we entertain that sinful greed for more, the stronger become the arguments in our minds, the more impregnable becomes the "stronghold".

Just as he did with Jesus in the wilderness, so Satan or his demons suggest to us all the power and wealth that would be ours if only we yielded to his advice.

Another "stronghold" may be pride.

In both James and I Peter, the Bible tells us to be very alert to the enslaving nature of our pride. And in both texts God connects the pride issue with a warning to "resist Satan".

Satan tried the pride ploy with Jesus. Anytime Satan can get us to take charge of our own lives, leading us to believe that we can do better for ourselves than God can, it is pride he is appealing to.

I'm convinced that the longer we yield to our pride the stronger becomes the "stronghold".

Other sins that give Satan an advantage and allow a "stronghold" to be built are:
immorality - any sexual sin, be it sex outside of marriage, improper sex in marriage, or selfish solo sex is a very powerful enslaving practice.

Playing with or practicing the Occult likewise open us up to powerful demonic influence.

These and other sins, practiced over time, build "strongholds" that Satan desires to defend in your life.

How does Satan take advantage of these sins that we commit?

He deceives us into believing that we need these things, or that we deserve these things, or that we have the right to take this or that action.

He deceives us into believing that though we are a Christian it is no "big deal" to engage in such and such.

He then suggests further involvement in the sin.

Then when we have fallen for his lies again and again he deceives us further into believing that now there is no forgiveness, and no hope.

But I am here this morning to tell you that is not true!

Will you please look again at II Corinthians 10:3-5?

God says that we have weapons to demolish those "strongholds"!

AS I said, one of Satan's strategies is to get you to believe that you are so trapped that you are doomed.

That's not true. You are God's child.

And certainly God would not have told you to resist the devil, if he had not already given you the ability to do so!

What I am going to suggest in the next few minutes is in part what we have already talked about in the preceding two weeks

BUT because of the degree of bondage and the strength of the "strongholds" AND the likely presence of demons defending those strongholds - I will suggest that an even more aggressive counterattack may be necessary to break the "strongholds".

But again before going further let me affirm what I believe the Bible teaches: That you have the ability by God's grace to resist Satan and break free.

Some suggest that what you may need is an exorcism - someone who will cast a demon or demons out of you.

I contend that while that may be true of an unbeliever as in the case of the New Testament examples - you have already been given by God all the power you need to send the enemy "packing".

Now because of the way that God made us to be part of the new community of believers - the church - we may well need the support of other believers as we demolish those strongholds in our lives - but we do it. You don't need an exorcist - you are your own exorcist, by the truth of God and the power of God in you.

Let me be very specific then about how I believe God has equipped you to break free:

First: You must know and believe who you are in Christ Jesus.

As I mentioned earlier, that is where it begins.

You can only counterattack the lies that you believed that led you to sin and the lies with which Satan now grips you by knowing the TRUTH.

You are fully accepted by God already.

You didn't earn that acceptance and you can't lose it.

Please refer to my message of 1/19 for a much fuller description of that truth.

Not only are you already accepted by God you have FULL ACCESS to God.

Moody Bible Institute theologian C. Fred Dickason has written well of the promise of God in the book of Hebrews that because of who we are in Christ we can come to God boldly asking for mercy and grace in our time of need.

Satan would deceive us into believing that we can't possibly go to God again - we've overstayed our welcome. That's a lie!

Not only have you already been accepted by God and have full access to God but you Full AUTHORITY from God.

This full authority over sin and the demons is ours because we have been granted that authority by virtue of our new relationship to Christ.

Look at Ephesians 1:20-21 READ

Compare it to 2:6 READ

That is why God says that we can resist Satan and he will flee from us.

That is why Paul says in Romans 8 that "We are more than conquerors through

Christ" and not even demons can separate us from the love of Christ.

Now folks if you will come to trust God enough to believe that about yourself as a Christian - it will revolutionize your response to sin, your ability to break free from those "strongholds", and your ability to walk in obedience to Christ.

So what do you do?

1. First you renew your allegiance to God and his truth.
Affirm what God says as true truth.
Read it, study it, accept it, believe it.
2. Secondly, do a thorough moral inventory and confess your sin. King David said, "search me O God and know my heart, try me and know by thoughts, see if there be any sinful way in me"

Be careful, don't let Satan or your overly sensitive conscience betray you into confessing sins that you have already dealt with before God. If you asked him in times past to forgive you for certain sins then you must believe him that he has done so - Don't dredge up what God has forgiven.

But if you have allowed immorality to go unchecked, or you have hung onto offenses against you by people from your past or present, or you have allowed pride to set up a stronghold in your thinking and actions, or any other sins that have given Satan a foothold, a place to stand and defend his lies and deceptions

then those sins must be confessed, those sinful patterns must be renounced - you must declare those sins and the lies that support them for what they are - lies and contrary to the word and will of God.

You must declare that they are not little issues but that they wage war against your soul and you here and now are done with such things.

3. Third, you must repent. That means to turn from those sins and don't even give them or Satan a way to get back in.

Paul in almost all of his letters tells us to thwart sin and Satan by actively pursuing right living.

Don't just acknowledge that certain attitudes or actions are sinful without making a plan to give your mind and body to doing what is pleasing to God.

When the Ephesians wanted to stop their involvement in the occult they started with getting rid of the materials that fed those sinful desires AND they gave themselves doing right. As Paul told them later in Eph 4:

How do you stop stealing - start working.

How to stop lying - speak truth.

How to stop anger - forgive.

How to stop bitter relationships - be kind etc.

Walking free is very proactive not passive!

4. Fourth, Command Satan or his demons to leave you alone.

Now this really starts to sound strange to many of you.

The preacher has gone over the edge -he's talking to demons.

D.Martyn Lloyd-Jones (a most sane, biblical teacher and renowned preacher of the Word who died just a few years ago) wrote boldly of our right to tell Satan to leave.

Even Jesus spoke to demons, looking directly at Peter he on one occasion said, "Get behind me, Satan" - Knowing that it was Satan who had prompted Peter to make his ridiculous and God dishonoring statement, Jesus directed his comment directly to Satan - Away with you Satan, what you have suggested is based on a lie and I won't fall for it.

Just like a bully wouldn't dare attack you when your bigger-than-he-is brother is with you, so we can say with confidence, Satan, "I know that I alone can't get you to stop anything, but if you keep after me, my older Brother, the Lord will avenge me. So in the authority invested in me by Him - in His Name - I say be gone. I do not belong to you and I do not have to succumb to your lies. I belong to Christ and I can obey Him."

5. Fifth, renew your mind with the truth of God's Word as I spoke to last week. Take the weapons described in Ephesians 6 and with TRUTH stand against the enemy of your soul.

Exercise your spiritual muscle by learning and applying the Word of God.

6. And last, Pray.

Again I mention Jesus, He prayed for Himself and

He prayed for us that we would be protected from the evil one. Can we do less than pray thus for ourselves and our brothers and sisters in Christ?

If you would look at all of Paul's prayers in Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians you will see the same issues mentioned time and time again:

O God, grant that they will be so established in truth that they will know your love, the future that is theirs, and the power you make available to them.

Yes, Christian you can be free.

No, I don't mean that you will never sin or even never sin that particular sin again, but you will be free -no longer held in bondage by that "Stronghold" in your life.

You can know more victories in your life than defeats.

That is your right as a Child of God,
that is God's plan for you,
and by his grace you can live it.

If you believe that you are captive to a "stronghold" please get a trusted friend or pastor and together think and act your way through these truths from the Word of God that I have reminded you of today.

And then with the support that God designed into his church, meet regularly with other believers for the purpose of affirming the truth of who God is and who you are in Christ and for the purpose of stimulating one another to love and good deeds.

As each person in the church does what God has equipped him or her to do we build each other up until we become mature in Christ.

It is on that theme - of spiritual gifts and how we help each grow- that I will speak beginning three weeks from today.