



Breaking down strongholds

2 Cor 10:3 It is true that we live in the world, but we do not fight from worldly motives. 4 The weapons we use in our fight are not the world's weapons but God's powerful weapons, which we use to destroy strongholds. We destroy false arguments; 5 we pull down every proud obstacle that is raised against the knowledge of God; we take every thought captive and make it obey Christ.

Last week we looked at the fact that when we became Christians, God intended that we should be spiritual people – living life a new way; according to the Spirit of God. But so often we choose to live according to the way we once were before we became Christians; what the Bible calls living in the flesh.

BALLOONS

Sometimes a thought gets planted in our head by something that happens to us, or maybe we have been bullied, or people have been negative about us. The problem is that many people get problems in life that they just can't seem to get over it. In fact they can't see a way by which they can do so.

Take this balloon. It looks quite big, but you all know what will happen to it if I stick this into it. Pop!

VERSE Heb 4:12 The word of God is alive and active, sharper than any double-edged sword. It cuts all the way through, to where soul and spirit meet, to where joints and marrow come together. It judges the desires and thoughts of the heart.

The amazing thing about God's Word is that God uses it to judge the thoughts and attitudes of our heart – and “pop” those which aren't true.

Before we go on let's remind ourselves of all the things God has given us in Christ. *Reprise sheet from first week.* When we get a hold of the truth, it can make a difference. *VERSE It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Galatians 5:1* The problem is that many Christians have barriers in their lives that make it difficult for them to grow as believers. ROADBLOCK. The problem is that many Christians miss out on the presence and power of God in their lives because they think that something in their lives can't be changed. It could be something in their past that nobody can do anything about or behaviour that they feel powerless to change. Most Christians just go around them or ignore them and go off in another direction..

What sorts of things are we talking about. I guess we know them. Unforgiveness. Obsessive behaviour. Addiction. Fear. Traumatic Experiences. Personal insecurity. Past failure. Negative spiritual experiences. Prejudices. These and more are the sorts of things that hold God's people back in their walk with Him and in their relationship with Him. They can stop them growing and in some cases, lay shipwreck to their faith.

One way these ways of thinking are described as described as in 2 Corinthians 10:4 are strongholds. CAERPHILLY CASTLE is a medieval stronghold, built by the English to subdue the Welsh. If the Welsh had wanted to take this land back and control it, it would not have just been a case of chasing the English into the castle and taking their land, because unless they had conquered the stronghold, the English would have just come out of their castle again and taken it back over, which is exactly what they did. That was the idea of having the stronghold.

On a spiritual level, people become Christians, but never deal with all the issues in their lives which have a potential to hold them back in their faith. What it means is that at some point, things not dealt with either pop back up to discourage us, or satan latches on to them and uses them against us to damage our relationship with God. So what is a Stronghold in personal and spiritual terms?

BARRIER - Strongholds are obstacles in our lives that impede our relationship with God.

Here are a couple of definitions of strongholds from some contemporary writers. QUOTES

What is a "Stronghold"?

"A mind-set impregnated with hopelessness that causes us to accept as unchangeable situations that we know are contrary to the will of God."

Ed Silvoso

"Mental habit patterns of thought that are not consistent with God's Word."

Neil Anderson

The good news is that God has equipped us to break them.

2 CORINTHIANS 10:4-5 4 The weapons we use in our fight are not the world's weapons but God's powerful weapons, which we use to destroy strongholds. We destroy false arguments; 5 we pull down every proud obstacle that is raised against the knowledge of God; we take every thought captive and make it obey Christ.

For Paul writing to the Corinthians, the obstacles preventing their spiritual growth were ideas planted in their case by their background and false teachers which were leading them to question Paul's authority and the truths of God he was trying to teach them. They worked on both their pagan and Jewish roots that a relationship with God had to be earned or deserved. If they wanted to be Christians, then it was said that they had to keep the Jewish laws. It was a gospel of fear and failure. Strongholds of religious fear or religious exclusivity are some of the worse kinds of ideas that stick in people's heads and leads to all sorts of falsehood and bigotry that can be hard to unravel. It's one of the biggest stronghold issues in the church of God now as it has been in the last 2000 years. And it's something satan latches on to easily.

Paul gives us these words: *4 The weapons we use in our fight are not the world's weapons but God's powerful weapons, which we use to destroy strongholds. We destroy false arguments; 5 we pull down every proud obstacle that is raised against the knowledge of God; we take every thought captive and make it obey Christ.*

Personal testimony about my own upbringing and some of the ideas that were fixed in my mind – Christianity, racism, self-fulfilling prophecy. The worst thing about these is when someone challenges us and we try to defend the indefensible. And that's the thing about strongholds. They are false ideas about ourselves and the world. And they take some shifting! Spiritually, we don't move on unless we recognise strongholds and deal with them.

In Christians, they invariably show up in the opposite of what we are in Christ. In Christ we are accepted by God, secure in Him, significant in Him. The effect of strongholds means that we feel guilty failures before God, we seek to be secure in our own strength and don't pray and trust God enough, and we don't feel significant enough in Him to deal with issues in our lives that we know aren't right.

How do strongholds get a hold of us in the first place. 2 Corinthians 10 gives us the idea – they come from the world.

How Strongholds Are Established

Environment

Family, community, schools, friends etc.

Traumatic experiences

It's not the experience itself but the lies we believe as a result of it

Before we came to Christ we were conformed to the world, it's ideas and pressures – a world hostile to God. And even if we are believers, we can easily act in the flesh as we talked about last week, to allow ourselves to become conformed to the world's thinking and not be transformed as we are supposed to be in Christ.

Besides, we know from our own upbringings, that our lives are shaped by our families, schools, community, friends and the like. I've got to say, that most of it positively develops us rather than creates strongholds that can influence our Christian faith badly. I was fortunate to have been brought up in a Christian family where I had good foundations. The problem is that satan can easily cause the bad things to be hidden amongst the good. I had a fantastic grounding in the scriptures when I was young – encouraged both by my parents and the church. But amongst them was stuff that had crept in that looking back, just was indefensible from the point of view of God's Word and I've already mentioned some of them.

Then there are traumatic experiences. We have all had them. I'll deal with this more in a later week. Needless to say, if you've been abused in your life, it will cloud how you think about people and how you respond to them and how you build up relationships. Similarly, people often found the loss of somebody close to them a shattering experience and they have difficulty in their relationship with God. How many people do you know that have had bad experiences in life and no longer walk with the Lord because it has shaken their faith. That trauma is a stronghold. Maybe we haven't gone that far but a past experience really bugs us and that gives us faith problems? God wants us to be free of it.

These mental strongholds are all things that are lies which as a child of God each of us has the ability to tear down. No Christian, no matter how bad their past experience has to remain a victim. In Christ we are new creations, so God doesn't change our past – he frees us from it!

Here's an interesting sentence for us to get our heads around:

SLIDE The problem with strongholds, is that if what you believe does not reflect truth, then what you will feel will not reflect reality. You may feel rejection when you are not rejected. You may feel helpless to change when actually you're not.

God has given us the means by which we can deal with strongholds. What are those means? Simple – through the truth that comes through His Word, and through the power of the Holy Spirit within us. Why do you think it is so important to know God's word and to pray. If you walk with God, you're less likely to walk off anywhere else.

The only thing is that if we don't, then they get reinforced, either by our persisting with them, or by satan using them to continue to keep us as far from God as he can. If all that sounds a bit like rocket science, then let me make it easy for you.

There's a word for it – TEMPTATION Temptation is an attempt to get us to live independently from God. Temptation usually starts as a legitimate desire for significance, security and acceptance (all the things God offers us in Christ). The question is, are we going to satisfy those needs by responding to the world, the flesh and the devil, or are they going to be met by God who promises to "meet all your needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus" (Phil 4:19).

Satan is very clever at being able to target our vulnerabilities and what happens may seem unique to us. Maybe we rationalise it and say "*but I just can't stop doing this or that. People just don't understand. God doesn't understand.*" You can see what that last phrase says and here's where it comes from. You're not the first – but God always provides a way of escape.

AIRPORT. At Stansted airport, there are air traffic controllers that control the landing and take off of planes. They control just what lands and when, or if there is an issue like the weather's bad, what doesn't land but gets diverted to East Midlands or Southampton or wherever. Our minds is like that. There are plenty of thoughts and ideas that could land and take root in our lives, but as we read in 2 Cor 10:5 Paul says we take every thought captive. We know what the truth is – we need not let the thought land and turn into actions. By His Spirit, God has given us the power to do that. Stop and pray.

God wants us to see the world as it truly is and to go in His direction because He has equipped us to do so.

**As the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.**
Isaiah 55:9

**Trust in the Lord with all your heart and
lean not on your own understanding. In
all your ways acknowledge him, and he
will make your paths straight.**
Proverbs 3:5-6

But our strongholds (examples) often prevent us from going God's way and put us in danger. CLIFF EDGE 1

Rather than making God choices in life, strongholds in our lives influence our judgement and push us towards making choices in the flesh. God wants us to grow in His way in our lives and part of that is realising that strongholds exist and dealing with them.

If you have a computer, you'll know that there are programs called viruses that can badly effect your system or even damage your computer. When you start it up, you should have something scanning for them and removing them. It's the same with being a Christian. Strongholds damage us, yet God has given us the means to check and deal with them – through His Word and by His Spirit – so that we can be people of transformed minds, knowing God's good pleasing and perfect will. CLIFF EDGE 2

I've given you some strongholds from my life. I've found over the years that some of my strongholds were there for years and I never realised them until God pointed them out to me. What are your strongholds? Maybe you've identified some in the past and dealt with them. Good. What else is there. Let's pray that God will show us what they are so that we can renounce them and find the freedom that comes from that.

If you know God is challenging you this morning, then we are coming to communion where we can confess the sin which the strongholds in our lives have resulted in us committing. We can renounce those strongholds and find the forgiveness and freedom that Jesus purchased for us in His broken body and shed blood on the cross.

Perhaps you don't have a clue. God no longer wants us to walk in ignorance of the deception that the world and satan have placed in our minds, or maybe any self-deception we have been walking in. In a later week, I'll talk about Steps to Freedom in Christ which is a way by which we can identify strongholds in our lives and use God's word and prayer to renounce them and walk God's way by His Spirit, finding that freedom that comes through trusting Jesus.

Prayer

*Preached by Mark Reid at MRBC Felixstowe 5/7/09
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