

The Spiritual War

9. OVERCOMING STRONGHOLDS



Spiritual warfare and strongholds

Strongholds mean exactly what the word implies. They are areas of land, which have a *strong hold*. A fortified structure, which is able to resist by assault by enemy forces is they picture of a spiritual stronghold. An army invading enemy territory needs to take down the strongholds to hold the land. If strongholds remain, they will become a continual threat to the army and citizens in the land.

When we were lost, we were under enemy control; our lives were subject to strongholds. These strongholds were constructed, for a purpose. They were designed to keep us lost; Satan in his war is in the business of constructing strongholds, which feed our fallen nature. His desire is to keep us blind from the Gospel of Christ, so we perish in a lost condition.

³ But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing,
⁴ whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them. **2nd Corinthians 4:3-4**

When we come to Christ, the army of the Lord invades our life; the battle for territory has begun. Satan is not willing to give ground to his enemy, the Lord of Hosts; he does not want us to live a successful spiritual life. Therefore, his goal is to keep as many strongholds standing in our life as he can, allowing him to wage war on our souls. Remember, Satan goal is to prevent the power of God, from being established in the believer's life. He does this through strongholds, if Satan can establish areas of operation in our life; he then will have the ability to attack at will. He can then keep us from being on the offensive, against his kingdom.

For this reason, it's imperative for us to have these Satanic strongholds pulled down. If we don't remove strongholds, we invite failure and defeat in our spiritual walk. Because we are giving Satan a base from which to wage war. The only way we can assault spiritual strongholds is through the power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in our life. Without the heavenly power, in our lives we are at Satan's mercy. The Holy Spirit through Paul shows us how to wage war.

³ For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh.
⁴ For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds,
⁵ casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, **2 Corinthians 10:3-5**

Being a soldier in the Lord's army, we should have a clear view and vision of the landscape before us. This section of scripture addresses these vital areas of understanding.

- Where the war is fought?
- How the war is fought?
- How victory is achieved?

Where the war is fought?

verse 3

we walk in the flesh: We live in the physical world, in the world of flesh and blood, is where we see the work of the spiritual realms, played out. We cannot divorce ourselves from the flesh, but this is not where our battle takes place. The evil we see in this world, is the result of this spiritual war, this however is not

where the battle is taking place. We need to change our perspective as the Lord's army; we need to train our spiritual eyes, recognizing the source of this conflict.

according to the flesh: As the Lord's army, we waste our time with waging war using weapons of flesh, because that is not where the battle is. Paul wants us to understand the nature of war in the spiritual realms. Many times, we can waste our energy focusing on the wrong solutions to a problem. We might think secular council or therapy can solve our problems, when the issue is spiritual.

To understand this war, let's take a married couple, Jim and Sandy Smith for example. They are having tremendous conflicts within the marriage. Jim's anger is out of control, Sandy is disgusted by his rage, she thinks Jim is having a self-esteem problem; he is taking it out on her. Sandy is thinking about divorce, she can't handle these outbursts, life is no longer fun. Jim after work has so much stress, he needs to stop at the bar, have a few drinks and watch some sports to unwind. He hates going home, because he feels so put down, he does not get respect. Their kids Jimmy 8 and Johnny 10 are having nightmares; mommy and daddy are always fighting. Everything seems like its falling apart for the Smith family.

Sandy Smith has a friend, Lisa a Christian who has asked Sandy if she would like to go to church. However, for Sandy, Sunday is the only day she can relax all day Saturday, she is driving the kids from one sporting event to another, and she needs Sunday to herself. Lisa understands the answer here is not secular counseling, money, a job promotion or more things. This family needs the Lord in their lives, so she knows it involves spiritual warfare.

Lisa knows both Jim and Sandy do not know the Lord, and Satan would love to destroy this family, creating misery and anger at a God they never knew. Lisa is at war, for the souls of a family, who is entrapped by strongholds they don't even know, exist. Lisa understands what scripture means, *though we walk in the flesh....we do not war according to the flesh*. Lisa sees with Spiritual eyes, through the lens of scripture.

Many times, we Christians fail to see the Spiritual war taking place around us. Our eyes need spiritual training, we have train ourselves to see the lens of scripture.

How the war is fought?

Vs. 4

the weapons of our warfare: In the description of the armor of God, only two offensive weapons are listed. The shield, breastplate, belt, shoes and helmet are essential, but they are mainly defensive in nature. Our offensive weapons are word of God, which is *the sword of the Spirit* (Hebrews 4:12, Eph 6:17) prayer (Eph. 6:18).

The Word of God

The Bible is is a weapon. The world we live in is subject to the invisible spiritual world, created by almighty God's word.

By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.
Hebrews 11:3

God works according to His word, meaning God's Word is stationary, while the world is fluid. The spiritual world is subject to God's authority, and therefore subject to God's word.

In Matthew 28:18-20, Jesus declares He has all authority in Heaven and on Earth, Jesus then gives His authority to us. We operate under His authority, therefore knowing His word, allows us to wield a weapon that both the physical and spiritual worlds are subject too. The sword of the spirit has eternal implications, while an earthly sword can only have an effect in the physical world. The universe is subject to God's word, let alone our neighborhood.

Prayer

Along with the word of God (sword of the Spirit) we have prayer (Eph. 6:18). The word of God along with the power of prayer, create the most formidable weapon in the universe. Think about it, God



made the Heavens and the Earth through His word alone! Now because of Christ's work on the cross, we now have access to God's throne in Heaven. We have the power and authority to access the throne of God in Heaven.

15 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.

16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Hebrews 4:15-16

The Lord works according to His word, by understand and applying God's word, we have access to the same power, which created the universe.

The power of the prayer as a weapon has no limits. Remember Daniel, he was praying about his people, who were captives in the Babylonian and then Persian kingdoms. The prince of Persia was moved out of the way, because of Daniel's prayer. The level of the person's faith, determines the size of the stronghold, they are willing to wage war with.

How we wage war

not carnal but mighty in God: Carnal means flesh, the weapons we use, access heavenly power, the power of God. The spiritual realms operate all around us; the natural world does not comprehend the spiritual.

Therefore the natural, tends to ridicule the spiritual. The Holy Spirit wants us to know just what type of power we have, as contrasted to the carnal. The word actually used here in the Greek is **δυνατός** *Dunatos*, means able, powerful, and strong, the word has the same root word, to our word for dynamite. Our weapon in other words is spiritual dynamite.

pulling down strongholds: With this "spiritual dynamite", we have the ability to literally pull down strongholds. What does Paul mean by strongholds? Paul defines this term in the next verse as anything, which pits itself up against the knowledge of God. There are many levels of strongholds, small scale and large scale. We have individual strongholds such as alcoholism, racism, and pride that we face on a personal level. There are also worldwide strongholds, exerting power over large groups of people such as Islam, atheism, materialism and pornography.

The term stronghold means an area where an entrenched power exerts control over an individual, group, generation, territory in opposition to the knowledge of God. We, the army of the Lord on earth, use our weapons, to pull down or destroy these strongholds. The Greek word for stronghold is, **ὄχυρμα** *Ochuroma*, means a castle, stronghold, fortress, fastness. We are to destroy these structures using our spiritual weapons.

Returning to our story of the Smith family, Lisa, Sandy Smith's friend, understands strongholds, she understands the Smith family from a spiritual lens, Lisa seeks to uncover the strongholds in her friends life. Lisa, a warrior for the Lord, knows Sandra Smith did not come into her life for no reason, Lisa understands she must now intercede for the souls of this family. Using scripture and prayer, Lisa has the power of God to overcome strongholds.

Through the battles in her own life, overcoming the strongholds of sin, she learned how to wage war. Lisa through war, learned the power of scripture and prayer. Lisa is battling for the souls of this family, conducting spiritual warfare on Satan's domain.

The powers of strongholds are not just on a personal scale, they also affect generations, and large segments of populations. For example Alcoholism, the addiction to Alcohol, can have a stronghold on entire generations of families. Religions are also strongholds, which claim billions of souls, entrapped in deceit.

For this reason, not every believer fights the same battle; some are called to distant lands to confront strongholds. Missionaries who bring the Gospel to areas of darkness are doing exactly that, they are confronting spiritual strongholds on enemy territory. God calls others to mission in the neighborhood, bringing the light of the Gospel to their next-door neighbor like Lisa. Wherever we find ourselves, we are on God's mission, until we are called elsewhere, our goal is to advance the gospel, pulling down strongholds, bring people into the Kingdom of God that is our purpose.

Vs.5

In verse 5, strongholds are defined as *arguments* and *high things*, which are placed above the knowledge of God. By comparing the knowledge of God to our actions and thoughts, we can expose not only our strongholds, but the strongholds of those around us.

For example, someone might know pornography is wrong and against God's word, they watch anyways despite the knowledge of sin. Why, because the power of the stronghold has overcome the person's inner objections, where does this control come from? This exposed stronghold should then become a target for the believer to attack. Our mission, literally destroy these arguments and high things.

casting down arguments: The word argument in Greek is λογισμοῦ *Logismos*, means logic or understanding. We are to pull down false ways of thinking, or false reasoning. This covers a very broad spectrum on both small and large scales. Many of our "isms" are essentially spiritual strongholds of false reasoning. Take your pick, Communism, Hinduism, Alcoholism, Atheism, Racism and more are all forms of logic, which make sense to the people entrapped. We are called to cast down or destroy this false logic.



High places of ancient Israeli city of Arad

and every high thing: What is a high thing? In ancient Israel, one of the besetting sins of the people was their setting up of images on hilltops and in groves. The pagans of Canaan (Palestine) were removed from the land for their sins; the people of Israel were to be a holy and upright people. They were to be different than the people of the land before their occupation. However, Israel soon began to adopt the customs of the people around.

They disobeyed God, by setting up competing places of worship. They set up idols and images in high-places, in defiance of God.

9 Also the children of Israel secretly did against the Lord their God things that were not right, and they built for themselves high places in all their cities, from watchtower to fortified city.

10 They set up for themselves sacred pillars and wooden images on every high hill and under every green tree.

11 There they burned incense on all the high places, like the nations whom the Lord had carried away before them; and they did wicked things to provoke the Lord to anger,

12 for they served idols, of which the Lord had said to them, "You shall not do this thing." 2Kings 17:9-12

Paul uses this imagery to illustrate the picture of a stronghold, a stronghold does not only have to be a way of thinking, it can be an idol, set up to worship. For example, our business, clothes, cars and homes can become a high-thing. Because, we choose to exalt the material thing above the knowledge of God.

When we examine the various kings of Israel, we get a contrast in people. Some kings were noted for their wickedness, others were praised for being faithful. Many times it's how the kings responded to high-places, which indicated the level of their relationship and sincerity with the Lord.

Jeroboam (king of Israel B.C. 975-954)

15 Then he appointed for himself priests for the high places, for the demons, and the calf idols which he had made.

16 And after the Levites left, those from all the tribes of Israel, such as set their heart to seek the Lord God of Israel, came to Jerusalem to sacrifice to the Lord God of their fathers. 2nd Chronicles 11:15-16

Jehoshaphat (914 B.C., King of Judah)

32 And he walked in the way of his father Asa, and did not turn aside from it, doing what was right in the sight of the Lord.

33 Nevertheless the high places were not taken away, for as yet the people had not directed their hearts to the God of their fathers. 2nd Chronicles 20:33

Josiah (641 B.C. King of Judah)

For in the eighth year of his reign, while he was still young, he began to seek the God of his father

David; and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of the high places, the wooden images, the carved images, and the molded images. 2nd Chronicles 34:3

The same is the case today, are we willing to remove our high-places, or things which compete for worship with the Lord. Josiah was an praised king; he was young when he became king, eight years old. When he was 16, he began to seek God with a sincere heart, during his reign Judah had a revival. Both Daniel and Ezekiel were the product of the revival. Jeremiah cried at the death of Josiah, who was considered one of the most righteous kings of Judah. What separated Josiah from the others was his sincere heart and his willingness to do what others would not do. He did not want anything to compete with the Lord, no matter how unpopular it made him, and God blessed his reign. He removed the high-places.

As part of the Lord's army, our job is to pull down the high-things, the idols set up in the lives of people. We are to be salt in the earth.

that exalts itself against the knowledge of God: Anything, whether intentional or non-intentional, which is placed above God is an idol. Strongholds are fortified area, which are opposed to the knowledge of God.

How victory is achieved

This would include arguments and high-things, which competes for truth.

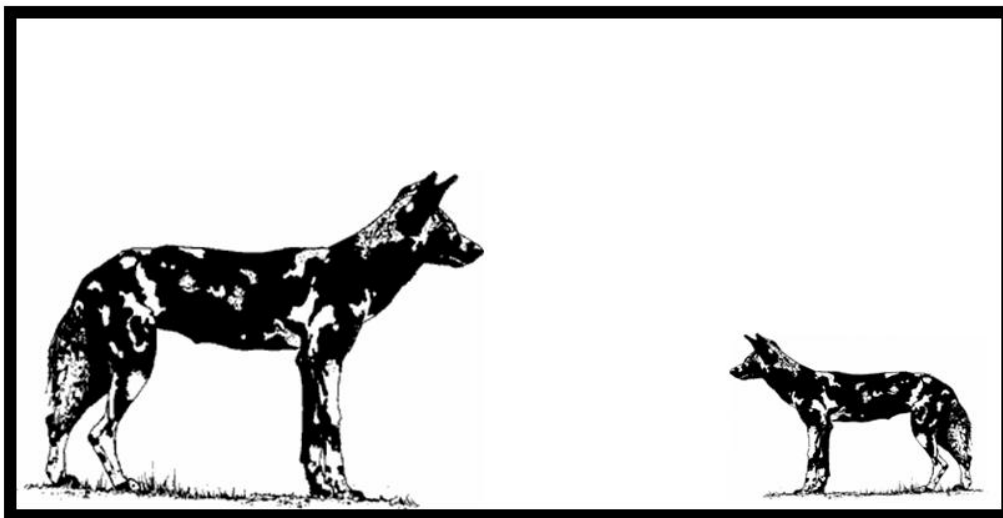
bringing every thought into captivity: We are to subject this fallen world, to the power of Christ. How are these strongholds destroyed? By bringing every thought into captivity, our minds and heart need to submit to the will of the Lord. First, we need to make the decision, before we can be effective on the spiritual battlefield, make our thoughts subject to the God's will.

7 Let the wicked forsake his way, And the unrighteous man his thoughts; Let him return to the Lord, And He will have mercy on him; And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon.

8 "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," says the Lord.

9 "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts. Isaiah 55:7-9

14 O Jerusalem, wash your heart from wickedness, That you may be saved. How long shall your evil thoughts lodge within you? Jeremiah 4:14





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Page	Topic	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	Love of God	Rom. 5:8	John 13:1	John 15:13	Rev. 1:5	John 3:16	Jer. 31:3		
2	The Deity of Jesus Christ	I Tim. 3:16	John 1:1,14	Matthew 1:22,23	John 10:30	John 14:9,10			
3	Jesus the Son of God	I John 4:15	Luke 1:35	Isaiah 9:6	Matthew 17:5	John 9:36,37	Colossians 2:9		
4	Jesus tells us who He is	John 8:23,58	John 4:25,26	John 6:35	John 9:5	John 10:7	John 11:25	John 13:13	John 14:6
5	Some miracles Jesus did	Matthew 14:19-21	Luke 5:5,6	Matthew 20:30,32b-34					
6	Jesus Christ is creator and Lord	Eph. 3:9	Col. 1:16	John 1:3	Phil. 2:11	Heb. 1:1a,2	Acts 2:36	Rom. 14:9	I Cor. 1:9
7	Jesus Christ is judge of all	Rom. 14:10	2 Tim. 4:1	Mat. 25:31-32	John 5:22	Rom. 2:16	Acts 10:42		
8	Redemption only through Christ	John 10:9	John 14:6	John 8:24	Heb. 5:9	Rom. 3:23,24	Hebrews 7:25	Acts. 4:12	i Thes. 5:9
9	Redemption only through Christ	I Cor. 1:30	Titus 2:14	Col. 1:12-14	Luke 19:10	Rev. 5:9	Eph. 5:2		
10	The atonement of Christ's blood	Rom. 5:9	Eph. 1:7	Mat. 26:28	I Pet. 1:18-19	I John 1:7	Heb. 9:14	Rom. 5:11	
11	Salvation by faith in Christ	Eph. 2:8,9	Rom. 5:1	Gal. 5:6	Acts 16:31b	I John 5:4	John 6:28-29	John 20:31	
12	God's mercy	2 Cor. 1:3	Micah 7:18	Psalms 108:4	Lam. 3:22,23	Psalms 103:11,17	Titus 3:5		
13	God Invites us to come to Him	Isaiah 1:18	Rev. 22:17	Isaiah 55:1	John 7:37	Mark 10:14	Matthew 11:28		
14	Not all people are God's children	I John 3:10	Rom. 8:14,15	Phil. 2:15	2 Cor. 6:17,18	John 1:12			
15	What God says about strong drink	Gal. 5:19-21	Rom. 13:13,14	Isaiah 5:11	Prov. 23:31,32	Prov. 20:1			
16	Sincerity is not enough	Matthew 22:37,38	Mark 10:17-22	Prov. 16:25					
17	Be not deceived	Gal. 6:7	I John 3:7,8a	I Cor. 6:9,10	Eph. 5:6	James 1:22	Gal. 6:3	Mat. 24:5	
18	Sin brings death	Rom. 5:12	James 1:15	Romans 8:6,7	Ezekiel 18:20	Luke 15:32	Prov. 11:19	Rom. 6:23a	
19	Christ conquered death	Romans 1:4	John 11:43,44	John 10:17,18	Luke 7:14,15a	Revelation 1:18	1 Cor. 15:26		
20	The commandments of God	Deut 5:7-21							
21	You cannot hide from God	Job 34:21-22	Jer. 23:24	Psalms 139:7-8,12	Prov. 15:3	Heb. 4:13	Luke 8:17		
22	Everlasting punishment of the ungodly	Matt. 13:41-42	Psalms 9:17	2 Pet. 3:7	2 Thes. 1:9	Matthew 18:8	Matthew 25:46		
23	Judgment ahead	Acts 17:31	2 Pet. 2:9	2 Cor. 5:10	I John 4:17	Hebrews 9:27	Rev. 20:12a	Rom. 14:12	
24	The grace of Jesus Christ	Rom. 5:15	Rom. 9:16	I Peter 5:5b	2 Cor. 8:9	Romans 5:20b,21	Acts 4:33		
25	Repentance	Acts 17:30	Luke 13:3	Matthew 3:19	Acts 2:38,3:19	Ezekiel 18:31a	Prov. 28:13	2 Cor. 7:10	

				3:2					
26	The forgiveness of sins	Ezekiel 18:21	Isaiah 55:&	Matt. 6:14	Mark 2:5	Acts 13:38b, 5:31	Rev. 3:20	Luke 24:47	
27	Separation of worldliness	Titus 2:11,12	Col. 3:2	Eph. 5:11	I John 2:15,16	James 4:4	Isaiah 1:16		
28	The new birth	Ezek. 36:26	I John 2:29, 5:18	I Cor. 6:11b	John 3:3	2 Cor. 5:17	I Pet. 1:23		
29	Dead to sin-Risen in Christ	Eph. 2:1,6	I Pet. 2:24	Col. 3:1-4	Gal. 5:24,25	Romans 6:2,11			
30	Eternal Life	Gal. 6:8	John 3:14, 15	John 17:3	John 3:36	Romans 6:23	John 5:24	2 Tim. 1:9b, 10	
31	Assurance of salvation	Rom. 8:16	I John 5:11-13a	John 14:21	Isaiah 32:17	Gal. 4:6	I John 4:13	I John 2:3	
32	The indwelling of Christ gives joy	John 17:13	John 16:22b	Romans 14:17	Isaiah 12:3	Gal. 2:20	John 15:11	Psalm 16:11	I Pet. 1:8
33	Obedience to the Lord necessary	I Sam. 12:15	Rom. 6:16	2 Thes. 1:7-9	Deut. 11:26-28a				
34	Confession of Christ necessary	Phil. 2:11	Mat. 10:32-33	I John 4:2	I John 4:15	Rom 10:9,10	I John 2:23	Luke 9:26	
35	Satan our arch enemy	I Peter 5:8,9a	Matt 4:1,10-11	Eph. 6:10-11	2 Cor. 10:4	John 8:44b	2 Cor. 2:10b, 11		
36	Victory over Satan	Heb. 2:14	I John 3:8	Acts 26:18	Rom 8:35,37	James 4:7,8a	John 12:31		
37	Love, the test of discipleship	I Cor. 13:1	Gal. 5:22, 23a	John 21:16	John 14:15	I John 4:20	John 13:35	I John 3:14	I John 5:3
38	The resurrection of Jesus Christ	Mark 16:9	Rom. 4:25	Acts 10:39-41	John 20:26-28				
39	The resurrection, our glorious hope	John 5:25b,28,29	Rom. 6:3-5	Rom. 8:10-11					
40	Holiness unto the Lord	Luke 1:68b,74,75	2 Cor. 7:1	I Thes 4:1-4,7	I Pet. 1:15,16				
41	Holiness unto the Lord	Heb. 13:12	Eph. 1:4, 4:24	Isaiah 35:8	I John 1:9	2 Pet. 3:11	Heb. 12:14	Psalm 29:2	
42	Spirit-filled men	Luke 11:13	Acts 4:31	Ezk. 36:27	Rom. 8:9	Acts. 1:8a	Acts 11:24a	Acts 13:52	Eph. 5:18
43	Wonderful promises to Christians	Psalm 34:18	Isaiah 66:2	Mark 9:23	I Pet. 4:12,13	Rev. 21:4	Psalm 37:3	Mat. 6:33	
44	Promises to the tempted	Heb. 2:18	Rom. 16:20a	Isaiah 43:2a	I Cor. 10:13	Psalm 34:19	Romans 8:28	Heb 4:15	
45	Promises to over comers	Rev. 21:7	Rev. 3:12	Rev. 3:5	Rev. 3:21	Rev. 2:7	Rev. 2:26		
46	God speaks to us about divorce	I Cor. 7:10,11,39	Rom. 7:2,3	Luke 16:18	Mat. 5:32				
47	Jesus Christ will return to earth	John 14:3	Matt. 24:30	Mark 8:38	I John 3:2,3	Luke 12:40	Matt 16:27		
48	The Word of God Pray and forgive	Luke 21:33	2 Pet. 1:21	2 Tim 3:16	Psalm 119:105	Mat. 6:9-15			
49	God's way of Salvation	Rom. 3:23	Isaiah 59:2	I Pet. 3:18a	Prov. 28:13	Acts 3:19a	John 1:12	I John 5:12a	John 5:24

