

Ev221 Sharing Your Spiritual Journey

Lesson Ev221-15 Spiritual Encounters: Strongholds of the Mind

By now you have some experience in sharing your spiritual journey with friends, family, and others who live near you. Have you noticed how some people are very resistant to the idea of the gospel? Have you wondered why they are completely negative when it comes to hearing about Jesus' love and forgiveness for them? It seems like nothing you can say or do increases their openness to the gospel. Their argument and opposition is almost like a stronghold or a fortress they have built against God.

What is the positive meaning of this old word, 'stronghold'? Consider the idea of a place fortified for the sake of warfare and security. The word used in the Scriptures often refers to a high place with walls, strengthened and defended against invasion. The Psalmist David knew a lot about warfare, assault, and the need to hide. He stayed in a "stronghold" to hide from King Saul (1Sam 22:4). He wrote using the positive sense of the word: "The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge. He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold" (Ps 18:2).

In the ancient world, safety for the one fleeing meant reaching and remaining upon some fortified high place. It was safe from beast and enemy alike. Such defenses were the key to military victory. When the battle involves bows, arrows, and spears, those with the high ground have a distinct advantage over those down below. Over time, these high places or fortresses became towns, and then cities—the strongholds of the ancient civilizations.

They didn't just appear, but were built slowly, rock upon rock, brick upon brick, over a long period of time. In some languages a 'fortress' may be described in terms of its function, for example, 'a place to defend oneself.' Often, however, a fortress is described in terms of its construction, for example, 'a strong-walled place.' So it is with the satanic strongholds in our lives. They didn't just happen, but were built sin upon sin. Slowly but surely the doubt and unbelief and wrong choices in people's lives become demonic strongholds. They are held by the evil one and are designed to hold us in bondage. They resist and defend against the coming of the good news of God's love and power. *This is the negative meaning of the old word.*

With this understanding of what the biblical word for 'stronghold' can mean, we can better understand the scripture in Paul's letter to the Corinthians. He says, "The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2Cor 10:4-5).

In this passage, Paul is addressing those who would try to tear down his ministry with the Corinthians. They claimed he was not really an apostle of Christ. Here, the Holy Spirit tells us through Paul, that God gives us weapons in our struggle against rebellion toward Christ. The weapons he gives us for spiritual warfare are not fleshly, or 'of the earth.' Rather they are "mighty before God"—a phrase in the original language that Paul makes into a word for prayer.

Prayer is essential to the pulling down of these demonic strongholds—agreeing with what God has to say about them.

One Bible translation says these prayers have “divine power” from God to demolish strongholds. God will give us powerful weapons to destroy false arguments, in the same way that people would destroy fortresses. The source of these weapons is supernatural. It is God himself empowering us through the work of the Holy Spirit in us. He gives us the words to say.

There is another important element here as well. What happens in our spiritual encounters is before the throne of God. We are not coming against these strongholds in the flesh or in our own strength. We are in full view and under the oversight of God Almighty. We don’t go anywhere, speak to anyone, or witness of the love of Christ in any way, by ourselves. Jesus has already gone before us to touch hearts, open minds, and convict hearers of the truth of the gospel. The Holy Spirit tears down the strongholds of the evil one in the lives of people as we pray.

But where does this battle take place primarily? According to the Scripture, we need to come against every argument and every trick. We oppose anything that puts itself against the knowledge of God. We take captive every thought and make it obedient to Christ. The battle takes place mostly in the minds of people. The context is the hearts and souls of humans, where Satan has established a foothold, an entrenched position of sin. Other translations call these strongholds “vain imaginations,” (Rom 1:21, KJV) or any “high thing that exalts itself against” knowing God (2Cor 10:5, KJV). In other words, we understand Paul is referring to idols in the lives of persons.

What do you think are some of the strongholds unbelievers are struggling with in their hearts and minds? Perhaps they are experiencing strongholds of doubt about God’s love or unbelief in the Word of God. Fear is another of the main strongholds people fight against when it comes to their faith. Fear about what others might think of them, fear of death, fear of the unknown. What about lust, greed, addiction, anger, jealousy, racism, and others? These can be strongholds too, if they control someone.

Believers, as well, have some of these same things at work in their hearts. They fear what others might think of them when they share their faith. They may fear the unknown when it comes to witnessing. They may be ignorant of what the Word says about spiritual encounters and those loved by God. Can you think of any strongholds in your life? How can God help you to tear down these strongholds?

According to the Scriptures, these sinful strongholds can be dealt with and torn down through divine weapons. God gives us his Word and the Holy Spirit to demolish these thoughts that come from the evil one. Bring them to him in prayer. Intercede for others who are bound. Then step out in faith to speak to them. God gives us a way to overcome these strongholds of the mind. The Word says, “No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it” (1Cor 10:13).

This lesson is **important** because it shows us that God has provided weapons in our battle against deep-seated devil-inspired thinking. God gives us the means through the Holy Spirit to tear down these fortresses we meet as we are witnessing. Through prayer, he will help us to bring people to obedience to Christ. He will also help us tear down strongholds we may find in our own hearts.

The **central truth** is that even though evil has built spiritual strongholds in the hearts and minds of people, God gives us prayer and the Word as weapons to destroy these strongholds.

Review Questions

1. Scripture tells us that the weapons of our spiritual warfare are not the weapons of this world. Rather, they are of what nature? [Pause 5 seconds.]

A. If you said, “They are divine, empowered by God through the work of his Holy Spirit,” you are correct.

2. What are some of the things the Scripture tells us we must come against to demolish strongholds? [Pause]

A. If you said, “Arguments, pretensions, anything that sets itself up against the knowledge of God,” you would be right.

3. What might be some of the strongholds unbelievers are struggling with in their hearts and minds? [Pause]

A. If you answered, “Doubt about God’s love, unbelief, ignorance of the Word of God, anger, lust, greed, and fear,” you answered correctly.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to listen it as many times as you need to in order to be able to explain how a Christian can confront the strongholds in people’s minds. Take some time to recall some of the strongholds that believers and unbelievers are likely to struggle against. Have a discussion with some other Christians about how they have overcome such strongholds. How might you use what you learned from this discussion to help others overcome demonic strongholds in their lives? If indeed, all of our witnessing efforts are “before God,” and we are never alone, how should this impact our confidence?