

STORMING



THE STRONGHOLDS

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Forward

2 Corinthians 10:3-5

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;

We, like Paul, are merely weak humans, but we don't need to use human plans and methods to win our battles. God's mighty weapons are available to us as we fight against Satan's "strongholds." The Christian must choose whose methods to use, God's method or the world's methods

Paul assures us that God's mighty weapons—prayer, faith, hope, love, God's Word, the Holy Spirit—are powerful and effective

Ephesians 6:13-18

These weapons of the Almighty God can break down the proud human arguments against God and the walls that Satan builds to keep people from finding God.

When dealing with the pride that keeps people from a relationship with Christ, we may be tempted to use our own methods. But nothing can break down these barriers like God's weapons.

Paul uses military terminology to describe this warfare against sin and Satan. God must be the commander in chief—even our thoughts must be submitted to his control as we live for him.

In the Christian life we battle against rulers and authorities (the powerful evil forces of fallen angels headed by Satan, who is a vicious fighter.

1 Peter 5:8,

To withstand their attacks, we must depend on God's strength and use every piece of his armor. Paul is not only giving this counsel to the church, the body of Christ, but to all individuals within the church. The whole body needs to be armed. As you do battle against "the powers of this dark world," fight in the strength of the Holy Spirit.

Those who are not “flesh and blood” are demons over who Satan has control. They are not mere fantasies—they are very real. We face a powerful army whose goal is to defeat Christ’s church.

When we believe in Christ, these beings become our enemies, and they try every device to turn us away from him and back to sin. Although we are assured of victory, we must engage in the struggle until Christ returns.

Satan is constantly battling against all who are on the Lord’s side. We need supernatural power to defeat Satan, and God has provided this by giving us his Holy Spirit that is within us, and his armor surrounding us.

In this study, we will understand how to overcome strongholds. Be blessed with understanding and faith as you rely upon God’s word.



Chapter 1

A Stronghold of Division

Keep your focus on Christ:

[1 Corinthians 1:12-13](#)

Now, this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?

In this large and diverse Corinthian church, the believers favored different preachers. Because there was as yet no written New Testament, the believers depended heavily on preaching and teaching for spiritual insight into the meaning of the Old Testament.

Some followed Paul, who had founded their church; some who had heard Peter (Cephas) in Jerusalem followed him; while others listened only to Apollos, an eloquent and popular preacher who had had a dynamic ministry in Corinth (Acts 18:24; Acts 19:1).

Although these three preachers were united in their message, their personalities attracted different people. At this time the church was in danger of dividing.

By mentioning Jesus Christ ten times in the first ten verses, Paul makes it clear who it is all preachers and teachers should emphasize. God's message is much more important than any human messenger.

Paul wondered whether the Corinthians' quarrels had "divided" Christ. This is a graphic picture of what happens when the church (the body of Christ) is divided.

With the many churches and styles of worship available today, we could get caught up in the same game of "my preacher is better than yours!" To do so would divide Christ again. But Christ is not divided, and his true followers should not allow anything to divide them.

Don't let your appreciation for any teacher, preacher, or author lead you into intellectual pride. Our allegiance must be to Christ and to the unity that he desires.

Practice the Fruits of the Spirit.

[Galatians 5:22-23](#)

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, [23] Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. The fruit

of the Spirit is the spontaneous work of the Holy Spirit in us.

The Spirit produces these character traits that are found in the nature of Christ. They are the by-products of Christ's control—we can't obtain them by *trying* to get them without his help.

If we want the fruit of the Spirit to grow in us, we must join our lives to his (see John 15:4-5). We must know him, love him, remember him, and imitate him. As a result, we will fulfill the intended purpose of the law— to love God and our neighbors.

Because the God who sent the law also sent the Spirit, the by-products of the Spirit-filled life are in perfect harmony with the intent of God's law.

A person who exhibits the fruit of the Spirit fulfills the law far better than a person who observes the rituals but has little love in his or her heart.

Seek to maintain Peace:

[Ephesians. 4:3-6](#)

Endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. [4] There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; [5] One Lord, one faith, one baptism, [6] One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

No one is ever going to be perfect here on earth, so we must accept and love other Christians in spite of their faults. When we see faults in fellow believers, we should be patient and gentle. Is there someone whose actions or personality really annoys you? Rather than dwelling on that person's weaknesses or looking for faults, pray for him or her. Then do even more—spend time together and see if you can learn to like him or her.

To build unity is one of the Holy Spirit's important roles. He leads, but we have to be willing to be led and to do our part to keep the peace. We do that by focusing on God, not on ourselves. For more about who the Holy Spirit is and what he does, see the notes on +John 3:6; +Acts 1:5; and +Ephesians 1:13-14.

Ask God to use your unique gifts to contribute to the strength and health of the body of believers.

Seek to know the truth:

[John 17:17](#)

Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.

A follower of Christ becomes sanctified (set apart for sacred use, cleansed and made holy) through believing and obeying the Word of God (Hebrews 4:12).

He or she has already accepted forgiveness through Christ's sacrificial death (Hebrews 7:26-27). But the daily application of God's Word has a purifying effect on our minds and hearts. Scripture points out sin, motivates us to confess, renews our relationship with Christ, and guides us back to the right path

Don't be moved by outward circumstances:

[Ephesians 6:11, 14](#)

Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness;

To withstand their attacks, we must depend on God's strength and use every piece of his armor. Paul is not only giving this counsel to the church, the body of Christ, but to all individuals within the church. The whole body needs to be armed. As you do battle against "the powers of this dark world," fight in the strength of the church, whose power comes from the Holy Spirit.



Chapter 2

A Stronghold of Immorality

Flee Fornication:

1 Corinthians 6:15-18

Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid. [16] What? know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh.

But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit. Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body, but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body.

This teaching about sexual immorality and prostitutes was especially important for the Corinthian church because the temple of the love goddess Aphrodite was in Corinth. This temple employed more than a thousand prostitutes as priestesses, and sex was part of the worship ritual. Paul clearly stated that Christians are to have no part in sexual immorality, even if it is acceptable and popular in our culture.

What you are thinking is a defining point.

Romans 8:5

Those who are dominated by the sinful nature think about sinful things, but those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit think about things that please the Spirit.

Paul divides people into two categories—those who let themselves be controlled by their sinful natures, and those who follow after the Holy Spirit.

All of us would be in the first category if Jesus hadn't offered us a way out. Once we have said yes to Jesus, we will want to continue following him, because his way brings life and peace. Daily we must consciously choose to center our lives on God.

Use the Bible to discover God's guidelines, and then follow them. In every perplexing situation ask yourself, "What would Jesus want me to do?" When the Holy Spirit points out what is right, do it eagerly. For more on our sinful natures versus our new life in Christ, see Romans 6:6-8, Ephesians 4:22-24; Colossians 3:3-15.

Evil words come from an Evil Heart.

Matthew 15:18-19

But evil words come from an evil heart and defile the person who says them. [19] For from the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, all other sexual immorality, theft, lying, and slander.

We work hard to keep our outward appearance attractive, but what is in our hearts is even more important. The way we are deep down (where others can't see) matters much to God. What are you like inside? When people become Christians, God makes them different on the inside. He will continue the process of change inside them if they only ask. God wants us to seek healthy thoughts and motives, not just healthy food and exercise.

Sinful Actions Lead to Death.

James 1:14-15

Temptation comes from the lure of our own evil desires. [15] These evil desires lead to evil actions, and evil actions lead to death.

People who live for God often wonder why they still have temptations. Does God tempt them? God *tests* people, but he does not *tempt* them by trying to seduce them into sin. God allows Satan to tempt people, however, in order to refine their faith and to help them grow in their dependence on Christ. We can resist the temptation to sin by turning to God for strength and choosing to obey his Word.

It is easy to blame others and make excuses for evil thoughts and wrong actions.

Excuses include

- (1) It's the other person's fault;
- (2) I couldn't help it;
- (3) Everybody's doing it;
- (4) It was just a mistake;
- (5) Nobody's perfect;
- (6) The devil made me do it;
- (7) I was pressured into it;
- (8) I didn't know it was wrong;
- (9) God is tempting me.

A person who makes excuses is trying to shift the blame from himself or herself to something or someone else. A Christian, on the other hand, accepts responsibility for his or her wrongs, confesses them, and asks God for forgiveness.

What we put into our minds determines what comes out in our words and actions. Paul tells us to program our minds with thoughts that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, and praiseworthy. Do you have problems with impure thoughts and daydreams? Examine what you are putting into your mind through television, books, conversations, movies, and magazines. Replace harmful input with the wholesome material. Above all, read God's Word and pray.

Ask God to help you focus your mind on what is good and pure. It takes practice, but it can be done.



Chapter 3

A Stronghold of Extreme Liberality

1 Corinthians 8:9-13

But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to them that are weak.

Paul addressed these words to believers who weren't bothered by eating meat that had been sacrificed to idols. Although idols were phony, and the pagan ritual of sacrificing to them was meaningless, eating such meat offended Christians with more sensitive consciences.

Paul said, therefore, that if a weaker or less mature believer misunderstood their actions, they should, out of consideration, avoid eating meat offered to idols.

For if any man see thee which hath knowledge sit at meat in the idol's temple, shall not the conscience of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols;

And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when ye sin so against the brethren and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ. Wherefore, if meat makes my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.

Christian freedom does not mean that anything goes. It means that our salvation is not determined by good deeds or legalistic rules, but by the free gift of God (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Christian freedom, then, is inseparably tied to Christian responsibility. New believers are often very sensitive to what is right or wrong, what they should or shouldn't do. Some actions may be perfectly all right for us to do but may harm a Christian brother or sister who is still young in the faith and learning what the Christian life is all about. We must be careful not to offend a sensitive or younger Christian or, by our example, to cause him or her to sin. When we love others, our freedom should be less important to us than strengthening the faith of a brother or sister in Christ.



Chapter 4

Stronghold of Idolatry

1 Corinthians 10:14-22

Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry.

Idol worship was the major expression of religion in Corinth. There were several pagan temples in the city, and they were very popular. The statues of wood or stone were not evil in themselves, but people gave them credit for what only God could do, such as provide good weather, crops, and children. Idolatry is still a serious problem today, but it takes a different form. We don't put our trust in statues of wood and stone but in paper money and plastic cards. Trusting anything for what God alone provides is idolatry. Our modern idols are those symbols of power, pleasure, or prestige that we so highly regard. When we understand contemporary parallels to idolatry, Paul's words to "flee from idolatry" become much more meaningful.

I speak as to wise men; judge ye what I say. The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?

For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread. Behold Israel after the flesh: are not they which eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar?

What say I then? that the idol is anything, or that which is offered in sacrifice to idols is anything? But I say that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils. Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils. Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? are we stronger than he?

The idea of unity and fellowship with God through eating a sacrifice was strong in Judaism and Christianity as well as in paganism

In Old Testament days, when a Jew offered a sacrifice, he ate a part of that sacrifice as a way of restoring his unity with God, against whom he had sinned (Deuteronomy 12:17-18).

Similarly, Christians participate in Christ's once-for-all sacrifice when they eat the bread and drink the wine symbolizing his body and blood. Recent converts from paganism could not help being affected if they knowingly ate with pagans in their

feasts the meat offered to idols.

As followers of Christ, we must give him our total allegiance. We cannot, as Paul explains, have a part in “both the Lord’s table and the table of demons.” Eating at the Lord’s table means communing with Christ and identifying with his death. Eating at the demons’ table means identifying with Satan by worshiping or promoting pagan (or evil) activities. Are you trying to lead two lives, following the desires of both Christ and the crowd? The Bible says that you can’t do both at the same time.



Chapter 5

A stronghold of ignorance of God

1 Corinthians 15:33-34

Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners. Awake to righteousness, and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame.

If death ended it all, enjoying the moment would be all that matters. But Christians know that there is life beyond the grave and that our life on earth is only a preparation for our life that will never end. What you do today matters for eternity. In light of eternity, sin is a foolish gamble.

“I die every day” refers to Paul’s daily exposure to danger. There is no evidence that Paul actually “fought wild beasts in Ephesus,” but rather he was referring to the savage opposition he had faced.

Keeping company with those who deny the resurrection could corrupt good Christian character. Don’t let your relationships with unbelievers lead you away from Christ or cause your faith to waver.

Paul compares the resurrection of our bodies with the growth in a garden. Seeds placed in the ground don’t grow unless they “die” first. The plant that grows looks very different from the seed because God gives it a new “body.” There are different kinds of bodies—people, animals, fish, birds. Even the angels in heaven have bodies that are different in beauty and glory. Our resurrected bodies will be very different in some ways, but not all, from our earthly bodies.



Chapter 6

A Stronghold of Unforgiveness

2 Corinthians 2:5-11

But if any have caused grief, he hath not grieved me, but in part: that I may not overcharge you all. Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many. So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow.

Wherefore I beseech you that ye would confirm your love toward him. For to this end also did I write, that I might know the proof of you, whether ye be obedient in all things. To whom ye forgive anything, I forgive also: for if I forgave anything, to whom I forgave it, for your sakes forgave I it in the person of Christ; [11] Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices.

Paul explained that it was time to forgive the man who had been punished by the church and had subsequently repented. He needed forgiveness, acceptance, and comfort.

Satan would gain an advantage if they permanently separated this man from the congregation rather than forgiving and restoring him. This may have been the man who had required the disciplinary action described in 1 Corinthians 5, or he may have been the chief opponent of Paul who had caused Paul the anguish described in 2 Corinthians 2:1-11.

Two mistakes in church discipline should be avoided—being too lenient and not correcting mistakes or being too harsh and not forgiving the sinner. There is a time to confront and a time to comfort.

We use church discipline to help keep the church pure and to help wayward people repent. But Satan tries to harm the church by tempting it to use discipline in an unforgiving way. This causes those exercising discipline to become proud of their purity, and it causes the person who is being disciplined to become bitter and perhaps leave the church entirely.

Our purpose in discipline is to *restore* a person to the fellowship, not to destroy him or her. We must be cautious that personal anger is not vented under the guise of church discipline.

Get Rid of All Bitterness:

Ephesians 4:30-32

And do not bring sorrow to God's Holy Spirit by the way you live.

Remember, he is the one who has identified you as his own, guaranteeing that you will be saved on the day of redemption.

Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of malicious behavior.

Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.

We can grieve the Holy Spirit by the way we live. Paul warns us against unwholesome language, bitterness, and improper use of anger, brawling, slander, and bad attitudes toward others. Instead of acting that way, we should be forgiving, just as God has forgiven us. Are you grieving or pleasing God with your attitudes and actions? Act in love toward your brothers and sisters in Christ, just as God acted in love by sending his Son to die for your sins.

The Holy Spirit within us is a seal or guarantee that we belong to God. For more on this thought, see the note on +Ephesians 1:13-14.

This is Christ's law of forgiveness as taught in the Gospels (Matthew 6:14-15; Matthew 18:35; Mark 11:25). We also see it in the Lord's Prayer— "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." God does not forgive us *because* we forgive others, but solely because of his great mercy. As we come to understand his mercy, however, we will want to be like him.

Having received forgiveness, we will pass it on to others. Those who are unwilling to forgive have not become one with Christ, who was willing to forgive even those who crucified him (Luke 23:34).



Chapter 7

A stronghold of resistance to authority

2 Corinthians 10:8-13

I may seem to be boasting too much about the authority given to us by the Lord. But this authority is to build you up, not to tear you down. And I will not be put to shame by having my work among you destroyed.

Now, this is not just an attempt to frighten you by my letters. For some say, "Don't worry about Paul. His letters are demanding and forceful, but in person he is weak, and his speeches are really bad!" The ones who say this must realize that we will be just as demanding and forceful in person as we are in our letters.

Oh, don't worry; I wouldn't dare say that I am as wonderful as these other men who tell you how important they are! But they are only comparing themselves with each other and measuring themselves by themselves. What foolishness!

But we will not boast of authority we do not have. Our goal is to stay within the boundaries of God's plan for us, and this plan includes our working there with you.

Those who opposed Paul portrayed him as weak and powerless, but Paul reminded the Corinthians that he claimed the power and authority of Christ. False teachers were encouraging the believers to ignore Paul, but Paul explained that the words in his letters were to be taken seriously.

Paul had authority because he and his companions were the first to bring the Good News to Corinth (2 Corinthians 10:14). On the basis of this authority over them, Paul wrote to them to help them grow.

Some said that Paul's speaking amounted to nothing. Greece was known for its eloquent and persuasive orators. Evidently, some were judging Paul by comparing him to other speakers they had heard, and Paul was perhaps not the most powerful preacher (although he was an excellent debater). But Paul responded obediently to God's call and thus introduced Christianity to the Roman Empire.

Moses and Jeremiah also had problems with speaking (see Exodus 4:10- 12; Jeremiah 1:6). Preaching ability is not the first prerequisite of a great leader.



Chapter 8

A stronghold of personality

The Anti-Christ possesses a strong personality.

Genesis 3:15

From now on, you and the woman will be enemies, and your offspring and her offspring will be enemies. He will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."

The anti-Christ is the seed of Satan.

Satan is our enemy. He will do anything he can to get us to follow his evil, deadly path. The phrase "you will strike his heel" refers to Satan's repeated attempts to defeat Christ during his life on earth.

"He will crush your head" foreshadows Satan's defeat when Christ rose from the dead. A strike on the heel is not deadly, but a crushing blow to the head is.

Already God was revealing his plan to defeat Satan and offer salvation to the world through his Son, Jesus Christ.

Never be drawn to a magnetic personality.

Be drawn to God through Christ.

Daniel 11:36-40

"The king will do as he pleases, exalting himself and claiming to be greater than every god there is, even blaspheming the God of gods.

He will succeed—until the time of wrath is completed. For what has been determined will surely take place.

He will have no regard for the gods of his ancestors, or for the god beloved of women, or for any other god, for he will boast that he is greater than them all.

Instead of these, he will worship the god of fortresses—a god his ancestors never knew—and lavish on him gold, silver, precious stones, and costly gifts.

Claiming this foreign god's help, he will attack the strongest fortresses. He will honor those who submit to him, appointing them to positions of authority and dividing the land among them as their reward.

"Then at the time of the end, the king of the south will attack him, and the king of the north will storm out against him with chariots, cavalry, and a vast navy. He will invade various lands and sweep through them like a flood.

The antichrist of the last days becomes the center of attention from this point through the rest of the book of Daniel.

Revelation 13:5

Then the beast was allowed to speak great blasphemies against God. And he was given authority to do what he wanted for forty-two months.

God will limit the power given to the beast. He will allow the beast to exercise authority only for a short time. Even while the beast is in power, God will still be in control (Revelation 11:15; Revelation 12:10-12).



Chapter 9

A stronghold of lukewarmness

Revelation 3:14-21

And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God;

Laodicea was the wealthiest of the seven cities, known for its banking industry, manufacture of wool, and a medical school that produced eye salve. But the city had always had a problem with its water supply. At one time an aqueduct was built to bring water to the city from hot springs. But by the time the water reached the city, it was neither hot nor refreshingly cool—only lukewarm. The church had become as bland as the tepid water that came into the city.

I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot.

Lukewarm water makes a disgusting drink. The church in Laodicea had become lukewarm and thus distasteful and repugnant. The believers didn't take a stand for anything; indifference had led to idleness. By neglecting to do anything for Christ, the church had become hardened and self-satisfied, and it was destroying itself. There is nothing more disgusting than a halfhearted, in-name-only Christian who is self-sufficient. Don't settle for following God halfway. Let Christ fire up your faith and get you into the action.

So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked:

Some believers falsely assume that numerous material possessions are a sign of God's spiritual blessing. Laodicea was a wealthy city, and the church was also wealthy. But what the Laodiceans could see and buy had become more valuable to them than what is unseen and eternal.

Wealth, luxury, and ease can make people feel confident, satisfied, and complacent. But no matter how much you possess or how much money you make, you have nothing if you don't have a vital relationship with Christ. How does your current level of wealth affect your spiritual desire? Instead of centering your life primarily on comfort and luxury, find your true riches in Christ.

I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.

Laodicea was known for its great wealth—but Christ told the Laodiceans to buy their gold from him (real spiritual treasures). The city was proud of its cloth and dyeing industries—but Christ told them to purchase white clothes from him (his righteousness). Laodicea prided itself on its precious eye salve that healed many eye problems—but Christ told them to get medicine from him to heal their eyes, so they could see the truth (John 9:39). Christ was showing the Laodiceans that true value was not in material possessions but in a right relationship with God. Their possessions and achievements were valueless compared with the everlasting future of Christ's kingdom.

[19] As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. God would discipline this lukewarm church unless it turned from its indifference toward him. God's purpose in discipline is not to punish, but to bring people back to him. Are you lukewarm in your devotion to God? God may discipline you to help you out of your uncaring attitude, but he uses only loving discipline. You can avoid God's discipline by drawing near to him again through confession, service, worship, and study his Word. Just as the spark of love can be rekindled in marriage, so the Holy Spirit can reunite our zeal for God when we allow him to work in our hearts.

Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come into him and will sup with him, and he with me. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.

The Laodicean church was complacent and rich. They felt self-satisfied, but they didn't have Christ's presence among them. Christ knocked at the door of their hearts, but they were so busy enjoying worldly pleasures that they didn't notice that he was trying to enter.

The pleasures of this world—money, security, material possessions— can be dangerous because their temporary satisfaction makes us indifferent to God's offer of lasting satisfaction. If you find yourself feeling indifferent to church, to God, or to

the Bible, you have begun to shut God out of your life. Leave the door of your heart constantly open to God, and you won't need to worry about hearing his knock. Letting him in is your only hope for lasting fulfillment.

Jesus is knocking on the door of our hearts every time we sense we should turn to him. Jesus wants to have fellowship with us, and he wants us to open up to him. He is patient and persistent in trying to get through to us—not breaking and entering but knocking.



Chapter 10

A stronghold to the Jezebel spirit

Revelation 2:20-26

Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols.

And I gave her space to repent of her fornication, and she repented not. Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. [23] And I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works.

But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak; I will put upon you none other burden.

But that which ye have already hold fast till I come. And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations:

A woman in the church in Thyatira was teaching that immorality was not a serious matter for believers. Her name may have been Jezebel, or John may have used the name Jezebel to symbolize the kind of evil she was promoting. Jezebel, a pagan queen of Israel, was considered the evilest woman who ever lived (see 1 Kings 19:1-2; 1 Kings 21:1-15; 2 Kings 9:7-10, 30-37; and her Profile).

Why is sexual immorality serious? Sex outside marriage always hurts someone. It hurts God because it shows that we prefer to satisfy our desires in our own way instead of according to God's Word or to satisfy them now instead of waiting for his timing. It hurts others because it violates the commitment so necessary to a relationship. It hurts us because it often brings disease to our bodies and adversely affects our personalities. Sexual immorality has tremendous power to destroy families, churches, and communities because it destroys the integrity on which these relationships are built. God wants to protect us from hurting ourselves and others; thus, we are to have no part in sexual immorality, even if our culture accepts it.

In pagan temples, meat was often offered to idols. Then the meat that wasn't burned was sold to shoppers in the temple marketplace. Eating meat offered to idols

wasn't wrong in itself, but it could violate the principle of sensitivity toward weaker Christian brothers and sisters who would be bothered by it (see 1 Corinthians 8 and the note on +Romans 14:2). Jezebel was obviously more concerned about her own selfish pleasure and free

1 Kings 18:19

Now therefore send, and gather to me all Israel unto mount Carmel, and the prophets of Baal four hundred and fifty, and the prophets of the groves four hundred, which eat at Jezebel's table.

Jezebel ranks as the vilest woman in the Bible. The Bible even uses her name as an example of people who completely reject God (Revelation 2:20, 21). Many pagan women married into Israel without acknowledging the God their husbands worshiped.

They brought their religions with them. But no one was as determined as Jezebel to make all Israel worship *her* gods. To the prophet Elijah, she seemed to have succeeded. He felt he was the only one still faithful to God until God told him there were still 7,000 who had not turned from the faith.

Jezebel's one outstanding "success" was in contributing to the cause of the eventual downfall of the northern kingdom—idolatry. God punished the northern tribes for their idolatry by having them carried off into captivity.

Jezebel held great power. She not only managed her husband, Ahab, but she also had 850 assorted pagan priests under her control. She was committed to her gods and to getting what she wanted.

She believed that the king had the right to possess anything he wanted. When Naboth refused to sell Ahab his vineyard, Jezebel ruthlessly had Naboth killed and took ownership of the land. Jezebel's plan to wipe out the worship of God in Israel led to painful consequences.

Before she died, Jezebel suffered the loss of her husband in combat and her son at the hand of Jehu, who took the throne by force. She died in the defiant and scornful way she had lived.



Chapter 11

A stronghold over a church

2 Corinthians 10:3-5

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;)

Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;

The Corinthian was called to examine and test themselves to see if they really were Christians. Just as we get physical check-ups, Paul urges us to give ourselves spiritual checkups. We should look for a growing awareness of Christ's presence and power in our lives. Only then will we know if we are true Christians or merely imposters. If we're not taking active steps to grow closer to God, we are drawing further away from him.

A stronghold of religion

Galatians 4:8-10

Before you Gentiles knew God, you were slaves to so-called gods that do not even exist.

And now that you have found God (or should I say, now that God has found you), why do you want to go back again and become slaves once more to the weak and useless spiritual powers of this world?

You are trying to find favor with God by what you do or don't do on certain days or months or seasons or years.

Galatians 4:15

Where is that joyful spirit we felt together then? In those days, I know you would gladly have taken out your own eyes and given them to me if it had been possible.

THREE DISTORTIONS OF CHRISTIANITY

Almost from the beginning, there were forces at work within Christianity that could have destroyed or sidetracked the movement. Of these, three created many problems then and have continued to reappear in other forms even today. The three aberrations are contrasted to true Christianity.

Group: Judaized Christianity

Their definition of a Christian: Christians are Jews who have recognized Jesus as the promised Savior. Therefore, any Gentile desiring to become a Christian must first become a Jew.

Their genuine concern: Having a high regard for the Scriptures and God's choice of Jews as his people, they did not want to see God's commands overlooked or broken.

The danger: Tends to add human traditions and standards to God's law. Also subtracts from the Scriptures God's clear concern for all nations.

Application question: Do you appreciate God's choice of a unique people through whom he offered forgiveness and eternal life to all peoples?

Group: Legalized Christianity

Their definition of a Christian: Christians are those who live by a long list of "don'ts." God's favor is earned by good behavior.

Their genuine concern: Recognized that real change brought about by God should lead to changes in behavior.

The danger: Tends to make God's love something to earn rather than to accept freely. Would reduce Christianity to a set of impossible rules and transform the Good News into bad news.

Application question: As important as the change in action is, can you see that God may be desiring different changes in you than in others?

Group: Lawless Christianity

Their definition of a Christian: Christians live above the law. They need no guidelines. God's Word is not as important as our personal sense of God's guidance.

Their genuine concern: Recognized that forgiveness from God cannot be based on our ability to live up to his perfect standards. It must be received by faith as a gift made possible by Christ's death on the cross.

The danger: Forgets that Christians are still human and fail consistently when trying to live only by what they "feel" God wants.

Application question: Do you recognize the ongoing need for God's expressed commands as you live out your gratitude for his great salvation?

Group: True Christianity

Their definition of a Christian: Christians are those who believe inwardly and outwardly that Jesus' death has allowed God to offer them forgiveness and eternal life as a gift. They have accepted that gift through faith and are seeking to live a life of obedient gratitude for what God has done for them.

Their genuine concern: Christianity is both private and public, with heart-belief and mouth-confession. Our relationship to God and the power he provides result in obedience. Having received the gift of forgiveness and eternal life, we are now daily challenged to live that life with his help.

The danger: Avoids the above dangers.

Application question: How would those closest to you describe your Christianity? Do they think you live so that God will accept you or do they know that you live because God has accepted you in Christ?



Chapter 12

A stronghold of witchcraft:

Ezekiel 22:18

Son of man, the house of Israel is to me become dross: all they are brass, and tin, and iron, and lead, in the midst of the furnace; they are even the dross of silver.

Precious metals are refined with intense heat to remove the impurities. When heated, the dross (impurities) rises to the top of the molten metal and is skimmed off and thrown away. The purpose of the invasion of Jerusalem was to refine the people, but the refining process showed that the people, like worthless dross, had nothing good in them.

God strictly forbids child sacrifice.

Deuteronomy 18:10

There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that uses divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch,

God strictly forbade Child sacrifice and occult practices. These practices were common among pagan religions. Israel's own neighbors actually sacrificed their children to the god Molech (Leviticus 20:2-5).

Other neighboring religions used supernatural means, such as contacting the spirit world, to foretell the future and gain guidance. Because of these wicked practices, God would drive out the pagan nations (Deuteronomy 18:12). The Israelites were to replace their evil practices with the worship of the one true God.

The Israelites were naturally curious about the occult practices of the Canaanite religions. But Satan is behind the occult, and God flatly forbade Israel to have anything to do with it. Today people are still fascinated by horoscopes, fortune telling, witchcraft, and bizarre cults.

Often their interest comes from a desire to know and control the future. But Satan is no less dangerous today than he was in Moses' time. In the Bible, God tells us all we need to know about what is going to happen. The information Satan offers is likely to be distorted or completely false.

With the trustworthy guidance of the Holy Spirit through the Bible and the church, we don't need to turn to occult sources for faulty information.

1 Samuel 15:23

For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath also rejected thee from being king.

This is the first of numerous places in the Bible where the theme "to obey is better than sacrifice" is stated (Psalm 40:6-8; Psalm 51:16-17; Proverbs 21:3; Isaiah 1:11-17; Jeremiah 7:21-23; Hosea 6:6; Micah 6:6-8; Matthew 12:7; Mark 12:33; Hebrews 10:8-9).

Was Samuel saying that sacrifice is unimportant? No, he was urging Saul to look at his reasons for making the sacrifice rather than at the sacrifice itself. A sacrifice was a ritual transaction between man and God that physically demonstrated a relationship between them. But if the person's heart was not truly repentant or if he did not truly love God, the sacrifice was a hollow ritual.

Religious ceremonies or rituals are empty unless they are performed with an attitude of love and obedience. "Being religious" (going to church, serving on a committee, giving to charity) is not enough if we do not act out of devotion and obedience to God.

Rebellion and arrogance are serious sins. They involve far more than being independent and strong-minded. Scripture equates them with divination (witchcraft) and idolatry, sins worthy of death (Exodus 22:18; Leviticus 20:6; Deuteronomy 13:12-15; Deuteronomy 18:10; Micah 5:10-14).

Saul became both rebellious and arrogant, so it is little wonder that God finally rejected him and took away his kingdom. Rebellion against God is perhaps the most serious sin of all because as long as a person rebels, he or she closes the door to forgiveness and restoration with God.

1 Chronicles 10:13-14

So Saul died for his transgression which he committed against the Lord, even against the word of the Lord, which he kept not, and also for asking counsel of one that had a familiar spirit, to enquire of it; [14] And enquired not of the Lord: therefore he slew him, and turned the kingdom unto David the son of Jesse.

Saul's unfaithfulness was both active and passive; he not only did wrong, but he also *failed to do right*. He actively disobeyed by attempting murder, ignoring God's instructions, and seeking guidance from a witch. He passively disobeyed by neglecting to ask God for guidance as he ran the kingdom. Obedience, too, is both passive and active. It is not enough just to avoid what is wrong, we need to actively pursue what is right.

In the account in 1 Samuel 28, Saul asked the Lord for guidance but received no answer; this account says he "did not inquire of the LORD."

The answer to this apparent contradiction lies in understanding Saul's motives and the timing of his request to God. His frantic requests came only when he had tried everything his own way. He never went to God unless there was nowhere else to turn.

When he finally asked, God refused to answer. Saul sought God only when it suited him, and God rejected him for his constant stubbornness and rebellion.

Throughout much of Saul's reign, David was forced to hide from him (1 Samuel 19-30). During this time David had opportunities to kill Saul (1 Samuel 24; 1 Samuel 26) and to assume the throne that God had promised him (1 Samuel 16:1-13).

But David trusted in God's promise that he would be king in God's good timing. It was not up to David to decide when Saul's reign would end.

During this battle, God ended Saul's reign just as he had promised.

2 Chronicles 33:6

And he caused his children to pass through the fire in the valley of the son of Hinnom: also he observed times, and used enchantments, and used witchcraft, and dealt with a familiar spirit, and with wizards: he wrought much evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke him to anger.

Sorcery is using power gained from evil spirits. Divination is predicting the future through omens.

Acts 8:9-11

But there was a certain man, called Simon, which before time in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one: [10] To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God. [11] And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries.

In the days of the early church, sorcerers and magicians were numerous and influential. They worked wonders, performed healings, and exorcisms, and practiced astrology. Their wonders may simply have been magic tricks, or the sorcerers may have been empowered by Satan (Matthew 24:24; 2 Thessalonians 2:9). Simon had done so many wonders that some even thought that he was the Messiah; but his powers did not come from God (see Acts 8:18-24).

Acts 16:16-19

And it came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying: [17] The same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, these men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation. [18] And this did she many days. But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour.

And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and drew them into the marketplace unto the rulers,

This girl's fortune-telling ability came from evil spirits. Fortune telling was a common practice in Greek and Roman culture. There were many superstitious methods by which people thought they could foretell future events, from interpreting

omens in nature to communicating with the spirits of the dead. This young slave girl had an evil spirit, and she made her master rich by interpreting signs and telling people their fortunes. The master was exploiting her unfortunate condition for personal gain.

What the slave girl said was true, although the source of her knowledge was a demon. Why did a demon announce the truth about Paul, and why did this annoy Paul? If Paul accepted the demon's words, he would appear to be linking the gospel with demon-related activities. This would damage his message about Christ. Truth and evil do not mix.



Chapter 13

A Stronghold of legalism

Galatians 3:1-5

O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?

The Galatian believers had become fascinated by the false teachers' arguments, almost as though they had been bewitched. Magic was common in Paul's day (Acts 8:9-11; Acts 13:6-7). Magicians used both optical illusions and Satan's power to perform miracles, and people were drawn into the magician's mysterious rites without recognizing their dangerous source.

This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?

The believers in Galatia, some of whom may have been in Jerusalem at Pentecost and received the Holy Spirit there, knew that they hadn't received God's Spirit by obeying the Jewish laws.

Paul stressed that just as they began their Christian lives in the power of the Spirit, so they should grow by the Spirit's power. The Galatians had taken a step backward when they had decided to insist on keeping the Jewish laws. We must realize that we grow spiritually because of God's work in us by his Spirit, not by following special rules.

Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh? Have ye suffered so many things in vain? if it is yet in vain. He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?

The Galatians knew that they had received the Holy Spirit when they believed, not when they obeyed the law. People still feel insecure in their faith, because faith alone seems too easy. People still try to get closer to God by following rules. While certain disciplines (Bible study, prayer) and service may help us grow, they must not take the place of the Holy Spirit in us or become ends in themselves. By asking these questions, Paul hoped to get the Galatians to focus again on Christ as the foundation of their faith.

The Holy Spirit gives Christians the great power to live for God. Some Christians want more than this. They want to live in a state of perpetual excitement. The tedium of everyday living leads them to conclude that something is wrong spiritually. Often the Holy Spirit's greatest work is teaching us to persist, to keep on doing what is right even when it no longer seems interesting or exciting. The Galatians quickly turned from Paul's Good News to the teachings of the newest teachers in town; what they needed was the Holy Spirit's gift of persistence. If the Christian life seems ordinary, you may need the Spirit to stir you up. Every day offers a challenge to live for Christ.

Throughout this study, we have seen many strongholds that hinder and deny the powerful presence of our God.

By using God's word, you can cast down every strong. It is all the plan God has for you to live an overcoming life.



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