

I. Introduction

- A. The more I have studied and thought about and prayed about today's topic, the more convinced I am that it is one of the most clarifying truths I have ever studied in the Bible... and also one of the most life-giving.
- B. We are into our fall series of messages. The series is called the Christian in Complete Armor.
- C. Today is part three in the series. And today, I invite you to meditate with me on the topic:
 - 1. **Casting Down Strongholds**
- D. You are here today by your choice and by God's purposes. I've been praying for you today. I am praying for a breakthrough. I am praying that today will be one of those milestones in your life that you remember for a long time to come. That my talk today will plant seeds of truth that will set you free.
- E. Here is our main Bible verse:
 - 1. *"For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, 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 10:4-5)

II. Baby Steps

- A. There's a great theological movie you might have seen, called *What About Bob?*
- B. Bill Murray plays a lovable, totally obsessive guy named Bob. Yes, I'm going there. There's a great scene where Bob has to walk down a hallway from his therapist's office... he's got his pet fish with him.
- C. Bob is so full of anxieties and phobias, he can barely function. Just to take this walk is an epic challenge. So he has to talk himself into it. You might remember what he keeps saying to get through it: "Baby steps." Baby steps down the hallway. Baby steps into the elevator...
- D. Baby steps.
- E. To go from the ridiculous to the sublime, C.S. Lewis penned a classic book on spiritual warfare. It's called *The Screwtape Letters*. A junior demon writes a series of reports to a senior demon and hears back from the senior demon. The reports concern the junior demon's subject — the man he is supposed to influence away from God, from truth, from Jesus Christ, from salvation, and from an abundant life.
- F. The senior demon keeps giving the same advice. He tells the junior demon above all else, don't draw attention to yourself. Whatever you do, do it incrementally. Do it with subtlety. Do it with craft.
 - 1. **"Indeed the safest road to Hell is the gradual one—the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts."** (C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*)
- G. You can say that the devil's plan to consume this man's life is to drag him away from God by baby steps.
- H. This is what makes Satan so hard to spot, and therefore so hard to resist.
- I. He infiltrates your mind slowly, slowly. Inch by inch. He persuades you to his way of thinking incrementally. Step by step. Imperceptibly. He puts your relationship with God on ice slowly. By degrees. Never drawing attention to himself.
- J. A Christian devolves from a heartfelt child of God to a sincere questioner, to a doubter, to a skeptic, to a de-converter, to an avowed atheist, to an anti-Christian. It's incremental. Baby steps. And as their love of God wanes, their moral code evaporates too.
- K. This is the warfare we are in. These are the wiles of the devil.
- L. Our verse for today speaks of this warfare in terms of "casting down strongholds."

III. Strongholds

- A. We will come back to these strongholds. For now, let me say that strongholds are large, and fortified structures in the human soul.
- B. But how did they get there? How did something so big, so strong, so complex, so interconnected, and so destructive get into a person's soul? Where did the stronghold come from? Where did it start?
- C. It started in Ephesians 4:
 - 1. *"Be angry and do not sin: do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil."* (Ephesians 4:26-27)
- D. That word "place" translates the Greek word *topos*. We get topology and topography from it.
- E. Some translations say foothold. I like the word turf, like gang warfare. Don't give up turf in your soul to the devil.
- F. Don't give a foothold, not even a toehold, in your soul—in your psychological makeup, in your beliefs, instincts, thoughts, or emotions—to the devil.
- G. It is possible for you to give legal jurisdiction to the devil in your heart... Let that sink in.
- H. So here is God's warning... "Neither give a foothold to the devil." Why not?
 - 1. **The devil's strategy is to expand FOOTHOLDS into STRONGHOLDS... and he will do it so slowly you won't even know it's happening.**
- I. And never forget that in Ephesians that foothold started with something as minor as going to bed angry.
- J. You have the same thing in Hebrews where the foothold is a root of bitterness—something as minor as holding onto a grudge, bitterness—that grows into a stronghold that short circuits grace in your life and actually "defiles many" (Hebrews 12:15).
- K. Give the devil an inch and he'll take a mile. Give the devil a toehold, and soon he'll build a stronghold, occupied by illusions, delusions, misconceptions, and self-deceptions, and all of it operated and fueled by evil spirits.
 - 1. And it doesn't start with forsaking God. It ends with forsaking God because it starts with something as small as a foothold.
- L. And if all of that sounds bad, it is.
- M. It is a plague. A spiritual and moral plague. It is the satanic battle plan to steal global dominion by capturing minds, and then hearts, and then lives, and then whole societies. Yes, it's bad.
- N. But...But the burden of our Scripture today is that God is bigger, better, and stronger than anything Satan can do, and the weapons he provides are mighty in God to the casting down of strongholds. His little finger is a wrecking ball to every last one of these

heartbreaking, life-sucking strongholds. With his weapons, you will win back any turf you surrendered. With his weapons you will rout the demons and make the devil flee.

O. That's the good news. And that's the twenty-thousand foot view. Let's get into the details.

IV. Casting Down Strongholds

A. **BATTLEFIELD - A stronghold is a structure of thinking that begins to dominate your mind.**

1. The mind is the battlefield. This is where the war is fought. It is the very real inner world of your mind, your heart, your psychology, and your soul.
2. Sp Satan works overtime to raise up strongholds across the battlefield of your mind.
 - a) *"This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic."* (James 3:15)
 - b) *"Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons,"* (1 Timothy 4:1)
 - c) *"But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ."* (2 Corinthians 11:3)
3. The battlefield is the mind.
4. Whose truth will you believe? Whose truth will you base your life on? Whose truth will be the core of your decisions? Whose truth will you find at the center of your relationship and dating and marriage and parenting?
5. Because if your core truth is not God's truth then it does not descend from above, and is earthly, sensual, and demonic.
 - a) Don't blame me, I'm just the messenger.
6. Every day is a battle over ideas.
 - a) Truth vs lies, Reality vs unreality, Good vs evil, Doctrines of God vs doctrines of demons, Right vs wrong, Christ vs other gods, Christ vs no god, Christ vs the prevailing mood of the culture, The Bible vs the philosophies of this age.
 - (1) *"Beware lest anyone take you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ."* (Colossians 2:8)
7. Your mind is a battlefield, and the devil wants to take you mentally captive, and by the way, he cheats.
 - a) But wait there's more.

B. **MATRIX: A stronghold is hardened and enlarged when error connects with error and half-truths to form interlocking systems of self-reinforcing lies.**

1. The devil's lies don't just float around in your brain as disconnected bad ideas. Instead, in your mind, the devil's lies actually come together. They actually form bigger lies.
 - a) *"But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction."* (2 Peter 2:1)
2. Destructive heresies. A system of teaching with enough truth to be attractive and enough untruth to be destructive.
3. Demonic error connects to demonic error which sucks in more demonic error to form a network of interlocking, self-reinforcing lies. They assemble a matrix. They assemble The Matrix.
4. They assemble entire systems, and philosophies, and structures. They pull together thoughts, ideas, arguments, truth-claims, instincts, emotions, opinions... all these things get locked together like Legos on steroids.
 - a) They write books this way. They teach university courses this way. They develop complicated philosophies this way. They seduce impressionable minds this way. They go after opponents who don't swallow the pill this way.
5. And once the pieces of falsehood are locked together these are Strongholds. Worldview. All contaminated by the devil's spit.
 - a) Every stronghold is a matrix of error that occupies space in your soul, influences your choices, damages your emotions, and enlarges the turf of the devil.
6. And all across the battlefield that is your mind, the devil is seeking to raise up these strongholds... hopefully without you noticing. I haven't given a definition of a stronghold yet, so let's do that next.

C. **DEFINITION - A stronghold is a mindset of defeat that causes me to accept as unchangeable a state of affairs that is contrary to the gracious promises of God.**

1. It is an influential structure within person's philosophy of life. It is your perception of the world as influenced by the dark side... Let me break this one down.
 - a) *A mindset of defeat...* means that the devil has you convinced that the victories, the dreams, the prayers, the ideals that you hope for your life are out of reach. You are a loser. You are a victim.
 - b) This mindset of defeat causes you to *accept something as unchangeable...* This unchangeable quality is a dead giveaway. The devil wants you to believe that you are damaged goods and you will always be this way. It's unchangeable. Your damage is too deep, too big, too strong, too severe to ever find healing.
 - c) A stronghold is a mindset of defeat that causes me to accept as unchangeable *a state of affairs that is contrary to the gracious promises of God...* So you see other people walking with God and enjoy his blessings, and you think, *That's not for me.* You hear of other people having their prayers answered and you think, *That's not for me.* You see other people find love and you think, *That's not for me.* I want you to know that the voice of defeat, the voice of unchangeability, the voice that you are severed from the grace of God... that is not the voice of God or of Scripture. It is the voice of evil, whispering from the citadel of a stronghold into the river of ideas flowing through your mind. That voice is an infection, and the Word of God can make it clean.
2. You've got to believe that all God's gracious promises are for you. I want you to walk out of here with permission to say that and believe it. I want you to be able to say:
 - a) **All the gracious promises of God are for ME.**
 - (1) God's promise of an abundant life is for you. (John 10:10)

- (2) God's promise of forgiveness is for you. (Ephesians 1:7)
- (3) God's promise of peace that passes understanding is for me (John 10:27, Philippians 4:7)
- (4) God's promise of joy unspeakable is for me. (1 Peter 1:8).
- (5) God's promise that no weapon formed against you shall prosper is for you. (Isaiah 54:17)
- (6) God's promise to work all things together for your good is for you. (Romans 8:28)
- (7) God's promise to supply all your need is for you. (Philippians 4:19)
- (8) God's promise to grant the desires of your heart is for you. (Psalm 37:4)
- (9) God's promise to deliver from bondage and addiction and despair is for you. (Titus 2:14)
- (10) God's promise that he is for you is for you. (Romans 8:31)
- (11) God's promise that no one can stand against you is for you. (Romans 8:31)
- (12) God's promise of mercy is for you. (Hebrews 8:12)
- (13) God's promise of grace is for you. (2 Corinthians 9:8)
- (14) God's promise of hope is for you. (1 Peter 1:3)
- (15) God's promise of love is for you. (Jeremiah 31:3)
- (16) All the gracious promises of God are for you. (2 Corinthians 1:20)

(a) *"For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us."* (2 Corinthians 1:20)

3. They are yours because they are Christ's and you are in Christ. So they are as much yours as they are Christ's... you've got to believe. And any voice that tells you otherwise is a liar. A stronghold is a mindset of defeat that causes me to accept as unchangeable a state of affairs that is contrary to the gracious promises of God.
4. But the truth is ALL THE GRACIOUS PROMISES OF GOD ARE FOR ME.
5. You need to be able to out-lawyer the devil, and when you keep on doing that, his strongholds will crumble to dust.

D. FALSE NORMAL - A stronghold is a satanic trick to create a false normal in your life.

1. I want to call out some strongholds right now. I'm not doing this to judge you or condemn you. That's not my heart for anybody.
2. I'm doing this out of compassion. I'm doing this because you may have strongholds so deep and strong they feel normal to you, and you need somebody to say that's not normal. That's not the normal Christian life. That's not God's plan for you. Wake up and take hold of the weapons of your warfare.
3. See if you can find yourself in this verse:
 - a) *"who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. But you have not so learned Christ,"* (Ephesians 4:19-20)
4. He's talking about Christians living like non-Christians... and look at three phrases that describe three strongholds.
5. "Who, being past feeling."

a) The Stronghold of Apathy

- (1) This is the stronghold where it's hard for you to care anymore, especially about God, the Bible, the church, or your Christianity.
- (2) The Stronghold of Apathy has glommed onto American Christianity in a very big way. Especially since Covid. It was a sifting, and we can see so many Christians took the exit ramp and never got back on with God.
- (3) Both Jesus and the prophets called out this stronghold.
 - (a) *For the hearts of this people have grown dull.
Their ears are hard of hearing,
And their eyes they have closed,
Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears,
Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn,
So that I should heal them.* (Matthew 13:15, quoting Isaiah 6:10)
 - (b) *"Everyone is dull-hearted, without knowledge..."* (Jeremiah 10:14)
- (4) This is the stronghold of dullness, the stronghold of apathy, the stronghold of being lukewarm about God.
- (5) Welcome to the church in America today. Most self-professing Christians have lost their grip on the almighty God and his invincible truth...
- (6) But I'm hoping and I'm praying that the Stronghold of Apathy is beginning to tumble down.
- (7) "I don't care" Is simply not the normal Christian life.
- (8) If you find yourself an inch away from checking out on God, that dullness, that apathy, that boredom is a siren song from the dark side. Better wake up and fan the flame of your first love.
 - (a) have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness

b) The Stronghold of Adultery

- (1) This is the stronghold where sexuality is so broken that sex has become an exercise in looking for love in all the wrong places.
 - (a) God made male and female in his own image (Gen 1:27). He called them father and mother (Gen 2:24). There's the institution of marriage and the institution of family.
 - (b) He said a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and they shall become one flesh (Gen 2:24). There's the institution of new families.
 - (c) And there's the institution of a sexual relationship within marriage, between a husband and wife, male and female, who become father and mother.

- (2) So, in the divine plan, you have a male, a female, in a marriage, which makes the only wholesome environment for sex, because it is the best possible environment for a growing deepening love over decades which produces the best possible environment for raising healthy children.
 - (a) There are about a hundred ways and far more than fifty shades of deviancies to violate the divine plan, and all of them can be called by the name adultery.
 - (b) So one of the Bible's Big Ten Commandments says "You shall not commit adultery" (Exodus 20:14).
 - i) Have you ever seen flies swarming to rotten meat?
 - ii) Did you know that the Devil is the Lord of the Flies? That's one of his names in the Bible (Matt 12:24).
 - iii) Because he swarms to wounds like flies to rotten meat.
 - iv) And the festering wounds of a broken heart make easy prey for the devil.
- (3) So here, when the Scriptures speak of people who have given themselves over — literally betrayed themselves — to lewdness to work all uncleanness, it is talking about one of the many variations of adultery.
- (4) The commands against sexual sin is not God yelling at you. It's the Father cautioning you, warning you, beckoning you out of spiritual danger.
- (5) Adultery is a stronghold. Pornography is a stronghold. Being trapped sexually is a stronghold. Sexual brokenness is a stronghold. Deviation from God's plan is a stronghold.
- (6) Demon strongholds try to make this feel normal, but it's a false normal. It will never be normal for a child of God.
- (7) Because God loves you and wants better for you.
- (8) But the whisper of Satan is so strong, and the stronghold is so pervasive, that this one is tearing our country apart right now. There's one more stronghold (maybe) I want to mention today. With greediness.

c) The Stronghold of A Frantic Search for Happiness

- (1) This is greediness. It is a relentless search for more. More money. More power. More intensity because nothing works any more. More drugs, sex, rock and roll, More money, sex, power.
 - (a) Got that, what's next? Got that, what's next? Got that, now what's next?
- (2) The Stronghold of Greed boils down to a frantic search for happiness.
- (3) I don't think there's a better description than the old prophet Haggai:
 - (a) *You have sown much, and bring in little; You eat, but do not have enough; You drink, but you are not filled with drink; You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm; And he who earns wages, Earns wages to put into a bag with holes. Thus says the LORD of hosts: Consider your ways! (Haggai 1:6-7)*
- (4) Greed happens, the frantic search for happiness happens, not as a sign of ambition, but as a sign of emotional lostness. It's a sign of fear.
- (5) This is a person who has set aside the God-blessed life in favor of the Self-blessed life.
 - (a) You're so afraid that God will let you down, you don't really trust him.
 - (b) So you work and strive and connive and wear yourself out to bless yourself, because God won't do it.
- (6) The truth is Only Jesus Christ can satisfy your soul.
- d) There are strongholds of fear, strongholds of arrogance, strongholds of occult bondage, strongholds of guilt, of religion, of atheism and on and on.
- e) And to whatever degree we think they're normal, we've been captivated by the dark side.

E. OBJECTIVE - Strongholds are engineered by Satan to steal your dominion distort your freedom, and make you disobedient to Christ.

1. When you disobey God again and again and again in the same area of sin, look for a stronghold. Chronic disobedience, chronic moral failure, a chronic bad attitude, chronic disappointment with God... all of this is a flashing neon sign pointing to a stronghold in your heart. You've been taken captive.
2. Your soul is made of mind, will, and emotions. This is your psyche, your identity, your psychology.
3. The devil infiltrates your mind and your emotions second, to take your will captive.
4. That way the choices you make that supposed to be free will, and are supposed to be by products of your God-given sovereignty — the choices you make instead have been "taken captive to do the devil's will."
5. I'm not making it up. It happens.
 - a) *"and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will." (2 Timothy 2:26)*
6. Now, think about free will and personal dominion.
 - a) If a person has lost their senses, are they free? If a person is in the snare of the devil, are they free? If a person has been taken captive by Satan, are they free? If a person is doing the will of Lucifer, are they free?
7. No, no, no, and no... This person has been lured into a trap. They've been hypnotized. Anesthetized. And lulled to sleep by a diabolical lullaby from the Father of lies.
8. And this is why strongholds have to be cast down. Not modified or compromised with or slightly adjusted.
9. We are talking about the casting down of strongholds. It is the only way to break free.
10. This is me preaching so that you may come to your senses and escape the snare of the devil.
11. Now, how to do that? How to cast down the stronghold? How to take every thought captive to Christ?
12. That will have to wait till next time.
13. But for now, it's enough to search your heart, and to ask God to reveal, to name, and to call out the footholds and the strongholds that are making you sad... and begin to pray, and begin to remind yourself that NOTHING in your heart is unchangeable with God.