

This Means War – Part 3

In this message we'll look at strongholds, the enemy's access points that can compromise God's power and purposes in our lives. We're also going to cover how these access points are established and how they can be dismantled.

If I have inside of me the fullness of the power of Jesus Christ that raised him from death, it's not an issue of needing more power. A lot of times in the church of Jesus Christ we think we need more power.

But in salvation, in our union with Christ we have the power that raised Christ from death. That's a pretty significant starting point. **So it's not an issue of needing more power; it's an issue of why that power is not being released in my life.**

How can I see that power released in an increased measure to live triumphantly in Christ? The answer to how to live triumphantly in Christ is to understand what strongholds are.

Salvation does not end our capacity to sin. Sin does not stop at salvation. It continues on, and we're in for a life of contending against sin. Paul highlights this in

Romans 7:18-25:

I want to do what is right, but I can't. I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway. But if I do what I don't want to do, I am not really the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me that does it.

I have discovered this principle of life—that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong. I love God's law with all my heart. But there is another power within me that is at war with my mind. [And that's a key phrase there. It's "at war with my mind."]

Fundamentally it's in our relationship with Jesus Christ at salvation that we're released from this bondage of sin and death, **but the problem is that, even once we become a believer, we will still battle with this bondage of sin and death.**

What we're going to learn in this message we're going to be able to get victory over some of those besetting sins, areas, and issues that are in our lives.

And so if in faith, Jesus sets us free, why do sincere believers who love God and have a passion for God still struggle in these areas of lustful thoughts, pride, depression, fear, anger, or any other ungodly attitudes and behaviors?

Understanding strongholds

In my experience through decades of ministry, I know sincere believers can be held captive to sin in ways that are not instantly resolved at salvation.

Now remember our one world has two realms: the natural realm and the spiritual realm. We're going to be talking about that spiritual realm in this session as described in **2 Corinthians 10:3-5.** **The New King James Version says:**

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. 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.

The New American Standard Bible says virtually the same thing, but instead of using the word **strongholds** it uses the term **fortresses.**

Now, what we want to do is identify and ask ourselves, what is a stronghold?

When Paul wrote this, the concept of a stronghold was not novel to the people of that day. Virtually any city or large town would have a fortress wall surrounding the town. Some of these walls would be up to fifteen, eighteen, or twenty feet in width. They literally could have chariots running on them. People sometimes lived in these walls.

A stronghold in the times of the apostle Paul was a base of operations where people lived.

Paul is saying that there are spiritual strongholds, and these strongholds need to be torn down. In 2 Corinthians 10:3-5, Paul describes a spiritual stronghold as being attitudes, knowledge, philosophies, teachings, and mindsets that oppose the knowledge of God.

Paul is saying any mindset, thinking, attitude, and philosophy that raises itself up and opposes the truth of God is a stronghold.

This is important for us to understand because what we believe eventually forms our values and becomes how we live. Paul is talking about mindsets that oppose the truth of God.

One reason Paul says in **Romans 12:2** that we're not to be conformed to this world but we're to be transformed by the renewing of our mind is that this is how we attack and destroy strongholds.

It's easy for us from western civilization to separate life from knowledge.

We think, well, we're just going to get some information. Paul says no, we're going to have a **mindset** that's going to change how we live.

In the Middle Eastern mindset you did not separate what we know from what we live. The Hebrew language is an example of this. One Hebrew word can be translated as both teach and learn. Why is that? **Because if you have not learned, then teaching did not take place.**

So if my life was not changed and affected by what I learned, then I did not learn, and if I did not learn, then teaching did not take place. And so Paul is talking about these mindsets, attitudes, and philosophies that come at us that are opposed to the truth of God.

They're strongholds that need to be torn down. And he says that we have divinely powerful weapons that are able to do that.

Now, I want to make this statement as a reference point: **God's truth is absolute.** God's truth does not shift or change. God does not become more culturally relevant or politically correct. **God's truth is absolute.**

That's why His truth is able to move and transcend from culture to culture, from century to century, from millennia to millennia, over and over again, because God and his truth are absolute. **Paul wants us to know we need to have that reference point, that plumb line of truth.**

This also relates to how we live. **In John 8:31-32 Jesus says: "You are truly my disciples if you keep obeying my teachings."**

In other words, Jesus was not going around the countryside teaching so that his hearers could merely grow in information. **Jesus was teaching in order to affect how people live. If you keep obeying my teachings, then you will know the truth.**

The word translated as *know* is an **experiential knowledge**. It's not an informational knowledge. It's knowledge that I experience.

What is a stronghold? A stronghold is any kind of mindset, value, teaching, or philosophy that opposes and comes against the truth of God.

What we know becomes a belief system, which becomes a value, which becomes a lifestyle.

If our knowledge is not based upon the plumb line of God's truth, it will move us into the bondages that come with Satan's lies.

Let's go a bit farther with this idea of spiritual strongholds by looking at another term Paul uses in **Ephesians 4:26-27**: "**Be angry and do not sin; and do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give *place* to the devil.**"

In the **New American Standard Bible** it says: "**Be angry and yet do not sin; do not the sun go down on your anger, do not give the devil an *opportunity*.**"

Instead of *place*, this version uses the word *opportunity*. In the **New International Version** it says "**In your anger do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you're still angry, and do not give the devil a *foothold*.**"

And so we see the words *place, opportunity, and foothold*. These words are different translations for one **New Testament word topos**. If you research the word **topos**, you find that one fundamental way this word is used is to designate simply a place.

We get the word **topography** from this word. Not only is it used to designate a place, but it's used to designate a **place of jurisdiction**. This word would be used to describe where someone would have a realm or parameters where they would govern, rule, and have responsibility.

And so **by using this term Paul is saying, Don't let the sun settle on your anger, because you'll give the enemy a place of *jurisdiction* to operate and carry out his lie.**

And so the idea of a stronghold, taken together with the idea of topos or place, opportunity, foothold, shows that we can have a mindset, values, philosophies, and knowledge that is raised up against the knowledge of God's truth, with the result that we begin living in a way that gives the enemy a place of jurisdiction in our lives.

Satan is always on an expansion program. He doesn't care how he gets in to the place, he doesn't care what opportunity he's given, he's ***not*** going to be content with what we give him.

When people open their lives to places that Satan can get in, on various levels, no matter how small and simple it might appear, given time it becomes complex and devastating. Lives become confused and mangled in all kinds of devastation, destruction, and ruin because the enemy will not stop once he enters. Paul is saying take this seriously.

Anger is a secondary response or emotion many times, which means there's going to be other things at play that give the enemy that opportunity, whether it's bitterness, un-forgiveness, resentment, or whatever it might be.

Even though as followers of Jesus Christ we belong to God, we can give the enemy a *place* and *jurisdiction* through unrepentance and unconfessed sin, no matter what that sin might look like. It might come through the back door by an injustice we suffer. It might be overt sin that we go after.

But no matter how it happens, anything in our lives that's not according to God's truth and design gives the enemy a *place of opportunity*, a *foothold*, to do his business.

When Satan came to Eve in the garden, he used thoughts against her. He asked, "**Has God really said...?**" Satan plants a thought, and that thought grows and develops, and Satan continues to move it forward. Pretty soon there's actual sin that takes place.

It moves from thoughts to decisions, and then from decisions to actions by which you live out your thoughts.

The decision comes from the thought. Pretty soon my actions become a value by which I live my life; it becomes a lifestyle. And when it's in that realm it becomes bondage, because Satan is out to steal, kill, and destroy. He's out to ruin and bring bondage.

That's why in **Luke 4:18** Jesus describes his job description as **setting captives free**, releasing those who are in bondage. We have to address strongholds at the foundational level, which means correcting the lies with truth.

We can illustrate this with the idea of an iceberg, which has eighty or ninety percent of its mass below the water's surface that you cannot see. Ten or twenty percent of the iceberg is above the water.

We see the bondage in our lives and other people's lives. That might be anger, sexual sin, viewing pornography, or self-hatred. We may address the bondage. If I go after the bondage, I'm going to have a tendency to be frustrated in the process, because the issue really is not the bondage. **The issue goes deeper than that.**

To change the illustration again, we have to do more than address the fruit on the tree. It's the root that is feeding that fruit. We must get to the root.

The authority I have in Jesus Christ and the power in me that raised Jesus Christ from death was useless when the enemy has a rightful place to reside.

If someone is harboring bitterness, and they or someone ministering to them tries to exercise authority to get rid of any tormenting activity of the enemy, nothing is going to happen, because the enemy has a right to be there, because we have given him permission/access.

As we were ministering to these people, we would ask questions that would help people identify areas of sin where they were not living according to God's truth.

What if we can just identify and see the lie in it and see how we believe that lie and provide a place for the enemy to have access in my life and I repent of that?

Then I can exercise the authority of Christ by rebuking and resisting the enemy. I then claim how I specifically will walk in the opposite spirit, and the enemy is gone, and soon what used to take months and years in discipleship is transacted in a moment's time.

We will begin to see the process of overcoming persistent, besetting sins and problems move from taking months and years to taking moments and events of spiritual transaction.

People still had to exercise themselves in walking the opposite direction from sin, of course, and then there is breakthrough.

The bondage, the grip the enemy had on people's lives, was broken, from things that would appear as benign as fear to that which would be as strong as sexual addictions that made people want to commit suicide. It's like the playing field was leveled, and now they were able to live in a triumphant way.

You may say, "I received Jesus as my Savior. The Holy Spirit is dwelling inside of me. Are you telling me that the enemy can have influence on my life?" We're saying, yes, he can.

I use this analogy: If I want to drive your car, I don't need to transfer the title into my name. All I need is your keys. If you give me your keys, I'll drive your car anywhere I want to drive. I don't care whose name is on the title.

We belong to God, but as believers we can give the enemy a place of access that hands him the keys, and he'll drive us where he wants to drive us.

You say, **"Well, how do we deal with this then theologically?"** As human beings we are comprised of three parts: body, soul, and spirit. Soul includes our mind, emotions, and will.

1 Thessalonians 5:23 says, "Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely"—comprehensively—"May your whole spirit, soul, and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Hebrews 4:12 says there's a distinction between soul and spirit: **"dividing between soul and spirit."** So we need to ask, Are human beings demonically susceptible?

When we understand that we are three parts—**spirit, soul, and body**—we ask ourselves, Is our spirit susceptible to activity of demonic beings? If I believe I was dead to God before salvation and that I was made alive, then we have to ask, **What was made alive in me?**

The spirit part of man is the God-conscious part of us, the place where I can receive the stimuli that comes from God. **1 Corinthians 2** talks about how we learn as believers: **the Spirit of God communicates to the spirit of man**, and there we learn and understand. When we receive Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior there is a sealing that takes place in our spirit with God's Spirit at that time. **The enemy doesn't have access into our spirit.**

The soul is our self-consciousness. So if the spirit is God-consciousness, the soul is self-consciousness. The soul is our inner being—our mind, emotions, and will. How many of us believe the enemy has access to our mind?

"The fiery darts of the enemy"—that's the way **Ephesians 6** talks about them. How many of us believe the enemy can have access to our emotions, bringing fear, anger, and everything that comes with that?

How many of us believe the enemy has access to our will? In **Acts 5:3** Peter says to Ananias, **"Why have you allowed Satan to fill your heart to lie?"** So I would say the enemy has access to our soul.

Our body is our consciousness of the material world. Does the enemy have access to our physical bodies? Well, we see in the Gospels many times where Jesus went to heal somebody physically. The body suffered from the spiritual activity of the enemy. The young man who had the seizures in **Luke 9:39** met Jesus, and the Lord released that young man from demonic activity and healed the young man. So we know that the enemy can have access to our body.

Therefore when we're talking about believers being influenced by the enemy, I don't believe it's dealing with our spirit, our God-consciousness, but it's with our soul—our mind, emotions, and will—and it's also with our physical body.

I don't want to give the enemy access, **topos, strongholds**, in my soul and how I live and what I do with my body.

There are three different battlefronts that believers need to be alert to. There's the world and the world system. There's our own sinful flesh, the sinful nature. And then there's Satan and his kingdom.

Ephesians 2:1-3 brings together all three battlefronts:
And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience, among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh.

There we see the world system, we see Satan and his kingdom, and we see our sinful nature. It's like a threefold cord.

Another way is through what we could call love-deficit sins. When others withhold love from us, when injustices come our way, we can be hurt, even devastated, and out of that come reactions and responses that are not godly.

Jesus suffered many injustices, but Jesus did not respond in an ungodly way. We need to identify where we have had ungodly responses to injustices and thereby have given the enemy an open door.

The enemy is deceitful. He wants to get our focus on injustices and the pain they cause us, and he wants us to feel justified in an ungodly response of bitterness or hatred or unforgiveness. That ungodly response provides a **topos**, a *place* of **jurisdiction** for the enemy.

More often than not, this is how I see Christians who are devoted to serving God struggle with ongoing strongholds. They fall to the sins that result from a love deficit.

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Let me build a foundation for this. First of all, God has an unbelievable love for you and me. God's love for us is eternal, infinite, and knowing this is fundamental to our living the life of power.

Ephesians 3:19 says, “**Then you would be able to live in the fullness of the life and power of God.**” **In other words, there’s a relationship between our experiencing God’s love and our living in his power.** When we know God’s love, then we’ll be able to do above and beyond anything we could ever imagine or think.

If you’re the enemy, and you know that for a person to live in the fullness of God’s power that person needs to experience God’s love, what is going to be a core area that you’re going to attack?

Satan wants to remove your understanding of how much God loves you. We don’t hear God saying, “I hate you,” “You’re worthless,” “You’ll never amount to anything,” or “You’re an idiot.” **Instead the enemy uses the experiences, relationships, and voices of others to strip from us the truth that I can be loved, that I am loved, and that I’m loveable.**

The enemy then rides in on the coattails of that and begins his work in our lives.

We are working through some of these issues here, at our church. The Lord is showing us some of the strongholds that are keeping our church from going forward.

We are still working at getting a breakthrough spiritually about how much God loves us. We resist that truth. I remember when all of a sudden some breakthrough come. You could feel the difference in people’s perceptions of themselves, their relationships, and the ministry that came out of the church. We’ve seen this same breakthrough happen in several ministries in the last several months.

God is love, and when God created us in his image, one of the fundamental building blocks was that we would experience love, be loved, and be able to love.

The Scriptures are filled with the truth about God’s love for us.

The enemy wants to shred that reality, and he does it through others. Love is sometimes imparted to us through healthy, affectionate touch, so the enemy tries to distort and pervert that into something that is not healthy and affectionate.

Love is imparted to us through quality time together, eye contact, being listened to, doing things together, through words of blessing being spoken over your life, through words affirming how amazing you are. But sometimes what happens instead is we experience deprivation, abuse, and the withholding of affection. **That love deficit does something to us at the very core of who we are.**

To find freedom, we have to identify where injustices have come in. Where have we experienced love deficits, injustices, and sins against us that have put deep within our hearts a sense of self-hatred, insignificance, anger, resentment, or bitterness?

We need to identify that and address it so we can be set free. If I don't truly identify that, grant forgiveness where forgiveness needs to be granted, and ask forgiveness where I need to receive forgiveness, it will continue to grow and move into other ***strongholds***.

It will compromise me and my relationships in increasing ways. I want to address it, and I want to increasingly move in the reality of God's love for me.

Keys to destroying strongholds

What are some of the keys to destroying these strongholds? **First of all, we need to understand that we're fighting a spiritual battle.** **Ephesians 6:12 says, "We don't wrestle against flesh and blood."** But we wrestle with spiritual beings. It is a spiritual battle fundamentally: one world, two realms.

Secondly, I need to exercise repentance, which is a divinely powerful weapon that destroys strongholds. I need to ask forgiveness for those things I'm hanging onto—self-hatred, feelings of insignificance, anger, resentment, and bitterness.

Forgiveness has two directions to it—granting it and receiving it in a horizontal way. In a vertical way I receive it from God. I need to learn and live in generous forgiveness.

This is difficult especially for some who have experienced deep wounds. When we forgive, we're not condoning what was done, or saying that we can suddenly build a wonderful friendship (especially when there were deep violations). Some have suffered sexual violations, so there are boundaries that need to be put in place. **But even so, we need to forgive fully, generously, and then be able to truly desire for the person to be blessed.**

That's what Jesus did when he was hanging on the cross and said, **"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."** He was asking his Father to release them for the responsibility of crucifying him. **Wow. That's the level of forgiveness that Jesus Christ lives in.**

Something deep within us cries out for justice. Scripture says that God's throne is built on justice. But what I must do is what we see Jesus doing when there were injustices against him. **1 Peter 2:23 says that "Jesus entrusted himself to the Father." Romans 12:19 says, "Vengeance is mine, I repay," says the Lord."**

Jesus turned it all over to the Lord.

Your heart should be to see the offender released from the judgment of the sin that was committed against you. When I can do that I've not set the other person free. You know who I set free? I set myself free.

So I grant and ask forgiveness. The **topos** is removed, and then I exercise the authority given to me, and I say, Right now in Jesus' name I command every evil spirit of unforgiveness, resentment, everything that has come against me in anger, I command you in Jesus' name to be gone.

I declare myself free as one who lives out forgiveness, mercy, and grace. Holy Spirit, I ask you to fill me up to live the supernatural life.

As we increasingly remove the strongholds and places where the enemy has jurisdiction out of our lives, we'll see the power and authority of Christ exercised in our lives. We're going to see the life and the ministry of Jesus accomplished in and through us in increased measure beyond anything we could ever imagine or think.

Close.