

Praying Down Strongholds

Spiritual warfare is a reality in the life of anyone who seriously follows Jesus

Every prayer the Christian lifts to God is, in some way and to some degree, a prayer against Satan. If we are to pray effectively--especially as we seek the salvation of loved ones and friends, and as we desire revival and spiritual awakening among the churches--we must recognize that Satan, the devil, is our enemy. Peter writes:

"Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings." [1 Peter 5:8-9]

He is not an enemy to be taken lightly. Though he has been defeated in the shed blood of Jesus Christ on the cross, he is a powerful adversary who, by his trickery and deceit, continues to confuse those whose hearts have not been fully yielded to Christ--who are not yet under the control of God's Holy Spirit.

Spiritual warfare is doing battle with this crafty enemy. If we are to battle effectively, in prayer (which is the only battlefield on which we can defeat him), we need to be aware of how he attracts and controls those who are his.

One of his strategies is the **spiritual stronghold**.

What is a stronghold?

There is much talk today about strongholds in the lives of those who rebel against the claim of God on their lives. But what in fact is a stronghold?

The Greek word is a military word, meaning "fortress." A soldier would define it as an area in which the enemy is entrenched. And that's what it means when we speak of Satan's stronghold in the life of a human being.

Satan becomes entrenched in an area of a person's life where there is a character flaw or an emotional or psychological predisposition to selfish, "me first" attitude and behavior. Though we are speaking of spiritual conflict, Satan's strongholds often capitalize on physical needs or weaknesses. Physical appetites--for food, sex, or any physical gratification--when not yielded to God, open a door for Satan to build a stronghold.

Other strongholds may be purely emotional or psychological. Much of modern psychology seeks to deal with "codependency,"--a condition in which two people are drawn together in an attempt to meet their individual needs, only to discover that together they find greater weakness, not strength.

Whether physical, emotional, psychological, or spiritual in origin, strongholds are best defined as areas of bondage to Satan, in which he, the enemy has free rein to strengthen and extend his control over the individual under his domination.

How to identify strongholds -- in yourself and in others

Satan uses many human weaknesses, emotions, and tendencies to establish strongholds. The praying, discerning Christian can easily detect most strongholds in the lives of others.

What are the signs?

Compulsions, obsessions, fears, lusts, jealousies, violent tempers, uncontrolled appetites of all kinds--these are often signs of a stronghold that is either being built or is firmly established in a life. In most cases, the individual will recognize that something is out of control, but he or she will almost always say "I've tried to control that, but I can't seem to get on top of it." Most often, that admission comes at the point when the individual recognizes that the stronghold is about to destroy some treasured part of life--the marriage, the family, the career, the reputation.

Strongholds can be powerful in the life of the Christian as well as the unbeliever. For the Christian, the presence of a stronghold can have severe consequences--drifting away from fellowship with God, loss of Christian influence, deep self-doubts and self-loathing are not unusual. For the unbeliever, of course, the stronghold is Satan's weapon for blocking the voice of the Holy Spirit Who seeks to draw the sinner to repentance and to saving faith in Christ.

Tearing down strongholds

Paul writes to the Corinthians:

"The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ." [2 Corinthians 10:4-5]

Paul further encourages the Ephesians [Eph. 6:10-18] to put on the armor of God in the waging of the battle. The armor of God provides the Christian with the characteristics of Christ Himself--truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, faith, salvation, and the power of the Word of God.

And how are these weapons to be brought into action for the purpose of demolishing strongholds in our lives and in the lives of those we love?

"...pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests...be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints." [Eph. 6:18]

Paul's instruction clearly applies to the use of the Word--the *rhema*, the word spoken, not merely the *logos*, the word understood. And his exhortation for prayer is for the kind of fervent, endless, purposeful prayer that he urged for every church and every believer under his spiritual authority.

That is because prayer is the battlefield. Prayer is the warfare. Prayer is the engagement, the assault on the stronghold we seek to bring down.

Ask the Spirit to Guide You

If you are in bondage to a satanic stronghold, or if you sense that danger in the life of a friend or loved one, ask the Holy Spirit to guide you as you:

1. Identify the stronghold--what is it, and what is its effect?
2. Claim the truth of 1 John 4:4: "...the one (the Spirit of Christ) who is in you is greater than the one (Satan) who is in the world..."
3. Accept your responsibility as a soldier of the King to put on the armor every day and engage the enemy in the battlefield of prayer.
4. Standing on the Word of God, and claiming the power of the risen Lord, through His blood shed on the cross for the defeat of Satan and his angels, pray until the stronghold is destroyed.
5. Enlist other prayer warriors to join you; share the details of the stronghold so that all prayers will be specific, direct and fearless.
6. Trust that God will respond as He has promised, and that the defeat of the enemy is certain through the victory already achieved by the Savior on Calvary.
7. Rejoice in the victory, even as you begin praying. God will honor your *trust*, just as He will honor your diligence and perseverance.

Never underestimate the influence and capabilities of Satan, but never fear him, either. He is a defeated enemy. He has no power to stand against the prayer of faith. The victory is won!