

Session 5 Increasing in the Knowledge of God

INTRODUCTION

Colossians 1:9-10. If you were a betting person and you knew Paul is going to pray for the church of Colossae, how is he going to pray for them? In the same way. Again, it's a lot bigger context.

“For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God” (Col. 1:9-10)

Another version says, “Being fruitful in every work by increasing in the knowledge of God.” Whether the knowledge of God is the way that we're fruitful, or whether he's praying that they would increase in the knowledge of God, to me it all comes down to the same thing: Paul focuses on them increasing in the knowledge of God. That's his intercessory prayer.

STRENGTHENED WITH DIVINE MIGHT BY INCREASING IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

The next phrase, verse 11, is the way that they're strengthened with divine might. It sounds like Ephesians 3:16 again. It's increasing in the knowledge of God. This is a very similar prayer to the two prayers in Ephesians. You want to pray for the Church in intercession, and for your own life that you would increase in the knowledge of God. That's the way you're strengthened with divine might.

“... That your hearts might be encouraged, being knit together in love, attaining to all the riches of the full assurance of understanding and attaining to the knowledge of the mystery of God” (Col. 2:2, paraphrased). The New King James adds the phrase, “both of the Father and of Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:2-3, NKJV).

Paul is telling them that his purpose in ministering to them is that they would attain to the full assurance of understanding and to the knowledge of the mystery of God. Paul is focused on them attaining to the richness, the riches, the treasure of the knowledge of the mystery of who God is and what God's plan is.

GOD INTENTIONALLY HIDES THE TREASURE OF HIS SON

The mystery of God isn't just the mysterious plan of God, but also the very being of God Himself. Paul wants them to attain to the treasure of the knowledge of the mystery of who God is, because, as he says in the last verse, in Jesus is hidden all the treasure of divine wisdom and knowledge. The treasure is hidden in a person. His name is Jesus.

I did a word study once. I would encourage you to do this word study on the word *hidden*. There are many times in the Bible where God purposely hides the treasure of His Son. The treasure is Jesus. There are many sub-departments of that treasure, but the treasure is the person of Jesus, His splendor, His beauty, and His majesty, but God hides it deliberately, strategically, purposefully. It isn't an accident that God hides it. I call Him “the hiding God.” He's always hiding Himself all the time.

IT'S THE GLORY OF GOD TO HIDE, BUT THE GLORY OF A KING TO SEARCH IT OUT

There are a number of reasons why God hides Himself. We spoke of one yesterday: that God wants to give on the basis of hunger. The glory of God is to hide a matter—to conceal a matter; but the glory of a king is to search it out (Prov. 25:2). It's God's glory to hide something, and it's the glory of a kingly spirit to search, to turn over every stone until you find it. God says it's a kingly spirit that searches for the things that God hides. So there's something about the kingly spirit that's drawn to maturity, drawn into fullness as we go on the search.

It's the glory of a king to search it out. That's a powerful statement. The Lord says to us, "I put a kingly spirit on you. I made you priests and kings. I put a noble spirit on you. That's called a spirit of nobility. I put a noble spirit on My bride, and that noble spirit is drawn to its fullness as she goes on this search that costs her everything."

JESUS BRINGS MYSTERY TO THIS DIVINE ROMANCE

We're changed in the search. We're not just changed in the discovery of the treasure; we're changed in the actual searching of the treasure as well as in the discovery. The Lord knows that. There's something much more powerful than I can get my mind around in this area of mystery and hiddenness. It's related to the divine romance. There's something about the romance of Jesus to His bride: He keeps mystery in the relationship. There are new discoveries; there are new prizes. There's a new price to pay, a new cost which in itself enlarges love. The paying of a price somewhere creates a history in our walk with God. We have a history of being costly in our love, and it actually establishes our love in a greater way. When two people go through something that costs them a lot together, the very history they have together that costs them something makes their love richer.

When you go through a real, difficult, costly thing, whether it's a project that cost you so much to do and you took years to do it; whether it's two brothers, a man and a woman, or two sisters, it doesn't matter what the relationship is—when two human beings do something together for two or three years that's very sacrificial, they are bonded in their love in a far greater way by going on the journey. When two people endure a great hardship together, they are bonded by the experience.

The Lord in His romance of His Church hides Himself so that we go on a journey with Him, and there's actual costliness. There's something that costs us something. We "shed blood," so to speak. We leave something, or there's a deposit of our life in the journey, and our love is enriched and strengthened in the very searching of the mystery.

JESUS DELIGHTS TO SURPRISE HIS CHILDREN

The Lord loves divine surprises. He loves to enthrall us with surprises along the way. Here we are, and suddenly, when there's a new discovery of God, we say, "O God, I love You!"

He loves that. He says, "I have an eternity of these things to give you." The treasure of God will go on and on and on. Maybe He could give it all to us at one time, but He doesn't.

I know I'm not exhausting this subject. I know I just barely understand it, but I know there's something about the withholding and the longing and the searching and the price that we pay that's a part of the growth of love. He hides things in mystery all the time.

I'm staying at Wes and Stacy's house. I've been there a couple of times. Their daughter isn't involved in this yet, but I can see that she will be before long. She has the same spirit. Their four little sons, these four little warriors, always get presents from me whenever I see them. They can't wait to see me. It's purely about them getting something. They pretend like they like me. I always buy the biggest chocolate bars I can buy. I get those two-pound bars that you buy when you're going to make 1,000 cookies for some big banquet. I buy those for these warrior sons.

Of course, it scandalizes Stacy. She says, "Oh no, Bickle is in town! My kids are going to be climbing the walls with chocolate!" I give them another little something-or-other that just blows their little minds. I love to do it. I have so much fun in it. I buy their chocolate and they go crazy. Of course they eat the whole thing.

Yesterday I bought them thick chocolate bars and a big bag each of Snickers chocolate bars. I gave it to them, and one of the little guys ate all of it last night. I said, "No, no, no, you have to save this over a week or something."

Stacy gives me that look that only a mother can give. When I came with the chocolate, they were all at the dinner table. They left the dinner table, ran, grabbed and tackled me, and devoured the chocolate. Of course they opened the candy bars under the table and stuffed them in their mouths, and when Stacy turned around she caught them, because it was all over their lips. She looked at me as though I was responsible for this! I'm innocent!

Then today, it's like, "Now what?" I'll give them money. Maybe I'll give them each a twenty-dollar bill. I love to do that. I give them each a twenty-dollar bill and they go crazy. They said, "Do you have anything else?"

I say, "Yeah, I'll give it to you on Thursday."

This was yesterday, and they said, "Thursday? It's Tuesday; we can't wait until Thursday!"

I said, "And I want you to know that I have it right now."

They said, "Give it to us now!"

One of them said, "I won't be here on Thursday!"

I said, "Good, you'll have to wait until Friday."

He said, "I can't, I can't! Do you have it now?"

I said, "Yep, and I could give it to you now, but I'm not giving it to you until Thursday."

They were tantalized. They were in agony over this. I'm scarring their hearts. They said, "Why are we waiting until Thursday?"

I said, "Because this is what God does to me all the time and it makes me love Him more. I die with longing until Thursday. Because God does it to me, I'm going to do it to you."

They're dying with longing right now. Stacy said they were asking, "When is he coming over? When is he coming over? We know he has candy!"

I like to do that to people. I hate it being done to me, but I love to do it. I look to the Lord: "Are You doing some of this to me?"

He says, "Oh, but it enlarges your heart, and I really enjoy what happens in you in the wait, in the search, and in the receiving, the discovery of what I have for you."

The waiting for it, the searching after it, the receiving and the discovery of it, all of them impact us in a powerful way. All of that is contained in the idea of the knowledge of the mystery that's hidden like a treasure and progressively given to us strategically by God according to our hunger. It drives us crazy. As St. Teresa of Avila said, it makes us "mad with love." It makes us mad with love. That's what the Lord is doing in this thing called "the knowledge of God."

There are so many bigger things in His heart than what I just told you in the subject of the knowledge of the mystery of God that's hidden like a treasure. The treasure is the person of Jesus. That's Colossians 2:2-3. I love to do it to people, and I hate to have it done to me. It really does bond your heart. They said, "You're their favorite human being in the earth, because you always come with this mystery of good stuff, and it just kills them."

I said, "That's why I do it." When all you guys are old and grey and ready to retire, I'm going to have successfully bought off the whole next generation, because I do this everywhere I go with kids. I always give them candy and money. I do it with the host family in almost every city I visit—I give them candy and money. The moms go crazy, the kids are dying until I get there. I'll be the only man secure in the next generation because I invested in this one when they were all under ten.

"YOUR LIFE IS HIDDEN WITH CHRIST IN GOD"

Colossians 3. Again, the reason I do it is because God does it to me and I want to do it to someone. Kids are the only ones who let me do it to them.

Since we're talking of hidden, look at verse 3. Your whole life is hidden with Christ (Col. 3:3). There are a number of things that verse means. It means God is hiding from you what He's doing in you in the specifics. We know in the general sense. He's transforming our character, but He's hiding the unfolding of the plan. That's the number one thing He's hiding.

THE LORD WILL PROGRESSIVELY UNVEIL THE BEAUTY OF YOUR LIFE

Another thing He hides from you is the full beauty of your life. Your life is so much more beautiful to God than you can even see. You'll see it all in the end, and He progressively unveils it to you now. The beauty of your

life is hidden. The wisdom of the strategy of how He's leading you is hidden. Even your rewards, the value of your life on earth, is hidden from you. You can only see it inasmuch as you fill your mind with the Word of God. Did you know that every cup of cold water you have given in the name of the Lord is going to be rewarded (Mt. 10:42)? That's hidden from our natural understanding, and we can only see those things through filling our mind with the Word of God. That's what verse 16 says: "Letting the Word of God fill you richly" (Col. 3:16, paraphrased). I want to see more clearly where my life is going, I want to see more clearly the beauty of my life, and I want to see more clearly the rewards of my life.

The Lord says, "Fill your mind with the Word of God, and the hidden things become clearer." Most people in Christ think their life is a failure. They think their life is wasted, and they think their life is ugly. The truth is that their life is successful. Your life has rewards from this age that will shock you in the age to come. Your life is hidden. The unfolding of it, the beauty of it, the reward of it, the meaning of it is hidden from us unless the Word of God touches our mind and enlightens us.

Anyway, God is really committed to this concept of hiding. He's a hiding God. He hides to establish deep things in us in the searching, the waiting, and the discovery. I just threw that in because we're talking about hiding.

RENEWED IN KNOWLEDGE ACCORDING TO THE IMAGE OF JESUS

Look at verse 10. "Put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him" (Col. 3:10). There it is again. How does renewal take place? The idea of renewal means your heart is motivated, your heart is made strong, your emotions are made healthy. That's what the idea of renewal means, right? It means being motivated to obey. It means being hungry for God. It means being happy in the Lord. Put whatever phrase you want. That's the idea in Paul's mind.

Do you want to be motivated to obey better? Sure. Do you want to endure hardship better, like when you're under a trial, and not give up so quickly? Would you like to be motivated in God? Would you like to enjoy God more, and have more spiritual pleasure? That's what it means by *renewal*. How are you renewed? Paul says it clearly: you're renewed by receiving the knowledge that's according to the image, or according to the personality, of God.

Do you want to be renewed? Fill your mind with the knowledge of the image, or the knowledge of the personality, of God. It will renew you. Again, it's Paul's number one way of renewing; but it's so deficient in the Church today. Your life will be invigorated. When our little, weak, dark hearts touch the light of the knowledge of God, our hearts are expanded and strengthened with might. It's really true. That's the number one method Paul uses to renew people. That's why it's mentioned in every one of his prayers. He's praying for the Ephesians, the Philippians, the Colossians. He says, "Oh God, reveal the knowledge of God to them."

Someone says, "Why do you keep doing that?"

He says, "The way the human heart is made, it resonates when it comes into contact with the knowledge of God." We're simply made that way. Our life is made to be weak when we're disconnected from the knowledge of God, and our life is made to be strong when we grow and increase in the knowledge of God. That's simply how we're designed by God. When God made us, He put a bias towards Himself in the design. There's a bias in you. There's a longing, a craving, a functioning in a right way only in the context of the knowledge of God.

God made us that way. People call it “the God-shaped vacuum of the heart.” It’s like a bias in you that the Designer put in the design of your heart.

Why, then, are we content to go year after year with so little focus and so little pursuit of that which makes our hearts thrive and abound in health and love and power and joy and strength?

“LET THE WORD OF CHRIST DWELL IN YOU RICHLY IN ALL WISDOM”

I share on Colossians 3:10 a lot. That’s really the model that I have based my teaching ministry on. I want people renewed; I want them happy in God. They obey better; they sin less; they divide less; they quit less when they’re renewed. They do everything better when they’re renewed, and the model of Paul is to renew them by bringing them into the knowledge of the image of God, the knowledge of what God’s personality is like.

I base my teaching ministry on this model of Paul. Of course, all the prayers are loaded with the idea, but write down Colossians 3:16 so that you know that it’s the Word of God richly dwelling in us. This is what shines light into the heart: when the Word of God richly dwells in us.

I like to say that when the Word and the Spirit are married in the inner man in our heart, that’s when the divine explosion takes place—when the Logos, the Word of God, is joined with the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God who lives in us is the fire burning on the inside. He’s saying, “Give Me wood; give Me some fuel to burn. Give Me some wood and I’ll let the fire be combusive in you. Give Me something to work with.”

The Holy Spirit is living in us, so we put wood on the fire and it’s combusive. It’s very, very powerful when the Word and the Spirit join in the inner man. The Holy Spirit is waiting for you to put wood on the fire. He says, “Give Me something to illuminate.”

“Well, I’m really too busy right now. I’m burned out right now. I have things to go do to relax because I’m burned out and tired.”

The Holy Spirit says, “Give Me something to illuminate it and I’ll illuminate it.”

Again, in the Western culture we’re so inundated with recreation and entertainment, and He can’t illuminate that very easily. He does occasionally. He’s waiting for the Logos to enter our heart, to illuminate it, to make our lives overcome burnout. We’re doing everything else to overcome burnout except for the thing that overcomes burnout, and that’s giving the Holy Spirit something to join with on the inside of our hearts.

Here’s another passage I’m just going to give to you, but we won’t look at it: Galatians 1:12 and 16. You can look that up later.

HEAVEN IS FILLED WITH THE FRAGRANCE OF JESUS

Now turn to 2 Corinthians 2. The focus of this morning’s section is the prominence of the knowledge of God and the plan of God. It’s prominent everywhere. The second point we’re making is that it’s the number one transforming agent in the grace of God. The third point we’re making is that it’s inevitable that the knowledge of God will triumph in the Church. There will be a revival in the knowledge of God. It has to happen before the Lord returns.

2 Corinthians 2:14-16. “Thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ” (2 Cor. 2:14). He leads us in victory progressively. Through us He “diffuses”—or manifests—“the fragrance of His knowledge” (ibid).

Ministry is about releasing the knowledge of what God is like to other people. I don’t just mean that we’re godly so that people know that God is godly. It’s more than that: we bring people into specific understanding of what God is like. When the knowledge of God is released, it’s called a fragrance. All of heaven is filled with the perfumes of the knowledge of Jesus. Heaven is filled with the fragrance of Jesus. Incidentally, I believe the fragrance in heaven is real; I don’t believe it’s figurative. I believe that the atmosphere of heaven smells so differently than the atmosphere of earth. You can even go into the most phenomenal garden, cultivated by the greatest garden people—whatever they’re called. That garden is nothing like the atmosphere of the eternal city in terms of its fragrance.

THE CALL TO ACQUIRE MORE THAN JUST MENTAL UNDERSTANDING

God wants to bring life (2 Cor. 2:16), and fragrance (v. 15) through that life. He does it through us understanding. It’s more than us knowing doctrine about God; it’s experiencing the knowledge of God in us. It’s the difference between being a voice and an echo. We start with just repeating what we learned in our mind. There’s nothing wrong with starting off being an echo. But we want to be a voice. We want to actually experience the knowledge of God, not just memorize things about God. It starts with cognitively learning things about God.

DEVELOPING A GROAN IN PEOPLE’S HEARTS TO KNOW GOD BETTER

Again, you put that wood in the fire and give the Holy Spirit something to work with and He illumines it in you. I never apologize for studying with my mind things about God. It starts with study; it turns into meditation, and then it becomes revelation. I’m not content with it remaining cognitive facts; that’s how it begins, but I want to experience the knowledge of God. I want to feel a little of the truth of it in my inner man, because the knowledge of God always brings an impact on your emotions in time. He’s talking about people who experience the knowledge of God; therefore they can bring people to the knowledge of God. Yes, people do see some of God’s character by our character, but it’s more than them seeing us being loving and therefore knowing that God is loving. That’s a very clear biblical principal, but it’s more. We actually have the ability to articulate to them what God is like, and there’s an anointing that’s even bigger than our words that makes them feel God a little when they contact us. This is what I have always wanted. I think it’s the highest point of ministry. I want to contact people, and when I leave—I say this in an extreme way—I want them to feel a groan in their heart to want to know God better. I don’t want them to say, “Oh, he knows the Bible and he has clever little stories.” I want them to leave and say, “That one man, I don’t remember his name, but there’s a groan in my spirit.”

IT’S NOT THE PROPHET OF GOD, BUT THE GOD OF THE PROPHET

We have a number of prophetic people in our church. I tell the prophetic people, “I don’t want you to know the prophet of God; I want you to know the God of the prophet.”

When you stand up front, I want you to prophesy over someone in such a way that when they’re walking to the parking lot, someone comes up to them and says, “Hey, you got a word, didn’t you? Who gave you that word?”

I would love for them to say, “Oh, the guy with the blue shirt on. I can’t remember his name, but oh, God loves me. You love me.”

There's a groan in their spirit of the knowledge that God knows them. That's what the prophetic word produces in them. Too often in our history the prophetic people have been trafficking in knowledge about themselves. They want to stun people so that the people leave and say, "Wow, I want to hear that prophet again." Or the people say, "Boy, that prophet is so interesting."

No, that's the wrong idea. It's OK if they do a little of that, but what I would like is for the people who get the word to not think about how intimate and close you are to God. I would like them to groan a little in their own spirit for God. I want them to know the God of the prophet, not the prophet of God.

That's what 2 Corinthians 2:14 is talking about. It releases the invisible; it releases a sense of the reality of God, to the point where they have a groan in their spirit. A hunger is strengthened in them to know God. That's the highest impact of the anointing, in my opinion. That's what Paul is talking about. He's not just talking about the ability to talk in an articulate way about God's personality. Some of that is fine. It isn't even talking about us being so holy that they want to imitate our holiness. That's good, too. I'm talking about the ability by the Spirit to produce a groan, to produce hunger in people. They say, "I can't wait for this meeting to be over. I want to be alone with God and give my heart to God."

That's the kind of thing this verse is talking about. I just wanted you to see the phrase, "the knowledge of God."

IT'S THE BEHOLDING OF GOD'S GLORY THAT TRANSFORMS US

Look at 2 Corinthians 3:18. *We behold*, or we look at the glory of God, the person of God, what God is like, and we're transformed. It's the same principle over and over and over. It's the beholding of God's glory that transforms us. It doesn't mean you have to be caught up in the Spirit in a heavenly vision. It means you understand a little, just a little more, what God is like.

Jesus said, "Whom do men say that I am" (Mt. 16:13, paraphrased)? That's what transforms people. Now you can do that in personal prayer, personal study, and meditation. It's bringing your heart into contact with what God is like.

SATAN'S NUMBER ONE JOB DESCRIPTION

Look at 2 Corinthians 4:4-6. Satan wants to blind your mind to the glory. It's the gospel, the good news, about the glory and person of God. It's what He did and who He is. Satan's number one job description is to blind people's minds to the good news about what God did and who He is. That's what awakens the human heart to power.

Paul goes on to say, "I don't want to preach myself" (2 Cor. 4:5, paraphrased). "I don't want to tell you guys how committed I am; I want to tell you how committed God is to you. I want to preach Jesus, not my own ministry."

Sometimes it helps people to connect with God more to know the journey, to know the struggles, to know the way God led a certain person, but that must only be spoken inasmuch as it enhances someone else to connect with God.

THE GLORY OF GOD IS THE PURPOSE OF TELLING OUR PERSONAL STORIES

I go places a lot, and people say, “Make sure you tell your journey, your story.” I know what they mean. They mean tell it so that people can identify with your struggle; make certain they know the highs and the lows so that they’re encouraged in their resolve to go on the struggle to find God. That’s very legitimate, but it gets easy to tell our story for the sake of the uniqueness of a person’s story. Our story must be told inasmuch as it brings people into contact with God. We want to preach Jesus even in the telling of our story.

Some people say, “I’ll just tell everyone this is for the glory of God,” while the whole time they’re just magnifying themselves. The little qualifier at the end of a long story, “This is for God’s glory,” doesn’t mean it’s for God’s glory. We really want to bring people into contact with God. That’s really what it’s about. You can say, “Let’s all give God the glory.” You can even put the qualifier: “This is for the glory of God; I don’t want any credit.” That’s not what makes it for the glory of God.

SHINING INTO YOUR HEART THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD AS REVEALED BY JESUS

Here’s the thing. I find that the more my heart is touched by the person of God, even if it’s only touched a little, I become a little more jealousy to get other people to touch it. It’s all about Him shining into your heart the light of the knowledge of what God is like as revealed by Jesus. That’s what the whole thing is about: shining into your heart the knowledge of what God is like as revealed by Jesus. It comes down to the same thing again.

Those of you for whom this is new, you’re getting the idea that this subject is everywhere. “Why am I not focusing on this?” If that one piece of reasoning takes place in one person, this trip is worth it for me. If one person says, “This is everywhere. My goodness, what have I been doing?” Yeah! That’s it. It was worth the trip right there. I’m spending two full days on this point; I realize that. The next three mornings we’ll spend on the how-tos.

“BRINGING EVERY THOUGHT INTO CAPTIVITY TO THE OBEDIENCE OF CHRIST”

2 Corinthians 10:3-5 is a very well-known passage about spiritual warfare. “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” (2 Cor. 10:3-5). The NIV says they need to be *demolished*. It’s all the same: we must pull down, or cast down, strongholds. That’s the goal.

A COLLECTION OF IDEAS THAT ARE IN AGREEMENT WITH SATAN

What is a stronghold? A stronghold in the ancient world was a big stone wall, a ten-foot thick, fifty-foot high stone wall that kept the bad things out and kept the good things in. That’s what a stronghold was. They built these ten-foot thick stone walls that were fortresses around a city. Those fortresses kept out the bad thing and kept in the good thing in the ancient world.

Paul is using the illustration differently. He says, “When Satan makes a stronghold, he keeps out the presence of God. He keeps you in bondage in your life.” It’s like this big, ten-foot thick stone wall that’s fifty feet high that keeps God’s presence out of your life and keeps bondage in your life. He’s using the analogy of a satanic stronghold where the good is being kept out. He’s saying, “Let’s dismantle the stronghold. Let’s take it stone by stone and tear it down.”

A stronghold is actually a collection of ideas that are in agreement with Satan. That's really what a stronghold is. That's the anatomy of a stronghold. That's the makeup; that's the bricks or stones that make up a stronghold. A stronghold is a collection of ideas that's in agreement with Satan and not in agreement with God. That's the essence of a stronghold. I'm going to prove that to you in a second. That's a satanic stronghold.

Now, there are demons in the air. I totally believe in demons in the mid-heavens and in the atmosphere, but those demonic powers and principalities have one main thing to work with: ideas that are lodged in the human heart that agree with Satan that don't agree with God. If Satan doesn't have ideas lodged in the human heart, he can't work effectively. That stone wall is built by ideas lodged in your heart.

CASTING DOWN EVERY THOUGHT THAT OPPOSES CHRIST

Let's look at this concept that a stronghold is made up of ideas. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 10:5 that the way you pull the stronghold down is to cast down the arguments. You cast down the concepts and ideas. You expose them and renounce them. That's how you cast them down. Did you know that the way you destroy a stronghold is by casting down arguments, ideas? That's how you do it. A lot of people approach a stronghold by addressing the demon. I believe the most effective way to address a stronghold in a person is to address the idea that the demon is feeding on. It's the argument that the demon energizes; it's the concept that gives Satan access into your heart. It's a concept lodged in you that Satan is employing. You get rid of the concept and Satan can't work on it. He energizes the concept and holds our hearts in bondage.

AN ARGUMENT AGAINST THE TRUE KNOWLEDGE OF WHAT GOD IS LIKE

Number one: the way you pull down a stronghold is to cast down, or to expose and renounce, the argument. It's an argument against God, or an accusation against God. It's an argument against the truth of God, or an accusation against the truth of God that's lodged in your heart.

He says, "These arguments exalt themselves against what? The true knowledge of God." It's arguments against the true knowledge of what God is like. That's what these arguments are about: they're against concepts that are true about God. Look at that: it's the arguments about the knowledge of what God is like. The way that you tear down the stronghold is to expose and renounce the ideas, or the arguments, that come against the ideas of the knowledge of God, by bringing every idea into captivity to Jesus. The whole thing is ideas. Ideas are referred to three times: by the word *argument*, by the phrase "knowledge of God," and by the phrase, "every thought." It's all about ideas that are lodged in the heart. It's all about the subject of the knowledge of God that Satan accuses in your heart that lodges against God.

Now this is talking about personal strongholds, and that's what Paul is talking about in this context. He's talking about personal strongholds. The dilemma is that people are in captivity to Satan. They're in bondage to wrong things. He says, "I want to bring you into captivity to Jesus." He's making a contrast. "You're in captivity to wrong feelings and thoughts. Let me bring you into captivity to right ones, to Jesus."

AN EMOTIONAL BONDAGE WITH DEMONIC POWER ON IT

Let's go through the whole thing again. I realize that this was a new idea to some of you. A stronghold is a collection of ideas lodged in the human heart that are in agreement with Satan that aren't in agreement with God. That's what a stronghold is. Satan energizes these ideas in you. He creates an emotional bondage with demonic power on it, but the fuel of Satan's emotional bondage in any of our lives is ideas. You get rid of the ideas and the power is broken.

By the way, the ideas come to us little by little, so we get rid of them little by little. A lot of people are looking for one meeting where a demon is cast out, and they fall to the ground, and everything is different. No. You cast the devil, the resident evil spirit—which I believe in—out of a person by filling that person with right ideas about who God is and who they are. You view yourself only in the wake of how you view God. We'll look at that tomorrow. The way you view yourself directly corresponds to the way you view God. Your image of yourself is the fruit of your image of who God is. The subject of the knowledge of God is paramount. You can't get free or be healthy without this subject being in our hearts in a right way—not that we have to be mature in it, but we have to be on the right path, going in the right direction.

Paul says, "Pull down the stronghold."

The Corinthian believer says, "How?"

He says, "You cast down the arguments" (2 Cor. 10:5, paraphrased).

"What do you mean, 'you cast them down'?"

"Well, you expose them and renounce them."

"Arguments about what?"

"Arguments against the truth of God, or accusations against the truth of God." *Arguments* and *accusations* is the same idea. You cast down the wrong ideas.

"OK, ideas about what?"

"Ideas that are exalting, that are adversarial against, the true knowledge, the true ideas of God."

"Oh, OK. Why?"

IF YOU DEFINE GOD WRONGLY, YOU DEFINE YOURSELF WRONGLY

Let me say it again. You're going to bring your thinking, you're going to bring every thought, you're going to bring your ideas into captivity, or into agreement with Jesus. Put *agreement* instead of *captivity*. Bring your ideas into agreement with Jesus instead of into agreement with Satan. You don't want to be captive to Satan's thoughts; you want to be captive to those of Jesus. It isn't just thoughts about whether He wants you to move here or move there; it's thoughts about what God is like. The way you define God really is the way you define yourself. If you define God wrongly, you define yourself wrongly. There's a clear progression of thought that takes place in our minds and hearts and emotions when we define God wrongly; we end up defining ourselves wrongly, and we hate ourselves at the end of the day.

Satan loves that. A person filled with self-disgust is a person you don't have to worry about impacting the kingdom in any great way; they're so self-absorbed in their pain that even though they go to all the seminars, even though they go on the ministry trips and try everything they can, they're so connected with themselves all

the time in a negative way, they're so self-conscious of their pain and failure, they can hardly even think in a way that's helpful to others in a substantial way.

The entire human race, and the Body of Christ, is in captivity to self-absorbed, negative self-consciousness. They aren't God-conscious; they aren't others-conscious. Rather, because of their pain and their self-disgust and their self-hatred, they are entangled and enmeshed in self-awareness all the time in a negative way. They walk into a room and the first thing they think about is what everyone is thinking about them, what they'll look like if they sit here or go there or stand up, move, talk, and everything else. They're in bondage to thinking about themselves.

The only liberty is captivity into thinking rightly about Jesus, because then you think about yourself entirely differently. You think about Jesus differently.

PRESERVING THE SIMPLICITY OF DEVOTION TO JESUS

You know what's happening in chapter 10 here? Let me just build this thought a little more instead of giving you more verses. In 2 Corinthians 10, Paul is working on one main idea. For four chapters he's developing one thought. It's important to know that, because if you don't know that, then you don't connect what's happening in 2 Corinthians 12 and 11 and 13 to 2 Corinthians 10. It's all one big context. Anyone who has studied 2 Corinthians in an academic way knows he's changing subjects. 2 Corinthians 10:8-9 is one subject; 2 Corinthians 10:10-13 is an entirely different subject. This is his subject. His subject is found in 2 Corinthians 11:3. This is what's on his mind for the last four chapters.

Look at the very last phrase of 2 Corinthians 11:3. He wants them to be freed from the distraction of not being able to have simple devotion to Jesus. The New King James says this: "Your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ" (2 Cor. 11:3). I love how it's phrased in the NASB and the NIV: "the simplicity of devotion." The word *simplicity* means, "singleness of mind." It means, "without duplicity." It means, "without two ways of thinking." It's single devotion. That's what the idea means.

Paul in the last four chapters has one theme: "How can I win the Corinthians back to a simple devotedness to Jesus?" In other words, he wants to get them back to the first commandment, right? He wants the first commandment to have first place in their lives. He wants them to be lovers of God. Paul has a problem, because these people are distracted from simple devotion to Jesus. The way they're distracted from simple devotion to Jesus is because they have wrong ideas. A believer with wrong ideas about God, and therefore wrong ideas about himself or herself, can't be a mature lover of God. Paul knows that. Most believers have wrong ideas about God; I certainly still do. I'm not claiming I don't have those, but most of the Church is substantially rooted in wrong ideas about God. They have wrong ideas about themselves, and then they can't be mature lovers of God. They can want to be lovers of God, but they'll never mature in it. They'll always be distracted, all the time, from being a lover of God.

FALSE APOSTLES CREPT IN WHO PREACHED ANOTHER JESUS

Here's why these believers were distracted: these false apostles came in the back door when Paul left Corinth. They said, "We're really apostles, and Paul is off the wall. Let us tell you the truth about Jesus." These false apostles preached another Jesus (2 Cor. 11:4). They had a different spirit and they preached a different gospel. Verse 4 describes these false apostles whom Paul is exposing in these last four chapters. They preach another Jesus, they have a different spirit, and they preach a different gospel.

Now, the reason that's bad is because these teachers are bringing the Corinthians into wrong thinking about God, which is the point of 2 Corinthians 10:5. That's why Paul is describing these strongholds. The strongholds of 2 Corinthians 10:4-5 are the fruit of these bad teachers. They filled these people with crazy ideas about Jesus that were totally wrong. Paul says, "The reason I don't like this is because it creates a stronghold. The reason I don't like this is because you can't be mature lovers of God under the power of these strongholds. I just want you to love God; That's why I have come to you to help you be a lover of God." He says, "The only way I can help you to be a lover of God is to expose the false ideas you have about God and expose the teachers who brought those ideas. When you get rid of the ideas and disavow the teachers, then your heart is liberated into the love of God again."

That's the logic of these four chapters. He says it very clearly in verse 3. "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 Cor. 11:3). This was Paul's fear: "Your minds will be corrupted from simple devotion to Jesus."

In verse 4 he says, "It's those teachers who did this to you. They are the ones who through craftiness led you off the path" (2 Cor. 11:4, paraphrased). The reason you need to know that there's only one main theme in these four chapters is because a lot of people discuss strongholds in 2 Corinthians 10 totally unrelated to 2 Corinthians 11. The strongholds in chapter 10 are about 2 Corinthians 11:3, about being lovers of God.

"I AM JEALOUS FOR YOU WITH GODLY JEALOUSY"

Now we're going to get to the power point here. All of that was introduction. Here's the power point. It's simple, but the power point is in verse 2. Paul says, "I am jealous for you with godly jealousy" (2 Cor. 11:2). Paul says, "I'm not jealous of these teachers."

One man said, "Paul, you're just mad because we're going to their conferences instead of yours."

Paul says, "I'm not jealous. Believe me, it has nothing to do with you going to their conferences and not mine." He addresses the accusation that he's jealous of these false teachers.

He says, "Yes, I'm jealous, but not of them. I'm jealous as a representative of Jesus that you would be a lover of God. I'm jealous, but it's not jealousy of these teachers; it's godly jealousy."

"THAT I MAY PRESENT YOU AS A CHASTE VIRGIN TO CHRIST"

Then he gives two of the highest doctrines in the Word of God, one after the other, boom, boom, right here in verse 2. He says, "Let me tell you what's going on. Number one: I have betrothed you to one husband. Number two: you're a chaste virgin. I'm going to present you as a chaste virgin to Jesus."

There are two important things going on here. By the way, those are the two doctrines that Paul is using to destroy the strongholds of 2 Corinthians 10. Let's look at doctrine number one: the chaste virgin (2 Cor. 11:2b). Did you know that because of the death of Jesus, no matter what you've done in your life, the wrath of God has already crushed Jesus and you're a pure virgin, clean in the sight of God? This is incredible! What you've done as a believer, because of the magnitude in the court of God of the blood of Jesus, means you're present before God right now.

The most carnal churches in the first century were the Corinthians and the Laodiceans. There they were. Paul said, “Do you understand that when you appear before God, you’re clean as a virgin in the court of God?”

The false teachers told them all something different. The false teachers said, “No, you have to keep all these rules; you have to go through all these hoops, and then maybe God will forgive you.” The false teachers disrupted this issue of how clean they were legally in the court of God. Paul came in against the strongholds.

Doctrine one: you’re pure virgins; you’re clean. He was hitting like a sledgehammer against a big, brick wall. He was smashing these false ideas these false teachers were establishing in the Corinthian minds. He said, “If you feel dirty before God, you’ll never be a mature lover of God.”

CLEAN BEFORE GOD BECAUSE OF WHAT GOD HAS DONE IN CHRIST

The teaching of the false apostles was legalism. They were the Judaizers. Some of you have studied the Judaizers. They show up in Galatians and in the two letters to the Corinthians. They show up everywhere. They said, “Jesus is the Messiah, but Jesus will only forgive you if you keep all of these laws and rules.” They added something to Jesus. They preached Jesus as the Messiah. They preached Him as God. They came in and said, “Jesus is God. He’s the Messiah. The Man from Nazareth is God, and He’s the Messiah.”

The Corinthians said, “Man, they have good doctrine.”

Paul said, “No, they’re right about that. He is the Messiah and He is God, but they’re wrong about the nature of what He’s like and how He saves you. They’re corrupting you. They’re adding all these other things you have to do to get clean. You’re already a pure virgin because of what God did to Jesus in the court of God.”

Did you know that if you don’t feel clean, you can’t live clean before God? That’s really true. It’s more than the fact that you’re clean before God as a virgin legally because the penalty has been paid. It’s the message of justification by faith; that’s what he’s talking about.

WE’RE THE ULTIMATE DESIRE OF THE HEART OF GOD

It’s more than that. Did you know you have been betrothed to a husband? This is powerful. *Betrothed* means *engaged*. In the Jewish society, you were typically married a year after you were engaged. The day you were engaged, it was a legal contract. You were legally married, but the marriage wasn’t consummated for a year. You were legally married the day you were engaged.

The way the gospel is presented is this: the day we’re born again, we’re engaged. We’re legally married to Jesus, but the marriage isn’t consummated until the day of eternity, until we’re all there on the last day. You’re engaged, but it isn’t consummated until the last day. You’re betrothed, or put engaged, or espoused, but it’s legal and it’s final. Here’s the point: God desires you. You’re the one He chose and desired to be His partner. Even now that’s true. He looks at the Corinthians and says, “Let me tell you: you’re the one that God desires. He likes you. You’re the only partner He wants. You’re His inheritance. He died so that you could be with Him at His side in glory.”

The Corinthians said, “Wow. We’re the ultimate desire of the heart of God even in our weakness.”

Secondly, you're clean as a virgin. He tells them about God's desire for them, which tells you what God is like, and redefines their lives. And he tells them how clean they are. He says, "You're the desired bride, betrothed to Jesus, and you're the clean virgin in God's sight now, O Corinthians. The reason you have to know that is this: if you don't know it, your minds are corrupted, or led astray. You won't be able to love God. These false teachers taught you that God is mad at you; that He's about to write you off; that He's fed up with you and that you need to keep the rules or you're never, ever going to be sure that you're accepted in God's presence. These are strongholds. It's killing your power to be a lover of God. You have to stand before God in your weakness and understand that you're the desired one of the great Lover of all the ages. You're the clean one in the court of God."

A REMNANT WILL COME FORTH WHO ARE VOLUNTARY LOVERS OF GOD

Those are the two hammers with which he's shattering the strongholds of chapter 10. He's taking these two assaults against the strongholds and he's hitting it, wham, and he's knocking these rocks down. Satan lied to them and said, "God isn't interested in you; He's about to write you off," and, secondly, he said, "There's no way you're forgiven the way that you're living."

Paul says, "No." For four chapters that's what's on his mind. He's establishing his own credibility as an apostle. He's undermining their credibility in order to undermine their doctrine in order to free the Corinthians from the strongholds so that they can be lovers of God. That's all that it's about for four chapters. Paul says a couple of times, "Why do I have to boast about my ministry? I hate this. I have to brag about myself so that I can put down these other men. This is stupid. You men ought to know that I'm the true thing. Here I am; I'm bragging about my credibility, feeling like an idiot doing it, but I have to do it. If I don't tell you who I am, you're going to believe these men. If you believe these men, you're going to believe their doctrines. If you believe their doctrines, you'll have strongholds. If you have these demonic strongholds, you can't be lovers of God."

He says in verse 2, "I'm jealous that you would be lovers of God, because that's the only reason I'm an apostle. I'm an apostle to bring you to mature love to Jesus" (2 Cor. 11:2, paraphrased). That's the whole purpose of the natural creation: that God would have a remnant come forth who are voluntary lovers of God. That's the only reason we're on earth. That's the argument of 2 Corinthians 10-13.

Here's my main point of the session: it's all about the knowledge of God. That's what defuses strongholds. Amen.