

Session 1 Pulling Down Spiritual Strongholds (2 Cor. 10-11)

I. WE MUST PULL DOWN SPIRITUAL STRONGHOLDS

*Tonight is our first session in **Growing in Prayer, part two**. For those you that were here last semester, this is part two for you. We are doing the second half of the book, **Growing in Prayer**. In our fall semester we did the first half of the book, and this spring semester we are doing the second half of the book. It's not exactly according to the book but about ninety-five percent, so it is really close.*

The format of the Friday evening service is this: we will worship typically for an hour, do one class for forty-five minutes, then at the end of the first one what I always like to do is take five minutes for small group discussion. I want everybody to participate because it will actually touch you. I want us to get into groups of three or four or five people and answer one question, just go around the group. We will take five minutes. Everybody gets about forty-five seconds, and I want you to highlight or mention one point that challenged you or one point that encouraged you in the Lord. So just go around the circle and mention one point from the notes. What will happen is it will actually touch your heart as well as other folks because it re-enforces the truth as you speak the Word out of your own mouth. Then we will take a fifteen-minute break—it is our coffee break—then we come back for ten more minutes of worship. Then we do class two, which is on the book of Daniel. Sometimes we will have ministry time, like tonight we will have ministry time afterwards, but sometimes we will have question-and-answer afterwards, and so we will kind of mix it up.

Well, let's begin. If you would, open your Bibles to 2 Corinthians 10, so you can look at it. We will look at two very powerful chapters related to pulling down spiritual strongholds in our life.

Father, we thank You in the name of Jesus. Lord, as we begin this new semester on growing in prayer, Holy Spirit, I ask You to release living understanding. I ask You to mark the heart of people tonight. I ask You to mark hearts, free hearts, liberate hearts. I ask You that you would equip teachers, disciplers, and pastors to liberate, to help other people find liberty in the name of Jesus, Amen.

Now you know part of my goal of this class is to not only to equip you in prayer, but also to equip you to equip other people in the future, those whom you might be pastoring in the future, those whom you are discipling, those whom you are training. So I am encouraging you to pay attention to these sessions as something that you will actually communicate to other people, of course through your own personality, through your own lens, but using some of these truths.

- A. Paul gave us understanding on how we can pull down spiritual strongholds in our life.

³For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. ⁴For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, ⁵casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity [a tenacious commitment] to the obedience of Christ. (2 Cor. 10:3-5)

We are looking at the subject of pulling down spiritual strongholds. Paul gave us understanding of how to pull down spiritual strongholds in our spiritual life. Let's look at 2 Corinthians 10:3-5. Paul said, "Though we walk in the flesh..." Though we walk in our physical bodies is what he is saying, we do not war according to human power. That is what he means by "we do not war according to the flesh." We are not limited to human power even though we are walking in a physical body.

Verse 4, “For the weapons of our warfare”—against Satan is the idea—“they are not carnal”—that is, they are not human. Our weapons are beyond flesh and blood, because our enemy is not flesh and blood is the idea—“but our weapons are mighty in God.” Now there is no real mystery to this. What Paul is going to outline very clearly is that our primary weapon is speaking the Word of God in unity with the Spirit as the Spirit moves when we do that. That is the ultimate weapon that is mighty in God. I mention it so you are not mystified by what Paul is going to say and make clear in the verses ahead.

Verse 4, “For the weapons of our warfare, they are not carnal”—they are not human, they are not flesh and blood—“but are mighty for the pulling down of strongholds.” He is talking about spiritual strongholds. He says the same thing in a different way in verse 5, “casting down arguments.” Now it is interesting that pulling down strongholds and casting down arguments are two sides of one coin. We will develop that in a minute.

Casting down not just arguments, which are arguments that the enemy puts in our heart against God and God’s truth, but we also cast down every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God. The idea is to bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. The goal is that believers would walk with their minds in captivity to the Word of God. That is where we put our energy. That is where we exert energy in our spiritual life to bring our mind into unity with the Holy Spirit and into unity with the Word of God.

When we exert energy and effort in our spiritual life, we are not trying to change God’s mind nor are we are trying to earn something from God. We are trying to change our mind. That is where the effort and the energy are exerted—to bring our mind into captivity into slavery to the Word of God. Paul uses this in the most positive way. It is where we are living when we agree with what God says. That is where we put the effort in our spiritual life; that is where prayer and fasting and spiritual disciplines come in. Some people get confused, and they think doing spiritual disciplines means they are trying to earn something or change God’s mind. No, they are positioning their life to change their mind, so they are brought into captivity. What an extravagant way to say it! Captivity meaning our thinking captive to obedience to the Word of God, where we believe the Word, we say the Word, and we live by the Word in our heart.

- B. A stronghold was a strongly fortified defensive structure. It was a fort or fortified city, which was often completely surrounded by a large stone wall. Some of these walls were as high as fifty feet and were ten feet thick. The purpose of a city wall was to keep an invading army out.

So Paul introduces this idea of spiritual strongholds. In the ancient world a stronghold was a fort, a fortified city. It often included cities as well where there was a big stone wall built around the city. Often that is what a stronghold was; it was the wall built around the city. Now just picture a fort or bigger than a fort, a fortified city with fifty-foot high walls, I mean big, tall walls. Some of them had big fortresses like that or fortified defenses. Think of that wall ten-foot thick. Now those walls were typically made of stone. So when the enemy came to attack the city, those big stone walls would keep the enemy out. They would keep the invading army from entering into the city. That is the purpose of a fortress, of a stronghold, to keep the presence of the enemy out. That is the idea or the thought that Paul is communicating, the picture that Paul wants you to have in your mind as you are reading this passage.

- C. Paul used the analogy of an ancient stronghold, or fortress, to teach a spiritual truth, describing how Satan attacks us and how we overcome it. He used a positive word picture of a stronghold (wall of stone) that protected a city to illustrate the negative way in which Satan holds people in bondage.

Paul used the analogy of an ancient stronghold or fortress to teach a spiritual truth. The reason he used that analogy was because it was so common. Everybody in the Roman world understood it. Now the truth he was talking about was describing how Satan attacks us and how we overcome the attack. He was using a positive

word picture. A fortress that kept the invading army out is a positive word picture, but he is using it in a negative way. He is saying that it is like the devil, Satan, is working to build a fort around you to keep the presence of God from liberating you. It is a fortress, standing and resisting the presence and the blessing of God in a person's life. So those walls, those demonic walls, have to be torn down stone by stone so that the invading army, which in this sense is the presence of God, would touch our inward life in a powerful way. Thus he is using a positive word picture in a negative way because in this case it is the enemy building the stronghold in agreement with our wrong thinking and our wrong choices. That stronghold is keeping the invading army so to speak—the presence of God—from touching our lives.

- D. Jesus described Satan as a strong man who seeks to guard his house from being “plundered” by Jesus so that Satan may continue to hold people in bondage (Mt. 12:28-29).

²⁸“**But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you.**

²⁹**Or how can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house. (Mt. 12:28-29)**

Jesus described Satan as a strongman who seeks to guard his house from being plundered. Jesus is the one who said, “I am going to bind the strongman and plunder his house.” Jesus binds the strongman and plunders his house so that the blessing of God would enter into people's lives and they would be liberated, plundered, set free from the bondage of Satan the strongman. That is the word picture that Paul is thinking of in 2 Corinthians 10:4.

- E. Satan seeks to keep us in bondage to him by establishing spiritual strongholds in our mind to keep God's presence out of our life. He works to establish “walls of accusation” in our mind against God to keep the Holy Spirit's liberating presence from invading our life and freeing our heart.

Here is the principle. Satan seeks to establish strongholds in our mind. Again, remember a stronghold is a fort. Picture it fifty feet high—that is an arbitrary number—ten feet thick, built of stone. Satan wants to have this fortress built in our mind to keep the presence of God out, to keep us in bondage to him and to keep blessing out of our life. This stone wall, this big wall, is made of these large stones. Paul makes it clear here that the stones that are the lies that accuse the truth about God. There are not physical stones in this fortress or stronghold in our mind. They are spiritual stones so to speak, accusations and arguments against the truth of God.

For instance, the Word of God says, “God loves you.” In our mind we say, “Well, I know He does technically, but I don't really feel it. It does not really feel like He does.” That is the power of a stronghold in a believer's life accusing the Word of God, keeping the Word of God from comforting you or changing you. We don't mean to do this. We don't intend this result, but still we are saying, “Well, I do not really know. You know it does not really seem like it is true. I mean I know it is true, but it does not really feel that true.” That is how people who have strongholds in their minds talk, because the Word of God is not penetrating their heart and their mind and their emotions.

II. DIFFERENT TYPES OF STRONGHOLDS

There are different types of strongholds. There are personal strongholds, which are strongholds of the mind. That is what we are focused on in this session. Second, there are cultural strongholds, strongholds in specific regions such as cities or nations. Third, there are cosmic strongholds or strongholds in the spirit realm. There are large demonic powers in the spirit realm over cities. They are often referred to as territorial spirits. Tonight

we are not going to look at the cultural strongholds or the cosmic strongholds. We are going to look at them next week. Tonight we are going to look at personal strongholds, strongholds in the mind.

- A. **Personal strongholds:** Strongholds in our mind are a collection of ideas that are in agreement with Satan. These lies accuse Jesus and His leadership, and then they accuse our standing before Him. They are arguments, or lies, about His character, power, and wisdom and about our relationship to Him. Once we believe lies about God, we so easily believe lies about who we are in Christ. Renouncing wrong ideas or lies about God is foundational to dismantling personal strongholds.

A stronghold in the mind is simply a collection of ideas that are in agreement with Satan. They are not in agreement with God, but are with Satan; that is what a stronghold is. Again picture that wall, that fifty-foot wall built of big stones. Those stones are spiritual ideas; it is a spiritual wall. They are lies that accuse Jesus, they accuse His leadership, and they accuse our standing before Him. They are arguments about His character, His power, His wisdom, etc. They are arguments in our thoughts about our relationship with Him.

For example, “Lord, I know You are good, but it does not really seem like You are good right now. I know the kingdom is real, but it does not seem that real. I know that I will live forever, but that does not really feel like it is true, even though I technically know it is true. I know that I have the gift of righteousness and that I am righteous in Your sight, but I do not really feel like it. It does not really seem true.” Those are arguments that rise up in us against God. When we believe lies about God, we are actually believing lies about who we are in Christ, too.

- B. **Cultural strongholds:** Strongholds in our culture consist of actions and laws in specific regions that are in agreement with Satan and stand against God’s righteousness. Repenting for these actions and laws, along with interceding for God’s mercy, is one way to dismantle cultural strongholds.

Cosmic strongholds: Strongholds in the spiritual realm are caused by territorial spirits or demons that energize entire geographic areas to embrace wicked behavior and evil ideas. There is a demonic hierarchy above each region of the earth (Eph. 6:12; Dan. 10:12, 20-21). Intercession with repentance in solemn assemblies is one way to dismantle cosmic strongholds (Joel 2:12-17).

III. SPIRITUAL STRONGHOLDS ARE ESTABLISHED BY AGREEING WITH DARKNESS

- A. Strongholds are established when we open doors to Satan through sinful actions and belief systems. Satan’s sphere of activity is the domain of darkness. Wherever there is darkness, he has legal access. If darkness is in our hearts, then he has legal access to us. Jesus had no place of darkness or agreement with Satan in His life; thus, Jesus gave Satan no legal access points into His life.

³⁰***“For the ruler of this world is coming, and he has nothing in Me.” (Jn. 14:30)***

Now we are going to look more closely at personal strongholds, not the cultural or cosmic. We will look at those next week. We are all in this battle, so this is a very, very, very relevant subject to every believer. Again, spiritual strongholds are a collection of ideas; they are thoughts. They are not only thoughts, but wrong thoughts that are the basic element of a stronghold. Strongholds are established by opening doors to Satan through sinful actions and wrong belief systems. Remember, we are born with a wrong belief system, even though we are raised in the Church. Our natural mind plus the work of the enemy and the culture are always resisting what the Bible says is true about us and true about God.

Now Satan's sphere of activity is the domain of darkness; he is the god of darkness. Here is the issue: wherever there is darkness, he has access to it. If that darkness is in our heart, he has access to influence our heart. Wherever we are in agreement with darkness, we give legal access to him. It is his domain.

So we want to renounce darkness, darkness agreeing with wrong ideas about God. We declare the truth: "He is the God of love. We are the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus. We are the Bride of Christ; we are sons of God. We will reign forever. Every small little thing we do in obedience to Jesus, even giving a cup of cold water, is remembered forever and rewarded." Those are true about us, though in our five senses they do not feel true.

Notice in John 14:30 Jesus said, "Satan has nothing in Me." What He was saying is that there was no access point in Him for the god of darkness. As in, "I do not have dark thoughts. I do not have dark decisions. I give him no access points in My life."

- B. Sometimes we feel an irrationally heightened lust, fear, oppression, or anxiety. We resist these demonic influences by committing to obey Jesus and declaring the truth of God's Word. In this way we can quench all the demonic missiles with their heightened demonic energy against our lives.

¹⁶You will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. (Eph. 6:16)

Sometimes we are attacked. We all know this experience. We are attacked by what Paul called these flaming missiles, these darts that are like sharp darts, they have fire, and they sting us. These flaming missiles, these fiery darts are like these heightened irrational moments where we feel fear or oppression or anxiety or we feel lost. In our humanity we often feel those things in everyday life. But these are those times where it is really heightened and is irrational.

You may wonder, "Why am I just so, you know, fixated for these few moments or few hours? Like what is going on?" Beloved, it is a demonic attack against you when it is heightened. A lot of believers do not have enough knowledge of who they are in Christ, so when that happens, they just ride the storm out and give themselves to those thoughts. Many times they yield to the activity associated with those thoughts when they really need to understand they are being assaulted by darkness.

Paul said in Ephesians 6 that we can quench those missiles, those flaming missiles. We can quench them, we can resist them, and they will go away, they will lift. We do not have to ride the storm out for a few days or even a few hours of this heightened intensity of oppression or anxiety or fear or lust or anger or bitterness. We can actually address those things.

- C. When we sin, we give Satan legal entry into our lives to work in a greater way in us. Satan adds a heightened demonic energy to our sin as we yield to it. He wants our weaknesses to escalate to wickedness. Lust does not stop with one act, but continues to grow until it is full-grown (Jas. 1:15). Sin that is not rejected continues to increase in our life. Augustine said, "Lust yielded to becomes a habit, and a habit not resisted becomes a necessity."

¹⁴Each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his desires...¹⁵When desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. (Jas. 1:14-15)

I will not spend time a long time developing this, but James 1 is a really powerful passage that describes how lust operates in our life. It starts off by a desire. Look at verse 15, when desire has conceived, then there is an action of sin. When that desire takes root, meaning it started as a passing desire but then it lodges, it turns into

an action. Paul continues, saying that what happens is the seed becomes full-grown. What a horrible word, full-grown. That heightened lustful thought becomes an action. The devil's point or goal is that our weaknesses would escalate to a life of wickedness. That is what he is after. He is after sinful lustful thoughts becoming deeds. The deeds growing, eventually becoming full-grown, it is called an addiction. It is called "bringing our life into bondage."

Now Augustine was one of the great teachers in the Church about the fourth century AD. Here is a famous statement he made, "Lust yielded to becomes a habit. A habit not resisted becomes a necessity." By a necessity, he is saying it becomes bondage, an addiction. What a powerful statement! So lust comes, we yield to it, and eventually it becomes a habit. Then it is a little bit harder to resist the habit, and if not resisted that habit becomes an addiction in our life.

Nobody is bigger than this power, meaning there is no one whose mind is so fortified and strong that they can overcome it because it is a spiritual power. It is why some of the most powerful minds in private live in deep perversion and darkness. Their minds are powerful, but they have a spiritual battle going on that they do not understand.

IV. PULLING DOWN STRONGHOLDS OF THE MIND

A. Paul exhorted believers to pull down spiritual strongholds (2 Cor. 10:4-5).

⁴The weapons of our warfare are...mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, ⁵casting 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. 10:4-5)

Let's read these verses again. This time I want you to pay attention to the phrases that point to knowledge of information. I mean this whole thing is about the information that you buy into, that you fill your mind with. Let's read this again.

"The weapons of our warfare, they are mighty in God." Again we are going to find out that the weapons are our agreement with the Word of God. Back in Genesis 1, when the Word was spoken, the Spirit moved in power as the earth was created. It was when the Word was spoken that the Spirit moved. The Spirit was present, but the world was still in darkness. Then Jesus spoke, "Let there be light!" When the Word was spoken, the Spirit moved. That is the principle of the kingdom.

The Holy Spirit follows the declaration of the Word in the mouth of a believer. If we say more, more happens. You pray for somebody—you can be in a bad mood, feel terrible—the more you pray for people more things are going to happen. Even though you just kind of mutter the words, you encourage a few people. You do that more, those encouragements more times than not will have a touch of a prophetic dimension in that person. They say, "That is the very thing I was asking the Lord to confirm in my heart."

You say, "All I said was, 'God loves you.'"

"I know. But today I said, 'Lord, tell me through somebody that God loves me.'"

I mean in the simplest things you speak, the Holy Spirit follows the declaration of the Word. He touches your heart, He touches your body, He touches your circumstance, He touches the people that you are praying for, talking to, fellowshiping with. The Holy Spirit follows the utterance of the Word in weak and broken people like us. So the weapons of our warfare are mighty in God. It is the "simply speaking the 'rhema' Word of God" for the pulling down of strongholds.

Now he goes on. Notice in verse 5, the way you pull down a stronghold is by casting down an argument. It is information you are casting down. He goes on and says further that you are casting down everything that exalts itself against the knowledge of God. You are casting down everything that exalts itself about the true information about God. Then he says the last step is to bring every thought into captivity. Fill your mind with the right information. This whole thing is based on information: resisting the wrong information, filling your mind with the right information.

It is so simple that there is no mystery to how this operates. A lot of believers still find themselves negligent on this subject. They do not fill their mind with the Word, they do not speak the Word when they feel tempted, and they do not take time to speak the Word over other people. I mean, in simple fellowship and prayer times, just speaking those little phrases, and that is where the Spirit moves. It liberates your own heart; it liberates others.

- B. **Pulling down strongholds** (NKJV, KJV); demolish (NIV); destruction of fortresses (NAS)
Casting down arguments (NKJV); imaginations (KJV); destroying speculations (NASB)
Every high thing (NKJV); every pretension that sets itself up (NIV); every lofty thing raised up (NASB); every proud obstacle (RSV); every high thing that exalteth itself against (KJV)
- C. **Every high thing**: This speaks of demonic activities and ideas that are like a powerful wall that hinders God's blessing in our lives. Demonic powers exalt themselves by seducing us to believe their lies that attack the truth about God and who His people are before Him.
- D. We must pull down these strongholds one by one. The spiritual stone wall in our minds must be dismantled, stone by stone. Every single stone of accusation in our mind against God and His salvation must be cast down. God's Word is like a hammer that strikes the "demonic wall" in our minds and demolishes it stone by stone—idea by idea.

Paul says, pull down the stronghold. He says, cast down the argument. Again it is—I am going to repeat it—it is like this stone wall. The enemy with our cooperation has erected this stone wall, this fortress, around our heart and our life. We have been cooperating with it many times, unconsciously, but still cooperating with it. We are agreeing with what he says that is against God and against the gospel.

I don't mean statements like saying that we don't love Jesus. I don't mean bold, blatant statements like that, but simple statements that come against truths such as: God loves you; you are the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus; the simple things you do like giving someone a cup of cold water in His name are remembered forever and your life is rewarded forever; it is meaningful now even though nobody sees it though it is small and unnoticed by anybody else; your life is crowned with power and importance. It is the assault against things like that.

These simple statements tell us that if we violate the will of God in relationships, if we violate the will of God in our interaction, in our purity, in our sexuality, that somehow we will have more fun, more liberty, and experience more. Those are lies that will bring us into bondage to those things that will hurt us. We open the door of relationship to darkness when we agree with those lies. When we open the door to darkness, we give the god whose domain is darkness legal access.

It is not about God not loving us. Still, we need to say no to darkness and say yes to truth. The Word of God is like a hammer, and it comes against this fortress built around our lives. The Word of God is knocking stones down, one by one. The Word of God is like a hammer, shattering these lies that are strongholds in our spiritual life. They are shattered by simply speaking the Word and agreeing with the truth.

- E. We cast down lies by bringing our thoughts into captivity to God—into agreement with His Word. We fill our mind with the Word and make it a slave that is captive to the truth. We do this by breaking our agreement with false ideas and arguments against God.
- F. Three ways in which we cast down arguments against God in our life:
 - 1. We **expose the lies** that are lodged in our mind by identifying them. Right thinking is the way to begin dismantling personal strongholds. Renewing our mind by the Word soon leads to emotional change, which in time results in the transformation of our behavior.

*There are three ways that we cast down these arguments. They are so simple. Number one way, we identify the lie that is lodged in us. We identify the lie. For example, we say, “Okay, I do not feel forgiven.” That is a lie. I mean it is true you do not **feel** forgiven, but it is a lie that you are not forgiven. So you say, “That is a lie; that is the devil’s accusation. I am going to line up with the Word of God. I am going to say, ‘Devil, you are a liar. I am fully forgiven. I am the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus. That is who I am.’”*

So we identify the lie; we expose it, very, very simple. I mean it does not take a degree in theology to figure out what the lies are. “God’s leadership is not good,” we expose that as a lie. “He is not paying attention to our life, our life does not mean anything because what we do is not celebrated and applauded by men; therefore our life does not mean anything.” That is a total lie. Are you kidding? The God of the universe has called you to be His Bride and said that even if you give a cup of cold water He will remember it forever and reward you and you are building His kingdom.

“Well, my life means nothing.” What a total lie!

“Well, if the cool people recognized me, then my life would be important.” That is not what makes your life important! What makes your life important is the coolest Man who ever walked the earth recognizes you and wants you to be His eternal companion forever. Really, this is real.

So we expose the lie. When we renew our mind, or in other words our mind agrees with the Bible, and we speak the Word, eventually our emotions change. When our emotions change, our behavior is transformed. I mean we can resist wrong behavior even when our emotions are totally out of whack. I tell you we can. Our life is really transformed as our emotions are transformed by our mind being renewed; that is the process.

- 2. We **renounce our agreement** with those lies. Sin gives demons the legal permission to operate in our lives. We shut the door by repenting of sinful actions and diligently renewing our minds. Our diligence in pursuing God is not an attempt to change God’s mind towards us in seeking earn His love but we are to be diligent to change our mind to agree with Him.

¹¹Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience. (Heb. 4:11)

So we expose the lie. We say, “Ah! That is a lie, I really am forgiven.” Or “It is a lie, because God does love me.” Or “It is a lie that says that His leadership is not good. It is a lie that says that my life does not matter. It is a lie that says that I do not have any hope. It is a lie that I have nothing to live for.” Those are all lies; we expose them. But it is not enough to expose them. Number two, we have to renounce them.

I want to encourage you to renounce the lies. We are going to do this in ministry time, not after this session but after the next session we are going to have a ministry time related to this. We are going to renounce our agreement with lies. It is not a one-time thing; it is something we do over and over. Because, using the analogy

of a spiritual stronghold or fortress, there are thousands and thousands of those stones in a fort around a city. It is an imperfect analogy, but the idea is that it is more than just renouncing it one time. There is a sticking with it. The goal is that we bring **every thought** into captivity. When I bring my mind into captivity, it seems ten minutes later the enemy is bringing a thought opposite of my mind being captive to obey Jesus.

3. We **resist Satan** and his heightened energy against us—referred to as “flaming missiles” and “fiery darts” (Eph. 6:16)—by using the authority of Jesus’ name (Eph. 6:10-11).

⁷**Submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. (Jas. 4:7)**

Number three, we resist Satan. We not only resist Satan by saying no to sinful things, but we actually use the authority of Jesus. You know, a lot of folks do not resist Satan. When Satan attacks them, and his flaming missiles strike them, they have this heightened sense of fear, anxiety, or lust that hits them. But again they ride the storm out. We need to say, “In the name of Jesus, I rebuke you and resist you.”

Resisting that temptation in that moment so we do not sin or suffer is not the only reason to resist him. When the devil attacks us, if he is unchallenged, he will keep attacking. Many believers do not know their authority in Christ so they ride the storm out and live in all kinds of unnecessary torment in their life, torment that could be driven away. We are to resist the devil, and he will flee.

V. ARGUMENTS AGAINST GOD THAT MUST BE CAST DOWN: TWO ESSENTIAL TRUTHS

- A. To understand how to overcome strongholds we must see 2 Cor. 10:3-5 in relation to 2 Cor. 11. In 2 Cor. 10:3-5, Paul called us to spiritual warfare, then gave an application of it in 2 Cor. 11:2-4. Paul declares two truths that are foundational to disarming personal strongholds in our mind.

²**For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. 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. 11:2-3)**

Arguments against God must be cast down. There are two essential truths that I want to really focus on here, two essential truths. We have been in 2 Corinthians 10, and now we are going to move over to 2 Corinthians 11. The point I want you to understand here is that 2 Corinthians 10-11 is one passage. Paul is giving one teaching here. You cannot separate 2 Corinthians 10 from 11. If you do, you will not catch the fullness of what Paul is saying, because here in 2 Corinthians 11 Paul identifies two truths that the devil is constantly challenging in our lives. He is identifying two truths for which the enemy wants to hold us in bondage to the lies corresponding to those two truths.

So 2 Corinthians 10, the passage we just looked at, is the call to spiritual warfare. 2 Corinthians 11 is the application. 2 Corinthians 10 tells us what to do, to cast down the argument. 2 Corinthians 11 gives us the arguments that we are supposed to cast down. It is very important when you put the two together. I want you to notice these two very important, foundational truths that we are to use as we cast down spiritual strongholds in our life. Again it is a thing that we do over and over and over; it is not a one-time deal.

Let’s read 2 Corinthians 11:2-3. He says, “For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy because I betrothed you”—That is the word, engaged. You know we talk about two young people being engaged. I guess some old people can be engaged too, help Lord—Paul says, “I betrothed you”—again the word betrothed means

engaged; the word we use today is engaged—“to one husband that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.” “Chaste” means pure.

So Paul is saying here that he is zealous. He is talking to the church that was known in the first century as the most carnal church. They had more compromise than any other church, rivaled only by the church of Laodicea. Paul says, “I realize that you are broken, and I realize you have got a lot of issues in your life”—the church of Corinth is, again, famous for its brokenness and its compromise—“but do you know you are betrothed, you are legally married to the King of kings. Did you know that?”

They think, “Well, I do not feel like I am. It does not really seem that real.”

He continues, “Did you know that the end of this you will be presented as a chaste, pure virgin before God because of what Jesus did for you. He sees you as pure, not in your brokenness and fallenness.” In verse 3, He says that there is a problem. He is going to go back to the spiritual stronghold idea. He says, “I am afraid lest somehow, as the devil deceived Eve by craftiness, the devil is corrupting your thinking to where you do not get what I just said.” That’s the essence of what Paul was saying. He is saying that the devil wants, in craftiness, to twist these doctrines so you do not get them and so he can bring you back into bondage.

- B. **Betrothed to one husband:** He desires you. You are the one that He wants! He wants you as His eternal partner. You are beautiful in His sight. The beauty that He possesses is the beauty that He freely imparts to us in salvation (Isa. 61:3). Jesus has deep *emotions* for us and is *committed* to sharing His heart, throne, secrets, and beauty with us. In the ancient world, a couple were legally married on the day they were betrothed. We were betrothed, or “engaged,” to Jesus on the day we were born again. The consummation of the marriage is in the age to come (Rev. 19:7-9).

Essential truth number one: Paul said that he betrothed you to one husband. Again, that husband is the King of kings. Now the spiritual truth is He desires you. I mean He enjoys deep fellowship and partnership with you forever starting the day you were born again. He actually enjoys and desires partnership with you. He does not look at you and say, “Well, that is a really hard case! That is going to take a lot of blood to cover that one.”

You know, some people get irrational and think they are a hard case as though the blood of Jesus or the heart of Jesus—both dimensions of the same truth—are not sufficient to cover them. They think, “I am really messed up.” Beloved, you are the one He wants or you are one of the ones that He wants. He wants you! He loves you more than you love you. It is a fact. He wants you as His eternal partner, not just after the resurrection. You are in partnership with Him now. He wants cooperation. He wants involvement in your life now in a deeper way. He has deep emotions for us. He is committed to share His heart, His throne, His secrets, His beauty.

Beloved, the very beauty that He possesses is the beauty He imparts to you forever. You are part of the aristocracy of the eternal city. Honestly you are part of the ruling class, the royal family of the eternal city forever. You may think, “Well, I know, but I am doing horrible in twenty areas. That is nice, but...” No! That is talking yourself right back into a spiritual stronghold!

In the ancient world when a couple got engaged, the day they were engaged they were considered legally married. Though they typically waited a year before their marriage ceremony and the consummation of their marriage, for the year of engagement they were legally married. So if they broke the engagement, they had to get a legal divorce. They actually had to go through the legal process of divorce. We don’t do it that way in the Western world. The idea here in this verse is that the day you were born again you were betrothed, so you are actually legally married to the Lord. The consummation means when we see the full glory of God; there is not a sexual connotation to this at all. It is being face to face in the glory of God with a resurrected body, and that fullness of our marriage begins in the resurrection. Beloved, you are married now to Him, meaning He desires

you. He wants to partner with you. He is already sharing His resources and unfolding a plan of your involvement with Him in His kingdom forever. Right now it has already begun in your life. The enemy does not want you to grasp this. You grasp this and your life will enter into a liberty and a freedom. You will cause trouble to his kingdom.

- C. **A chaste virgin:** The moment we are born again and receive the gift of Jesus' righteousness, we stand as a chaste virgin, pure in God's sight. We are declared righteous (clean) before God—as righteous as Jesus is. The righteousness we receive cannot be improved on, because it is God's very own righteousness. Everything that legally hinders us from receiving God's affections is removed.

¹⁷If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new...²¹For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (2 Cor. 5:17, 21)

The second foundational truth: you are a chaste virgin right now before Him. It is not based on your track record. It is based not on what you have done, but on what He did. We are talking about the full power of the cross, the gospel of grace in its glory. You were made a chaste virgin. Again that is the word; the word chaste means pure. You are a virgin in His sight because the power of the gift of righteousness that was given to you. This is radical. In our mind and emotions we do not feel the power of it. So the devil comes as the accuser and tells us the opposite. And so we live in the feeling of accusation instead of living in the confidence of the gift of righteousness.

Look what it says here in 2 Corinthians 5:17. You cannot read this too many times. "If anyone is in Christ"—no matter what bondage you have ever been in, that man or woman—"is a new creation." Your born-again spirit is made new the moment you are born again. Your mind and emotions are not renewed yet, but your spirit man is made new instantly and you have received the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus. You have received the indwelling Spirit, you are in the family of God, and you are betrothed to Jesus. Your born-again spirit actually is fully blameless or God the Holy Spirit could not dwell in you. Your mind and emotions and your body are not renewed yet, but the process of spiritual life is bringing our minds into agreement.

Remember, the effort we put in in our spiritual life is not to change God's mind, not to earn something from God, but is to bring our mind into agreement with God. We are not earning anything. When we see the truth of this gift, it produces gratitude. This gratitude makes us want to give all of our strength to the relationship, not to earn anything, but simply as the overflow of gratitude. A lot of folks get all confused. They think that if they put any effort in that they are trying to earn it.

No, you are not trying to change God's mind; you are trying to change your mind! God's mind is already changed, free gift. He wants you to experience more of it now in this age. The key to that is your mind coming into agreement with His mind, and that takes effort. There is discipline involved in bringing our cold mind before the bonfire of God's presence so that we are warmed and tenderized by the Word of God. It takes effort to do that, but we are not earning anything. That is one of the great lies of the enemy. Lots of young people hear the lies when, if they put any effort in, somebody says, "Legalism!" Legalism is only if you are trying to earn something from God, if you are trying to change God's mind and earn something.

No, you say, "I am not earning anything, I am full of gratitude, and I want to feel the fullness of it. I want total unity of my inner man because He already loves me fully. I want to enter into the experience of it, not just in the resurrection. I want to experience it more now."

We are declared clean before God. Do you know you are as clean before God as Jesus is? That just almost confounds our religious thinking! You received a righteousness so great even God cannot improve the righteousness that you received because it is His. It is perfect. It is 100 percent. God cannot improve the righteousness that you received the day you were born again. Beloved, a billion years from now in the resurrection you will not have a superior righteousness than you received the day you were born again.

- D. Many mistake their spiritual immaturity for being a hopeless and rebellious hypocrite. The devil wants us to mistake weakness for rebellion so that we give up in despair and hopelessness.

Many mistake spiritual immaturity for being a hypocrite. In their mind and emotions they are not lined up with the truth of who they are. They love Jesus, and they keep signing up to go 100 percent, but they come up short. They think, "I am just a hypocrite."

The devil chips in, "You are a liar. You are a hypocrite. You are a fake. Your love is false. You are just an absolute fake."

Those statements enter our brain and our heart, and we think, "Oh, I might as well just give up then."

The Word of God says, "Well, that is not what God thinks. That is the accuser. That is a stronghold."

- E. What is our core spiritual identity? Are we slaves to sin who struggle to love God? Or are we lovers of God who struggle with sin? Our love for God may be weak, but it is real. Weak love is not false.

*What is your core spiritual identity? Here is what I want to know: are you a slave of sin who struggles to love God or—The answer is no. I heard someone say, "Amen." No! No! Every now and then you got to slip the answer in ahead of time—Are you a slave of sin who struggles to love God **or** at the core are you a lover of God who still struggles with sin?*

Beloved, you are one who loves God. That is who you are, that is what you do, and that is what you are about. You struggle with sin. But you are a lover of God who struggles with sin, not a slave of sin who is struggling to love God. It is a very, very different core identity. When your love is weak, it does not mean it is false. Weak love is still real; it is just growing.

- F. We do not define ourselves by our struggles, but by His work on the cross and His desire for us. When we feel dirty or shameful, we live dirty and shameful lives. When we feel clean, we live clean lives. When we feel desired by God and clean before Him, we will live differently.

Do we define ourselves by our struggles? "Man, I am just so in bondage! Oh, I just feel so left out. I just feel so lethargic. I mean nothing is happening in my life."

Or do we define our life by the work of the cross and His desire and what He says about us? Here is what I found over the years in my own life and in the lives of people I've pastored over forty years: when people feel shame, they live in shame, and they live shamefully. When people feel dirty, they live dirty.

When they feel clean in God's sight, even in their weakness, they live far more cleanly and they feel desired by God. They live very differently than when they feel God saying, "You know what? I am going to give you one more chance, but this is really the last time."

- G. These two truths redefine our life: we see God’s desire for us, and we see ourselves as a virgin in His sight. These two truths disarm our most powerful negative emotions such as fear of rejection.

These are the two truths: being betrothed, He desires us; being as a virgin in His sight, we are pure. Our image of God is related to those two truths. Our image of ourselves is related to those two truths. When we see those two truths, both the way we view God and the way we view ourselves change dramatically.

- H. We must turn our eyes from past failures and all the voices that condemn us. We must unfetter ourselves from man’s applause and condemnation so that we can receive God’s truth about us.

VI. DECEIVED BY FALSE TEACHINGS

- A. In context, Paul is exhorting believers to pull down spiritual strongholds (2 Cor. 10:4-5) by exposing and renouncing lies against Jesus and the truth of the gospel (2 Cor. 11:3-4).

³I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted [led astray, NASB] from the simplicity that is in Christ. ⁴For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted—you may well put up with it! (2 Cor. 11:3-4)

Paul goes on in verse 3-4 to talk about exposing the lies. He wants us to refuse the false teachings. Let’s read verse 3 again. He says, “I fear lest somehow as the devil deceived Eve by craftiness”—by spinning the truth is the idea, spinning it, craftiness. Not blatant, but just getting people to believe things that have truth in them but is not the whole truth, only part of the truth where they put a negative spin to it. Paul says that as the devil deceived Eve by craftiness, he wants to corrupt your mind. One translation, the New American Standard, said that he wants to lead us astray from the simplicity of the cross, the simplicity of the God who is love.

- B. As the serpent, Satan, deceived Eve with craftiness, so false teachers (called Judaizers) deceived the Corinthians with lies about Jesus and the gospel. Satan’s goal was that the Corinthians would leave the simplicity of being received by God, which came from knowing that He desired them and had freely given them His righteousness. The Judaizers preached another Jesus and operated in a different spirit with a different gospel from Paul!

In verse 4, he says, “For if somebody comes”—because in Corinth, it was happening. There were these false teachers that were actually preaching about Jesus, but not accurately. He says that when somebody preaches that, they are preaching another Jesus. They are using the name Jesus but it is not the Jesus of the Bible. You receive a different spirit; you are receiving a different gospel. Paul rebukes them, saying that they were putting up with it. He asks why they would take a step aside from the true Jesus, the right spirit, and the right gospel. Why would you put up with a distortion?

1. **Another Jesus:** The Judaizers preached “another Jesus.” They believed that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah, but they did not believe that He offered the gift of righteousness by faith, nor did they see Him as the Bridegroom God filled with desire for His people. Once we believe lies about God, then we believe lies about who we are in Christ. We can only know the truth about *our* heart as we understand the truth about *God’s* heart.

He said that they were hearing about another Jesus. These men, called Judaizers, preached Jesus. They claimed to be saved. They claimed to love Jesus. They said He was Messiah. But, they didn’t like this gift of

righteousness idea, this free gift of righteousness. They didn't like the Bridegroom God. They didn't like the God of desire. They had another Jesus that they called Jesus of Nazareth the Messiah, but not the One described by the Bible.

2. **Another gospel:** The true gospel is motivated by God's free gift and deep desire for us. The false gospel that they received called them to *earn* God's favor and salvation; it kept them in the identity of a slave of sin.

Number two, they had another gospel. Beloved, the false gospel called them to earn God's favor and salvation. The truth is we cannot earn the favor of God. We cannot earn the love of God. We cannot change God's mind by earning it.

Again the effort we put out is to change our own mind. Paul says in Hebrew 4:11 that we labor to enter rest. What he means in Hebrews 4:11-12 is we labor to renew our mind. We labor to enter rest; that seems like a contradiction. No, you put effort into bringing your mind into agreement with God, and you enter into the rest that the Word of God freely made available to us.

The gospel they heard kept them in the identity of a slave to sin. When they heard the "gospel" that they heard, they did not feel like they were lovers of God who still struggled; they thought they were slaves of sin who were failing at attempting to love God.

3. **A different spirit:** They operated in a spirit of condemnation, fear, and bondage. The spirit of bondage never empowers our heart in love; it never imparts to us the power to obey God.

Paul said that these other preachers had a different spirit. He said that the fruit of what they preached led people into condemnation, fear, and bondage. The spirit of bondage never empowers to people to be wholehearted in love. The spirit of bondage and the spirit of accusation never empower you with gratitude to say, "I am going to give all of my energy into the relationship, not to earn, but because I am so grateful in love. I understand who I am, and I understand who He is." This wrong spirit never produces that response.

- C. **Summary:** Paul taught us to use God's Word to dismantle spiritual strongholds in their lives—to cast down lies against Jesus and lies concerning who they were in Christ. In essence, he declared that they were betrothed to Jesus, desired by God, and that they stood as virgins, clean before Him.

Amen. Let's just stand before the Lord for a moment. We are going to have ministry time on this after the next session. But let's take some time now and just wait in the presence of the Lord. We are going to do this for a minute. We are just going to spend a moment to pray and then I want you to get in your small groups.