

What is a spiritual stronghold?

Written by Bill Perkins

A spiritual stronghold is a fortress of lies built in the soul. Stone by stone, lie by lie, the fortress takes shape until it seems impregnable. Within its walls stands an idol that produces shame, anger, lust, greed, malice, hatred and other vile thoughts. The only ones allowed through its gate are more lies and lying spirits. This fortress is designed to keep out truth and undermine our freedom in Christ.

Paul wrote about the power of a stronghold when he said this, “For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing” (Romans 7:18-19). In contemporary vernacular we call such enslavement obsessions, compulsions, addictions or bad habits. God calls them spiritual strongholds.

Divine Power to Demolish

Writing to the Corinthians Paul describes the source of our enemy’s attack, “For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:3-5).

What makes these strongholds so strong? The answer is twofold.

The First Strength

Arguments against the knowledge of God are the first strength of a stronghold. If God is real but can’t be known, then nothing matters. Once we accept that lie, a fortress of lies will be built upon it. Such lies drive us to find arguments, or reasons, *not* to believe God rather than reasons to believe him. They compel us to disobey God rather than obey him. These reasons include justifications, projections, minimizations and rationalizations. In the Garden, Adam didn’t accept responsibility for his sin. He projected it onto Eve.

The Second Strength

The word “pretension” speaks of a strong desire for advancement . . . a striving after something higher than oneself . . . the desire for recognition of accomplishment without actual possession of the necessary ability to achieve the accomplishment. This is the second strength of a stronghold.

Satan was pretensions when he sought the throne of God. Adam and Eve were pretentious when they sought to be like God (Isa. 14; Ezekiel 28, Gen. 3:5). We are pretentious when we lift our desires and wishes above God. Anytime God tells us one thing and we do another, we are pretentious.

Where There's an Idol, There's a Demon

We've all had, or have spiritual strongholds. Perhaps the most sobering reality is that where there is a stronghold there is an idol and where there is an idol there is a demon. In 1 Corinthians 10:19-20 when Paul wrote about food sacrificed to idols he said this: "Do I mean then that food sacrificed to an idol is anything, or that an idol is anything? ²⁰No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons."

The power of an idol resides, not in the idol itself, but in the demon attached to it. But this raises an important issue: can a demon inhabit a believer? Next week I'll address that thorny issue.