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Why a mask hides the true you

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According to the Merriam Webster dictionary a stronghold is, “a protected place where the members of a military group stay and can defend themselves against attack. I would add that it’s also a place from which an army can mount an attack.”

A Fortress in the Soul

In the spiritual arena a stronghold is a fortress in the soul where an army of lies fight to keep out the knowledge of God (2 Corinthians 10:3-5). It’s where we set up an idol and devote our time, energy and resources to serving it. It’s the place that keeps us from living free of fear, rage, depression, despair, suicidal thoughts, lust and a host of other issues. It’s the place where we hide our shameful lies and secrets that we want no one to see.

Two People

A stronghold makes us two people: the one we want others to see, and our true-self.

Strongholds blind us to this duplicity. We believe we are the mask the stronghold has us wear. We don’t realize the person we pretend to be, the one without the regretful memories, evil thoughts, impure urges, and determined secrecy, isn’t the same person we would be without the stronghold.

A Twenty-Five-Foot Tapeworm

Is a man hauling around a ball and chain going to see himself differently than if he didn’t have the restraint? The stronghold shapes our identity around a false-self. It’s an evil we want nobody to see and so we pretend it’s not there. By then the stronghold has taken over like a 25-foot tapeworm that irritates, inflames and consumes. Not much left over to nurture our real-self.

Glory Through Weakness

When I shield my true self and my struggles and failures from others, I project my glory. When I open up and share my disappointments and struggles the glory of God is seen through my weaknesses. Why? Because his power is perfected in my weakness (2 Corinthians 7-10). The very thing the stronghold, with its lies, drives me to hide, will bring glory to God once he destroys the stronghold and creates strength where there was weakness. But instead of exposing the lies, my false-self, with its pride and fear, creates an inauthentic person to impress others.

Meanwhile, my true-self is intermingled with the toxins of the false-self so I believe the false-self is me. This drives me to hide the bad and project the good. And then our secret is exposed and the false-self breaks though into our reality. Someone sees what we’ve been hiding and we scramble to clean up the mess.

The Moment We're Seen

Driven by a need to protect the false-image we minimize, justify, rationalize and project the issue back at the person unfortunate enough to see the truth for just a moment. We don’t stop to ask the question—how much like the person I pretend to be am I really?

Next week I’ll write about how to know if you’ve got a stronghold. I’d love to hear your thoughts and questions so feel free to share them.