

Life's Tough Questions, Part Four

Am I Just Meant to Struggle in a Certain Area of My Life?

2 Corinthians 10: 3 - 6 (NIV)

June 21, 2009

Last Sunday, we considered the tough question, "Why do I still struggle with sin in my life?" And we shared some reasons why this happens to Christians:

1. I am more earthly minded than heavenly minded;
2. I have put sin to death but not put it to death;
3. I struggle dealing with people;
4. I put a sin out of my life, but put nothing spiritual in its place; and
5. I remain unsatisfied with my life.

Today, I would like to examine a question that is a follow up to last Sunday's question: "Am I just meant to struggle in a certain area of my life?" It may be excessive anger; it may be uncontrolled lust that is driven by pornography; it may be materialistic living that causes me to cheat others at work; any number of areas in our lives have the potential to subvert our sincere desire to honor God in our life. And sadly, many Christians come to the conclusion, "I am powerless to control these thoughts, or emotions, or habits. I am doomed to repeat the same cycle of temptation and sin in my life."

Well, God tells us there is not a single area of our life where we are unable to claim victory over sin. That is what I want to address today: how can I take victory over that tough area in my life? I want to give you an important term the Word of God raises: "Stronghold." Read with me 2 Corinthians 10: 3 – 6 (NIV): *"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. And we will be ready to punish every act of disobedience, once your obedience is complete."*

1. Stronghold: Spiritual term for something entrenched in our life that doesn't go away easily (2 Corinthians 10: 4).

A. A stronghold is a fortress, and a fortress by its makeup is intended to be difficult to defeat. In ancient times, a stronghold stubbornly resisted armies of the most powerful, determined king. To defeat a stronghold called for special tactics and weapons, and most likely would require a lengthy siege.

B. By assigning this problem the term 'stronghold' Paul is telling us there is a wide spread problem in the Christian community.

1. Remember, Paul applied this term to his First Century audience – the Believers in the Church at Corinth. Thus, the term applied to a Christian problem.

C. We all have things that hinder our walk with God, that are difficult to easily put out of our life.

1. So, the reality that I have a stronghold in my life does not make me any less a Christian; actually, I am probably in the majority in this case

– whether they admit it or not, they, too are battling strongholds just as I am.

I also am certain of another thing regarding strongholds:

2. The devil would want me to fight a stronghold with earthly weapons – he knows they aren't effective against the problem (vs. 3 – 4).

A. When dealing with a stronghold in my life, I must be sure to use a spiritually based approach to deal with it.

B. The world floods our marketplace of choice with worldly answers and solutions.

1. Oh, they will remove the problem for a short time, but unfortunately the problem will return after a season, and will likely be an even greater, more entrenched stronghold in my life.

2. Remember the parable I mentioned last week (Matthew 12: 43 – 45) where Jesus spoke of an evil spirit who, having been cast out of his host, wandered abroad for a season, only to return to find its former home clean but empty; he goes and invites seven even more evil spirits to move in with him, and the ending for the host is worse than the beginning.

3. The man likely did everything the world told him to do – Jesus says everything was put in order – but he was ill-equipped to completely keep the evil spirit away from his life.

I submit there are two crucial steps I must follow to defeat a stronghold in my life:

3. The first step to defeat a stronghold is to recognize the real enemy (v. 3).

A. The enemy of every believer is the devil himself.

1. The enemy isn't other Christians; it is not that unpleasant co-worker, or that family member who gets on your last nerve whenever you are in their presence; it is not that neighbor who seems to know just when and how to put you down and ridicule you.

B. In fact, Paul reminds us in Ephesians 6: 12 (NIV), "*for our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.*"

1. I am afraid it is all too often we take our eyes off the real, dangerous enemy who can truly hurt us and become focused on a perceived enemy who is actually little more than a distraction or a stand in for the real enemy.

C. When I study how Jesus reacted to the Pharisees who attacked Him at every opportunity, I am humbled by the fact He never treated the way I would have likely treated them if I were in His place – I would have treated the way I treat any enemy. I would wish them dead! And my treatment of them would show how I wished them dead!

1. But Jesus patiently continued to teach His message of grace and salvation and love. He understood that people were enslaved to the false theology of salvation by way of works. Their opposition to Him was an outgrowth of the world's false teachings.

2. Yes, I must use His example and never forget who is my real enemy.

4. The second step is to use God's equipment (v. 4).

A. A soldier must know how to maximize the weapons he has been issued. He must have experience operating his weapons and equipment, so that when he is faced with a sudden attack, he can immediately employ the proper weapon to counter the threat.

B. In other words, we are not to play around with strongholds. We need the right equipment for each unique challenge; God has the equipment for any contingency. We need to use them!

C. Our weapons: listed in Ephesians 6: 13 – 18

1. The Word of God – It is a lamp and light in the darkness (Psalm 119: 105); a two-edged sword (Hebrews 4: 12): “... *and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*”

2. The Faith of God – The world can often erode my optimism, undermine my best intentions; but the world cannot defeat my relationship with God if I cling to His promises.

3. The Truth of God – When the world slanders my beliefs, I can claim my victory over sin and death – look it up, its in the book, and furthermore, the Holy Spirit has been given me as a down payment on that victory (Ephesians 1: 13 – 14)!

4. The Salvation of God – Live as if your are a child of the King, because you are!

5. The Spirit of God – Essential activities of the Spirit of God in the lives of Believers: to lead us (Romans 8: 14); teach us (1 Corinthians 2: 13); help us pray (1 Cor. 14: 15); and to comfort us (John 14: 16).

When I was a boy, education was dedicated to the ‘Three R’s:’ Reading, ‘Riting, and ‘Rithmetic. Those were the core disciplines of a well-rounded education.

For me as a Christian, the core discipline of my spiritual life are also the ‘Three R’s.’ they are: **Remember** the price for my forgiveness has already been paid in full; **Recommit** my self daily to my relationship with my Savior; and **Rejoice** in the Lord always, for when I am rejoicing I am focusing on the goodness and mercy of my Heavenly Father. When I am developing the Three Spiritual R’s, the strongholds will give way.

Let’s pray!