



Glenn Brown

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441 ½ Lark Drive

Grand Junction, Colorado 81504

telephone 970-434-1377

CASTING DOWN STRONGHOLDS

2 Corinthians 10:3-5 reads as follows in the New Living Translation: *We are human, but we don't wage war as humans do. We use God's mighty weapons, not worldly weapons, to knock down the strongholds of human reasoning and to destroy false arguments. We destroy every proud obstacle that keeps people from knowing God. We capture their rebellious thoughts and teach them to obey Christ.*

What amazing insights into our human condition are contained in these three short verses! Following are some of the things God is showing us:

1. Although we are human, we are engaged in an unseen, spiritual war that must be waged on a spiritual plane.
2. God intends for us to win this war, so He has provided us with the weapons we need.
3. The enemy identified in this passage consists of "human reasoning" and "false arguments," bolstered by "proud and rebellious thoughts," that create a "stronghold" in people's minds. (A stronghold is defined as: "A fortress; A place having strong defenses; A place where a group having certain views or attitudes is concentrated.")
4. The purpose of this stronghold is to keep people from knowing God.
5. Once people come to know God, they must be taught to obey Christ. (There is no such thing as knowing God apart from obeying God.)

A parallel passage in the same epistle is 2 Cor. 4:3-4: *If the Good News we preach is hidden behind a veil, it is hidden only from people who are perishing. Satan, who is the god of this world, has blinded the minds of those who don't believe. They are unable to see the glorious light of the Good News. They don't understand this message about the glory of Christ, who is the exact likeness of God.*

Some sobering and even disturbing insights are contained in this passage, and they are insights that could only come from God:

1. The good news of the message about Christ and how He came to offer salvation as a gift from a gracious God is hidden from many people. There is no way they can even comprehend the message because the truth is hidden, as it were, behind a veil.
2. They are blinded to the truth, the light, by Satan, not just by their wrong perceptions. That is to say, Satan has planted these false thoughts in their minds.
3. Satan is now, in this present moment, "the god of this world." As such, he has enormous power over individual men and women, and over their collective lives (nations, governments, businesses, schools, families). Is it any wonder the daily news is so dark and terrible?
4. We understand from Genesis and Romans, not from this passage, that title to the world was given by the Creator to mankind (Adam and Eve) in the garden, but when they sinned they lost that favored status and the title was surrendered to the deceiver, the liar, Satan.

Part 1 – Strongholds in society

There are many examples of ungodly strongholds in large groups of people: false religions; cults; nations that worship their leader as a god, such as the Emperor of Rome, Hitler in Nazi Germany, Kim Jong Un in North Korea; the aggressive beliefs and practices of the homosexual movement in our nation; and the mindset of humanism which has permeated our education, media, government, entertainment, and folk wisdom.

Consider for a moment the mindset of humanism, or the Western secular worldview. When a person becomes a Christian, he has already been programmed with this perspective about “reality.” He has been taught all sorts of lies about God, nature, the origin of life, etc. Much of this information is in the realm of speculation and philosophy and is in fact unprovable, but it has been presented as having been scientifically confirmed, and it supposedly proves that the universe created itself – and that life came forth from inert matter and man evolved into his present god-like status. In our society, one challenges these unprovable assumptions at the risk of his reputation if not his career. This clearly represents human reasoning and false arguments flowing from proud and rebellious hearts. The Bible declares that these arguments did not come from man’s intellect but that they came from the god of this world, the master deceiver, Satan.

The Bible reveals that the universe did not just “happen,” but that, *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.* It reveals that the universe is not impersonal, it was created by a loving God, *God is love.* It reveals that existence (man) has a purpose and an obligation to his Creator, *Here is the conclusion, fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man..... You shall love the Lord your God with, all your heart, soul, and mind.....and love your neighbor as yourself.* The commandment to love God with our minds shows that true science and education is to be embraced and not feared and rejected. The Bible reveals that God entered into our fallen world as a Savior to fully reveal the God who had been hidden and to save mankind from his destructions.

How do we cast out the incredibly powerful stronghold of godless humanism? By proclaiming and living out the Gospel of Jesus Christ. *Go and make disciples of all the nations, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.* And by allowing the Bible, the word of God, to do its powerful inner work: *Be transformed by the renewing of your minds....*

Part 2 - Strongholds in individuals

A simple definition that covers a part of the meaning of a stronghold is “a lie in the mind.” When a person comes into the Christian life, he brings along some junk, some lies in his mind and heart. Obviously, he has absorbed some of these lies from his environment, his family, school, and society. For example, he has been taught all sorts of lies about God, nature, the origin of life, etc, as mentioned above. But he is also carrying his own personal kit of lies that have come from his own history. When I am teaching about this subject, I hold up an old-fashioned coffee basket with a paper filter. Friends, everyone (that includes you and me) has one of these filters/strongholds in his or her mind. It does not contain coffee grounds but lies: filthy, disgusting lies, distortions, accusations against God, hatred, perversions, self-condemnation. These are the things we have believed deep within our souls, below the level of consciousness, and they have twisted and destroyed our relationships and any chance of peace and fulfillment. Let me share a few examples. First, an example from a book by Danny Silk, management pastor at Bethel Church in Redding, California:

“A friend of mine, a brilliant pastor and teacher, called me one day and said, ‘I have a situation, a worship leader who just confessed to his wife about an immoral relationship. It’s been going on for four years and is with his wife’s best friend. We don’t know what to do, because this guy is amazing. He has been taking our church to new places in God. We’ve started a school of ministry and he and his wife lead it. There is an amazing anointing on this man and his wife.’ This pastor had called me because he knew what had to happen when the truth came out, when you break the rules. They had to put the man through the ‘restoration process,’ which was going to be agonizing for the couple and for the church. This pastor also knew that the restoration process we had at Bethel looked different from the ordinary.

We agreed to meet with them, and two days later my wife, Sheri, and I met the couple. The wife looked as though she’d been crying for a week, and he looked as though he had had been dragged along the freeway behind their car. He was wracked with shame. He knew he had broken the rules and broken his wife’s heart and needed to be punished. He readily let us know what an evil scumbag he was, that he knew how selfish and evil he was, and that this was not his first instance of unfaithfulness.

We did not believe that what this man had done was evidence of his true identity. Paul said we once were darkness, and now we *are* light. One time as I walked around our church property, I stepped on a board and a nail went through my foot. I could clearly see and feel that a nail had entered my foot, but never once did I think, ‘I’m a nail!’ I was, however, very interested in getting that nail out of my foot. We leaders should not be afraid of sin. Sin is nothing! Sin is darkness! One flick of the switch and *click* – it’s out, it’s over!

So I asked the question I ask everyone in these situations: ‘What is the problem?’ He looked at me like I was drunk. “I just told you what I did. I’m a lowlife scumbag. What do you mean, what is the problem?” I asked, “What is the problem that would drive a man to do such destructive stuff to his family, church, and God?” “I don’t know,” he responded. “Have you repented?” Yes, he replied. “Of what?” I asked. “I don’t know.”

I didn't know what the problem was either. So I asked, "What is your connection with your wife?" I know that adultery is usually a symptom that a couple struggles with intimacy. "We don't have one." "What is your wife's love language?" "Encouraging words," he said, looking at her. His wife, sobbing, said, "In 18 years he has hardly ever told me he loves me." We were finally onto something. He said through tears, "I can't tell anybody that I love them, not even my kids. I've turned out just like my father. My father can't express love to anyone either." We talked about this for few minutes, and suddenly the light came on. He cried out, "I've been deceived. This is exactly what I hated about my father. I've been deceived."

I invited him to walk through a few minutes of forgiving his father. Wham! He turned to his wife and said with complete sincerity, "I love you so much. I am, so sorry!" I wanted to start singing, I am free at last, thank God Almighty, I am free at last!

Later the man went home, gathered his children, sat them down, looked into their eyes and said, "Please forgive me. I have withheld my love for you for your whole lives. I am so sorry. I only love you. I only adore you." He showered love on his children for the first time in their lives.

When Danny talked to the man's pastor, he encouraged him to delete the usual process that goes along with restoration because the man had truly repented. "He is a changed man. He doesn't need punishment. He needs accountability to make sure he keeps the light on, and he needs to clean up his mess."

I (Glenn) thought this was a beautiful example of discovering and casting out a stronghold hidden in a man's mind. It is also an example of how God treats us when we come to the light and truly repent. God is not into punishing us. Jesus already took our punishment. And a church, a fellowship, doesn't need to punish a person if it is clear that he or she has truly repented and been set free. (Actually, the Scriptural process is redemptive, not punitive.) This is a tricky subject, because Scripture is clear about the steps that need to be taken when a leader falls into sin, not only for his sake but for the fellowship. (1 Cor. 5 & 6; Gal. 6; 1 Tim. 5:17-20)

I want to share a cross section of some of the people I have counseled to illustrate the deep-rooted strongholds and lies that have captured normal, everyday Christians like you and me:

- a. **A lady in her 40's** – never knew her birth father; her adopted father never ever hugged her or showed love or approval. His total fixation was for her to be thin so she would not reflect badly on the family. (Stronghold of perfectionism, rejection, etc.)
- b. **A lady in her 50's** – never knew birth father. Mother cold and indifferent. Step dad controlling, critical, and touched her inappropriately at times. (Stronghold of criticism, self condemnation, and fear of insanity.)
- c. **A man in his 40's** – Parents were druggies and hippies. Adopted father beat him starting at age 5. Started using drugs at 12. Addicted to meth, heroin, porn, and witchcraft. (Strongholds!!!!)
- d. **A man in his 30's** – Raised in a rigid, rule-based church and church family. Father very religious, but screamed and abused his wife. Mother also cold and angry. (Stronghold of anger at God and toward all women, including his wife.)
- e. **A woman in her 20's** – Raised by a loving father and a cold, indifferent mother. When she was 8 years old, her father told her he was divorcing her mother, but that it would not affect his relationship with her, that he would always spend time with her and love her. She never saw him again. (Stronghold – God, and all men, will lie to you and betray you.)

The good news: If our fathers and mothers were not kind and loving, God is not like them. Jesus said, *When you have seen me, you have seen the Father*. Notice in the stories about Jesus how little children ran to him, and He picked them up and held them. That tells us something about our Father in heaven, because Jesus was just like God! Jesus said that he came to heal our wounds and to set the captives free. (Luke 4:18) Ask Him to reveal any lies/strongholds in your mind, and you cast them out by the authority of His name. Hallelujah!

HISTORY CHANNEL

I learned something while watching History Channel the other day. They were showing the city of Rome, and when they showed the Coliseum, the reporter said that General Titus, who led the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, was the son of Vespasian. Titus returned to Rome with all the loot from Jerusalem and the temple, and with maybe a million captive Jews who were sold into slavery. With the proceeds, Vespasian built the Coliseum and more or less bought the Emperorship for himself. I had never heard that before, but I'm sure it is true because it was on television.

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU ARE FALSELY ACCUSED

Marcus Yoars lists five principles for responding like Jesus in the face of injustice:

- 1) **Hold your tongue.** The tongue is a really dangerous little muscle. The Bible compares it to a spear, a sword, and a wildfire. When you're treated unfairly, don't lash out in "defense" with your words. Don't even grumble, gossip, or complain. Consider Jesus during his arrest and trial.
- 2) **Put things in perspective.** Marcus says that when he meets persecuted believers from around the world, he is often struck by how consumed most are with the bigger mission of sharing the Good News. They act a lot like Jesus. How about us?
- 3) **Turn the other cheek.** Jesus' words have been part of our language for generations, but we can always find some reason that they don't apply in this situation. It is not the way of our flesh or our culture, but Jesus calls it the way of the Kingdom.
- 4) **Understand that vengeance is the Lord's.** Someone said that you don't have the right to judge and condemn and exact vengeance on someone unless you love them enough to die for them. That just describes one person that I know of.

Forgive your accusers. Jesus' prayer and declaration of forgiveness at the very moment of the agony of being crucified have echoed down through the centuries. He forgave those who put him on the cross, and that includes you and me. Let's ask him for grace to forgive those who falsely accuse us and who otherwise wound us and our loved ones.

FAST FOOD IN THE BIBLE

Did you know that in several places the Bible mentions "fast food?" One of the places is in Genesis 18 when three angels appeared to Abraham. Abraham was so honored that he asked if he could prepare some food for them. They agreed, and notice how Abraham zipped around and prepared some really fast food for them:

*So Abraham **ran back to the tent** and said to Sarah, "**Hurry!** Get three large measures of your best flour, knead it into dough, and bake some bread." Then Abraham **ran out to the herd** and chose a tender calf and gave it to his servant, who **quickly prepared it**. When the food was ready, Abraham took some yogurt and milk and the roasted meat, and he served it to the men.*

Sarah hastily got some flour, kneaded it into dough, built a fire under the oven, and rapidly baked some bread.

Abraham ran out to the herd, picked out a calf, gave it to his servant, who cut its throat and bled it out, gutted it, skinned it, cut up the pieces, washed them, built a fire, and quickamente roasted the meat.

And you thought McDonalds invented fast food!

THE PRECIOUS BLOOD

Ray Beeson relates the following story: One night at a church service, a young woman felt the tug of God at her heart. She accepted Jesus as her Lord and Savior. She had a very rough past involving alcohol, drugs and prostitution. But the change in her was evident. As time went on, she became a faithful member of the church and began teaching young children. It was not long until she caught the eye and heart of the pastor's son, and they began to make wedding plans.

This is when the problems began. About half of the church did not think a woman with a past such as hers was suitable for a pastor's son. They decided to have a meeting, and as they made their arguments tensions increased and things began to get out of hand.

The young woman became very upset about all the things brought up about her past. As she began to cry, the pastor's son stood to speak. He could not bear the pain it was causing the one he loved. He said, "My fiancée's past is not what is on trial here. What you are questioning is the ability of the blood of Jesus to wash away sin. Today you have put the blood of Jesus on trial. So does it wash away sin or not?"

The whole church began to weep as they realized they had been slandering the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Is there some Christian you know, an acquaintance, a church member, a family member, that you secretly continue to condemn because of some sin they committed in the past? More to the point, are you that Christian that you cannot seem to forgive even though you have cast yourself on the mercy of the Lord? How dare you! You have been questioning the

ability of the blood of Jesus to wash away sin - - some other person's sin, and your sin. Friend, you need to repent and receive the forgiveness of the One who died on a cross and shed His blood for you.

DOES GOD STILL HEAL TODAY?

For several years people in our church have been serving food each Sunday afternoon to folks living around Kimwood Park, a depressed area in Clifton. Last Sunday afternoon a man of about 50 received a sack of groceries but was unable to carry it to his car because of pain in both shoulders caused by fibromyalgia. The man had been living with intense pain for three years to the point that he could hardly ride his motorcycle. Joey Yamaguchi, son of Kirk and Jane, carried the sack for the man and then asked him if he could pray for him. The man agreed and Joey prayed for him three times. On the third time, both shoulders popped with an audible sound that both of them heard, "Pop! Pop," and all pain immediately disappeared. The man was so excited that he came back to the park.

Joey told Bob Clifford about the healing and Bob went over to see him. The man told Bob that last November he attended the funeral of his best friend who had committed suicide. Pastor Kirk preached the funeral sermon, and the man said that for the first time in his life he started to wonder if there was really a God. Then he said that when his shoulders were healed he immediately knew there was a God, and that he had right then committed himself to Christ. Hallelujah

(The answer to the question in caps is yes.)

God Bless

Glenn

casabrn441@gmail.com

WEBSITE: glennbrownministries.com

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