

Dealing with "Strongholds"

Excerpted from the Arrival Kit by Dr. Ralph Neighbour

1. Strongholds

The best athletes are always teenagers between the ages of 10 and 20. This is because teenagers at this stage are at their peak in terms of physical development and muscle coordination, and they have experience in participating in various sports. Likewise, a spiritual "teenager" has passed through the childhood stage of the Christian life. He or she has also gained some "battle experience" from the many battles with Satan. Someone once said, "You must conquer the internal strife before you can fight the external war!" The "weaknesses" you see in your life are "strongholds" of Satan.

A "stronghold" is a fortified position controlled by a powerful force. However, this power cannot completely control everything -- it can only control where there are strongholds. This term is used eighteen times in the Bible, referring to the army hiding in a "fortified camp" during war. It is also used to describe those areas of a Christian's inner world that are still controlled by Satan.

Paul talks about "strongholds" in 2 Corinthians 10:4: "For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds." Then in verse 5 he explains what "strongholds" are: "We destroy (arguments) and every (self-exalted thing) that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ." The noun in brackets is the meaning of the original Greek text. From this we can see that the so-called "strongholds" are all related to our thoughts. The term "self-exaltation" refers to those people in Genesis 11:4 who "will build us a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and make a name for ourselves, so that we will not be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth." Satan attempts to incite Christians to doubt God and encourage them to seek their own glory instead of giving glory to the Lord Jesus. If we let it have its way, it will inject all kinds of fears, doubts and worries into our minds.

"Strongholds" usually include lust, pride, bitterness, unforgiveness, resentment, jealousy, greed, envy, and similar feelings. All of these might have been part of your thought before you entered the Kingdom of God. Christ wants to set you free now. You do not have to let these "strongholds" hold you back anymore!

Identify the problem

Read Ephesians 4:17-24; Philippians 2:12; 1 Corinthians 10:13

Here it says "the inner world of Christians...", which means that only Christians have so-called

"Strongholds." Unbelievers do not have this problem because they are completely controlled by Satan. A Christian may have "Strongholds" in his body, mind, will, and emotions.

The grace in the Kingdom of God is sufficient to make your life victorious. To achieve this, you must tear down all those aspects of your life that are not under your control (strongholds). Since we extend our old way of life into our new life, we are limited in every way and cannot fully triumph in our new life.

Paul said in Philippians 2:12, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." Paul was not referring to our decision to accept Jesus, but to our daily salvation; we must be saved from the inner life level of our daily failures. When we give ourselves completely to our risen Lord, He will work in our lives in a new way.

If you already have a "listening room" in your life (see the article "Listening Room"), then you can begin to free yourself from the "strongholds" in your life. God will completely change your life, and you will become a "young man" in the kingdom of God. "Young men" are those who have "overcome the evil one." The purpose of this article is to guide you to victory; only after you have defeated the "strongholds" in your own life can you overcome the external battles.

Therefore, you need to gradually review your past life "folder". Identify those "strongholds" that Christ wants to heal. It is very important to face all the hurt and sin in your past life one by one. Because if we want to be completely freed from "strongholds", we must start from the root causes of problems in our present life (such as sin, hurt, curse, etc.).

Paul often refers to our "old man." Although we cannot get rid of the entanglement of the old man before entering eternity, we can be freed from many "strongholds." When we tear down these "strongholds" one by one, we will be able to break free from the bondage of the old man and gain freedom.

There are three aspects of our cleansing that are provided by the blood of Jesus Christ. In the first level, we receive forgiveness from the third heaven (1 John 1:9). Despite this, many people still do not "feel" that their sins are forgiven. In the second level, we will have a good conscience (Acts 24:16; 1 Corinthians 4:4). The many scars left by sin in our lives can only be cleansed and healed in the third level.

1 Corinthians 10:13 "No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. But God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear, but with the temptation will also provide a way of escape, so that you can bear it." Please memorize this verse. You have to keep it in mind at all times!

2. Soul Ties

Read Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:5; 1 Corinthians 6:15-17

A "soul tie" refers to an unhealthy connection between two people. It is not only a "memory" or "emotional" obsession with another person, but also a kind of spiritual connection. Soul ties involve emotional or physical connections, including sexual relationship. It also refers to an abnormal and binding relationship between people and their parents, friends, brothers or sisters. Sometimes, some things that once worried us have become a thing of the past or even forgotten, but they still become "strongholds" in our lives, functioning as Satan's weapon to manipulate our lives.

Soul ties occur in the following situations:

1. Your love for others has replaced your worship and dependence on God. This situation may occur between you and a person who holds an important place in your life. Maybe it's a mentor, spouse, boyfriend, girlfriend, or even a son or daughter.

Abraham allowed Isaac to replace God in his life, so God had to ask him to sacrifice Isaac. Abraham obeyed God's instructions and was ready to do so. However, just as he took action to show his willingness to sever this "soul tie", God immediately stopped him from doing so. Because Abraham had once again allowed God to reign in his heart.

2. You allow others to take over the intimacy you want between you and your spouse. If you are unmarried, this refers to physical relations with someone else within the context of marriage. If you are married, it refers to emotional and physical infidelity to your partner, including sensual kissing; because these things should be reserved for your spouse. In addition, having improper thoughts about another person, even without actual contact, is also a kind of "soul tie" feeling. (If you are already in such a relationship, seek help from someone you trust!)

Soul Ties can lead to two consequences

1. Sin. Not only does the person who commits a sin feel guilty in his heart, he also feels deeply guilty before God. This will create a "stronghold" that Satan can exploit.
2. Spiritual bondage. We are spiritually involved with every person we have a "soul tie" with. Just like committing adultery, it will form a "stronghold" that will bring confusion and chaos to our hearts and affect the unity between us and our spouse. Not only are they connected to our souls, they are also a curse and threat to us. Just like David's sin against Bathsheba, it caused him pain throughout his life.

Sometimes the person with whom we have a "soul tie" may be an old lover who still lives on in our fantasies. If any connection affects us and prevents us from maintaining a pure and guiltless heart before God, it is a "stronghold." It will cause us to fail again and again in our lives!

How to sever this "soul tie"?

It must be dealt with like sin (1 John 1:9). Separate counselling is provided for both parties involved; which includes:

1. Confession: Carefully list all sins, not only to break away from them, but also the pleasures you get from them. You must confess your sin to a third person (1 Thessalonians 5:11).
2. Cleansing: Bring this sin to Christ for forgiveness and remain in the "listening room" until your spirit can feel God's complete cleansing.
3. Meditation: What is the reason that triggers this "soul tie"? Is it loneliness? Or is it out of curiosity about sex? Or has anger caused you to decide to hurt another person? Once you find the reason, you will be freed from these "strongholds" and Satan will have no way to tempt you.

Meditate on Colossians 1:13-14 "He has freed us from the power of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of the Son of his love, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."

You can imagine in your mind the relationship between yourself and the person with whom you have a soul tie, and then declare in the name of the Lord Jesus that He has severed that connection. Put your hand on your chest and declare that you are willing to return to him every memory and emotion he left in your heart. Finally, take back every part of your life that you have ever given to the other person.

Pray like this: "I am free. I am forgiven. The Lord Jesus has completely set me free from (name) forever!"

If you can't do it yourself...

Usually those who wish to be freed from a soul tie need help from someone who is a Christian filled with the Holy Spirit, sensitive to the needs of others and knows how to exercise discernment in prayer. If the "soul ties" you are facing are a bunch of "strongholds" that cannot be untied, then you must find a spiritual companion to help you walk the journey. Perhaps it is your mentor, your cell group leader, or someone on the pastoral staff whom you can trust.

God will prepare some helpers for us on our journey to heaven, so feel free to share your problems with someone you think is appropriate: "Exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'Today,' so that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." (Hebrews 3:13)

3. Idol worship

Read Exodus 20:3-5; 1 John 5:21; Galatians 5:19-21

We often think that the first commandment is the easiest to obey, so we often ignore it. However, this is not the case! God clearly said, "You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol or any likeness of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me..."

A large proportion of the Chinese population in Singapore are idol worshippers. Many people place an "altar" in their home and fill it with sculptures of Buddha, Guanyin, etc. However, some tourists out of ignorance buy these sculptures as souvenirs and take them home.

Why is God so angry that he passes on the punishment to the descendants for the sin of idolatry? The answer is given in Romans chapter 1. Paul said that God has revealed His eternal power and divinity to the world through what He created. However, man says to himself, "If I accept the fact that God exists, then I should kneel down and worship Him, and I should also entrust my life to His control. I don't want to do that!" Because mankind insists on living a life of self-willfulness and undisciplined life, we have created idols for ourselves. We believe that since we make the idols for ourselves, we are superior to them and can manipulate them as we please, asking them to bring us "good luck" and make our wishes come true.

We "exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image made like mortal man and birds and four-footed animals and reptiles" (Romans 1:22-23). Each idol represents a presumptuous claim by its owner to be a rejection of God's power. God will never sit by idly and watch such behavior; He will punish! This behavior violates the first commandment.

A Chinese friend of mine has told me many times, "I can't be a Christian because I'm afraid my parents will be angry. They worship idols." Every time I hear him say this, I remember that the Bible says that the curse on those who worship idols will continue "until the third or fourth generation"; countless souls will be sentenced to eternal hell because these people grew up in pagan families and were forced to follow all kinds of traditional customs at home!

I have been to meetings where idols were destroyed and altars burned. Because people who worship idols usually collect amulets such as spells, which they sometimes forget to take out of the

closet, so they will allow members of the cell group to search the house and find all related items. Then everyone will sing hymns to praise God while destroying all the idols one by one.

Wherever there are idols, there are "strongholds."

Whenever a family buys an idol, they would first take it to the temple to infuse it with the idol's spirit, and the devil would then enter the family and live with them. Demonic influences gradually darken their minds, instill superstition and fear, and imprison everyone in the family. People who are loyal to the Kingdom of God will never allow idols to be placed in their homes, even if they are hated and cursed by their relatives. The Old Testament is filled with God's wrath against those who "worship false gods." In God's eyes, if a Christian owns idols, it is like committing spiritual adultery!

Idols are very dangerous; they are full of deceit and deception. Satan is bent on blinding the eyes and ears of men, that they may become ignorant. He deceives those who associate with idols all day long, preventing them from understanding how evil the idols they worship are in God's eyes! If people knew God's wrath toward these evil spirit-possessed objects, they would retreat from them as if they were being chased and bitten by a snake.

Idols may not be obvious

According to the Webster dictionary, "idol" is defined as: "an object of extreme dependence, worship, or admiration." Therefore, idolatry is the most common sin committed by people in both the West and the East.

Not only is Satan full of deceit and lies, he is also very cunning! He provides another kind of idol for those who are "worldly-wise." These idols are "things or objects that people become overly attached to." For one person, his idol may be a luxury car; for another, it may be travelling, a sport (whether playing or watching), a passion, a hobby, or an art. This kind of idol not only always makes people feel safe, but also brings comfort and satisfaction to its worshippers. In addition, Satan also provides another group of people with things such as drugs, alcohol, gambling, or promiscuous sex.

Let's be honest about this...

If you have ignored a "stronghold" of idolatry in your life, now is the time to deal with it! God can set you free. He has enough power for you to draw upon. First, you go to the "listening room" and talk to your Lord. Ask God to free you from being deceived by various schemes and to see the evil of these idols. Be honest with yourself. Think about it carefully: Are you overly dependent on something? Satan has a very attractive propaganda with a list of idols on it, which contains many color photos of idols for you to choose from. Whenever you choose one of these options, Satan

will inflict evil power upon it to control you, and you will become a victim of this terrible "strongholds"!

In 1 Samuel 15, God gave the prophet Samuel a promise to bless the Israelites when they were at war with their enemy (the Amalekites). God commanded them to strike their enemies and utterly destroy them. (Because God knew that if the "bad" was allowed to remain in the "good", it would eventually lead to the destruction of everything!) However, Saul had pity on the wicked king Agag, and he loved good things and did not obey God. When Samuel found out, he was furious! Saul also lost his throne because he disobeyed God. In the end, Agag still could not escape death. God's commands allow no compromise.

You must know that if you have an idol in your heart or life, it is equivalent to having a "stronghold" that allows Satan to enter and exit freely. You will never experience victorious living, and the peace of God will be far from you. You must completely destroy the idols you worship!

Many years ago, when my family was preparing to go on a mission trip to Vietnam, a veteran who had returned from Asia said to us, "When you go, keep your belongings in your hands, not in your hearts." We had been there for only a few weeks when Saigon fell. Many missionaries lost all their possessions. We still often remember the old soldier's advice. Let me give you a word of advice here, too: "Destroy your idols. Take what is in your heart and put it in your hands. Don't let idols manipulate you into making any compromises."

4. Treasures on Earth

Read Luke 16:19-31; Matthew 6:19-23

One day, I was strolling along the oldest streets in Singapore, hoping to learn more about the local customs and culture. I saw someone in a shop making something with bamboo sticks and paper. I saw a Mercedes-Benz car that was half the size of the original one, with seats and a steering wheel made of paper. There was also a luxurious residence that was brightly painted, about five feet high, and fully furnished. There was also a paper-made blonde beauty who was almost as tall as a real person and was wearing sexy clothes.

They told me that these toy-like artifacts were meant for a poor taxi driver who had recently passed away. All the fake items will be burned with his body during cremation so that he can enjoy them in the "afterlife". This driver has met many wealthy people in his life, and he has always wanted to enjoy a wealthy and luxurious life. However, his wish could only be fulfilled in the non-existent "ghost world".

One major world religion describes heaven as a place of limitless sensual pleasure, where one can indulge in the pleasures of the flesh and lust all day long. However, this is not the future kingdom

God has promised.

Jesus mentioned "treasures on earth" and "treasures in heaven" in Matthew 6:19-23. What exactly is this so-called "treasure in heaven"? What are the future "treasures in heaven" that we should cherish? If we could understand the answer to this question, we would navigate this life in a completely different way. Jesus said, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

It is not difficult to list the treasures on earth because they all revolve around the word "treasure". What is your favorite? People's favorites vary. We cannot list every possession that people love most, but that does not matter. What matters most is our heart and motivation, because this determines what we put as top priority in life.

Jesus taught this in Matthew 6:22-23: "The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is evil, your whole body will be full of darkness. But if the light in you is dark, how great is that darkness?"

Your heart always follows your treasure. Cherish those things that will last forever. Do not be obsessed with pursuing personal wealth, and do not put all your thoughts on it. Mark 10:21 records that Jesus looked at the young ruler and loved him. He said to him, "You still lack one thing. Go, sell all you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."

Let the words "he loved him" be deeply engraved in your heart. Jesus understood that the young ruler had deceived himself by his misguided love for earthly riches. Jesus knew that this young man must first sell all his wealth that would distract him, give the money to the poor and put it into the Lord's ministry, so that his life could receive the Lord's blessing.

The word "mammon" in Matthew 6:24 is the Greek word for "money." Just as the idols worshipped by the Chinese are possessed by evil spirits, the idol of money also carries the power of "mammon". Jesus said that loving money is worshiping an evil spirit. We must handle money carefully and apply it appropriately. Because it can cover up the truth, blind our eyes, and destroy our determination to follow God.

My wife, Ruth, and I have been living by a principle for more than forty-one years. Let us share with you:

A servant's duty is to obey his master.

The master is obliged to provide all the needs of the servant.

Therefore, servants do not need to worry about their own needs!

5. Just do it!

Read 2 Corinthians 6:1-2; Philippians 1:6, 2:12-13

If you do not understand what “the day of salvation” means in 2 Corinthians 6:2, there are two important passages you should always remember: Philippians 1:6 and 2:12-13, “I am confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Jesus Christ...So then, my beloved, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence but now much more in my absence—work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you both to will and to act in accordance with His good purpose.”

There are three stages of salvation

1. On the cross: You have been freed from the penalty of sin.
2. In everyday life: You are freed from the power of sin.
3. In the future life: You will be freed from the entanglement of sin.

The passage you are to meditate on today is designed to encourage you to break free from the power of sin in your life today. To say to you: "Today is the day of salvation!"

Do not forget that “sin” refers to the proud “I” that desires to control my own life, not just the “many sins” and crimes caused by the proud “I”. If you allow Jesus Christ to reign in your life and surrender to Him all the "strongholds" in your value system, habits, and lifestyle, the power of Christ will be able to set you free.

More importantly, the victorious experiences you gain in your life will give you more confidence to help those around you fight the spiritual battle! We cannot be too self-centered and always think about ourselves and our own needs. After we are healed, we must also use the power of the Lord to help others revive!

I have struggled with weight my whole life. (If you have the same problem as me, I understand your situation!) Finally, my doctor told me that I had old age diabetes. She said, "You only have one choice. You have to exercise for an hour every day and change your eating habits, or diabetes will destroy your life." I had to face reality. Although exercise is a very unfamiliar thing to me, I have no choice! So I joined a sports club and started walking on the track very hard for that arduous hour. At this time, a frail-looking girl in her twenties actually passed me as if I wasn't walking at all. It was so embarrassing! To make matters worse, when she was about six to eight feet in front of me, I saw big red letters on her T-shirt that said, "DO IT!"

I said, "Lord! You have spoken to people in the past through thunder and lightning, and even in silence or with a still small voice. But this is the first time I've heard You speak from behind a T-shirt!"

This is the time for you to go to the "listening room". Perhaps the Holy Spirit has revealed certain "strongholds" to you that you have been struggling with. You say, "I can't be free on these levels. I've tried. And I just don't like the feeling of failure."

Now think about it, who put that thought into your mind? Is it the Holy Spirit? Of course not! In addition to learning to hear God's voice, have you also learned to discern Satan's whispers? Can you identify where your thoughts come from?

Listen carefully! Do you hear the Spirit of God speaking to you? Is He saying, "You couldn't win because you tried to do something that only I can do. Don't try again. Give your life as a living sacrifice to Me! All authority in heaven and on earth belongs to Me. As long as I am in control, victory is yours!"

Just do it!