

Approximately 25 minutes Topical



SIN AND STRONGHOLDS

Understanding the Difference ... and Walking in the Freedom of Christ

Key Scriptures: Romans 6:11-14;

2 Corinthians 10:3-5; John 8:34-36

🙏 OPENING PRAYER:

Father God, we come before You in the name of Jesus Christ.

Lord, we ask You to open our hearts and our minds to Your Word. Help us understand the seriousness of sin, but also help us understand the freedom that Jesus purchased for us at the cross.

If there are areas of our lives where sin has gained a foothold and developed into a stronghold, expose them by the light of Your Word. Give us the courage to surrender those places to You.

Remind us today that we do not fight for victory ... we stand in the victory Jesus Christ has already won.

Holy Spirit, teach us, convict us, encourage us, and draw anyone who does not know Jesus personally into a saving relationship with Him.

We ask this in the mighty name of Jesus Christ, Our Lord and our savior.

Amen.

**INTRODUCTION - SIN AND
STRONGHOLDS ARE RELATED, BUT
THEY ARE NOT THE SAME**

There are two words Christians sometimes use interchangeably:

- **sin** and
- **stronghold.**

But they are not exactly the same thing.

A sin can contribute to the development of a stronghold, but not every individual sin should automatically be called a stronghold.

👉 Sin is fundamentally rebellion against God falling short of His holy standard.

A stronghold, in the spiritual sense we are discussing today, is an entrenched pattern of thinking, believing, or behaving that resists the truth of God and gains influence over an area of someone's life.

🤔💭 Think about it this way:

- **Sin is the act of disobedience.**
- **A stronghold is a fortified position that falsehood, temptation, or**

repeated sin may establish in our thinking and behavior.

A person may tell a lie.

👉 That is sin.

But suppose lying becomes a way of life.

The person lies automatically.

- They lie to protect themselves.
- They lie because they fear what people think.

Eventually, they begin believing their own deception.

🤔💭 Now we are dealing with something deeper than one isolated act.

- There is an entrenched pattern.
- There is a fortress of deception that must be confronted with the truth of God's Word.

The good news is that Jesus Christ is greater than both our sin and every stronghold.

WHAT IS SIN?



(NIV)

Romans 3:23 says:

“²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,¹”

Notice the word **all**.

- Not some.
- Not merely the worst people in society.



All.



Every human being has sinned.

Sin includes actions, attitudes, desires, and choices that violate God's character and commands.

¹ [The New International Version](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Ro 3:23.

But Scripture goes even deeper than individual sinful actions.

Sin reveals something about humanity's fallen condition.

This is why we need more than behavior modification.

- We need salvation.
- We need a new birth.
- We need Jesus.

A person can stop one bad habit and still be separated from God.

- They can clean up their vocabulary.
- They can stop drinking.
- They can stop looking at pornography.
- They can become more generous.
- They can start attending church.

Those may all be good changes.

  But changing behavior cannot produce salvation.

Jesus said in   (NIV) **John 3:3:**

“³ Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.”²”

Christianity is **not** merely God improving the old you.

   Through Christ, God gives you new life.

SIN IS SERIOUS ... BUT SIN IS NOT OUR MASTER IN CHRIST

Before we talk about strongholds, we need to understand something extremely important about believers.

  (NIV) **Romans 6:11-14** says:

“¹¹ In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ

² [The New International Version](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Jn 3:3.

Jesus. ¹² Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. ¹³ Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness. ¹⁴ For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace. ³”

Notice Paul does not say that Christians will never face temptation.

He says:

 **Do not let sin reign.**

That means temptation may knock at the door, but it doesn't have to become king of the house.

³ [The New International Version](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Ro 6:11–14.

Before Christ, sin ruled us.

But when we are **born again**, something changes.

- Jesus becomes Lord.
- The Holy Spirit comes to live within us.
- Our relationship to sin changes.
 - We may still stumble.
 - We may still struggle.
 - We may still have areas where God is transforming us.

👉 But sin is no longer our rightful master.

There is a tremendous difference between **falling into sin** and **living comfortably under the rule of sin without repentance**.

The Christian who sins will always experience the conviction of the Holy Spirit drawing him or her back to Christ.

  (NIV) **1 John 1:9** gives us this wonderful promise:

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.⁴.”

The conviction of the Holy Spirit

  A Christian does not lose salvation every time he or she stumbles, however sin **“does”** disrupt our fellowship with God. Because the Holy Spirit lives within the believer, He will not allow us to remain comfortable at home in sin. He lovingly exposes what is wrong and draws us toward confession, repentance, and restored fellowship with Jesus Christ.

⁴ [The New International Version](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 1 Jn 1:9.

Conviction goes deeper than embarrassment or fear of being caught. It shows us that our sin is ultimately against the God who loves us and that it does not agree with the new life we have received in Christ.

David prayed, in   (NIV) **Psalm 51:4**
"Against you, you only, have I
sinned and done what is evil in your
sight; so you are right in your
verdict and justified when you
judge.⁵

👉 Conviction is God turning on the light so that we can see our sin honestly and return to Him.

We may experience conviction as inward heaviness, a loss of peace, a Scripture repeatedly coming to mind, or a

⁵ [The New International Version](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Ps 51:4.

growing desire to confess and make things right. David described the burden of unconfessed sin in



(NIV)

Psalm 32:3 When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. ⁶

The Holy Spirit may disturb our comfort because He cares more about our holiness than our temporary ease.

But conviction is not condemnation.

- Conviction is detailed: **"What you did was sinful; confess it and return to Christ."**
- Condemnation is hopeless: **"You are worthless; God is finished with you."**

⁶ [The New International Version](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Ps 32:3.

  (NIV) **Romans 8:1** assures us,

**" Therefore, there is now no
condemnation for those who are in
Christ Jesus,⁷."** The Spirit exposes sin
while pointing us to grace.

The enemy accuses us in an attempt to
drive us away from Christ.

- Conviction produces godly sorrow.
- Worldly sorrow is upset about being caught or suffering consequences.
- Godly sorrow agrees with God and turns toward obedience. It may require an apology, restitution, accountability, or removing access to temptation.
-   Confession does not persuade a
unwilling God to become merciful; it is

⁷ [The New International Version](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Ro 8:1.

our honest response to the mercy already offered through the cross.

👉 A believer can resist or grieve the Holy Spirit, so conviction may not always be immediate or dramatic.

Repeated disobedience can dull our spiritual sensitivity. David concealed his sin for a season, but God pursued him and confronted him through Nathan. Therefore, we must never say, "**I do not feel convicted, so it must not be sin.**" God's Word....**not** our feelings....is the final standard.

👉 Christians can fall seriously, as Peter and David did, but God calls His children back. A continuing life of sin with no repentance, no spiritual conflict, and no desire for Christ should cause a person to

examine whether he or she has truly been born again.

The issue is not sinless perfection; 👉 it is the direction of the **heart**.

A believer may fall into sin, but cannot ultimately be at peace there.

When the Spirit brings sin into the light, do not excuse it. Agree with God, confess it honestly, receive Christ's forgiveness, turn from the practice, make matters right where necessary, and seek godly accountability.

😞💭 Conviction can be painful, but it is also a gift. It tells us that the Shepherd has not abandoned His wandering sheep. He is drawing us back to the cleansing, restoring arms of Jesus Christ.

WHAT IS A STRONGHOLD?

Now we come to our second word.

Paul writes in   (NIV) **2 Corinthians 10:3-5** ***“³ For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. ⁴ The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. ⁵ 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.⁸”***

When Paul discusses strongholds here, he immediately talks about **arguments, knowledge, and thoughts.**

So we should be careful not to make the word “stronghold” mystical beyond what Scripture teaches.

⁸ [The New International Version](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 2 Co 10:3–5.

A stronghold can involve a deeply established lie or pattern of thinking that stands against God's truth.

- It says: **“God will never forgive me.”**
- That's a lie. **“I'll always be this way.”**
- That's a lie. **“Nobody could love me.”**
- That's a lie. **“I need this sin to survive.”**
- That's a lie. **“God has abandoned me.”**
- That's a lie.
- **“I cannot change.”** Apart from Christ, we are powerless to save ourselves. But in Christ, transformation is possible.

HOW CAN SIN DEVELOP INTO A STRONGHOLD?

 Imagine someone walking through a field.

The first time they walk across it, there is barely a mark.

But suppose they walk exactly the same route every day.

After several weeks, a trail appears.

After several months, the trail becomes obvious.

The more frequently that path is traveled, the easier it becomes to walk down it again.

  Sin can operate similarly.

- A temptation comes.
- We surrender.
- Then it comes again.
- We surrender again.

   Eventually, what began as an occasional choice can become a deeply established pattern.

This can happen with:

- anger,
- bitterness,

- lust,
- pornography,
- dishonesty,
- jealousy,
- greed,
- gossip,
- unforgiveness,
- pride,

or countless other sins.

Repeated sin can develop patterns of thinking that reinforce the behavior.

The person doesn't merely say:

“I sinned.”

Eventually they begin saying:

 **“This is just who I am.”**

And that's where the enemy loves to attack.

Because Satan doesn't only want you to commit sin.

He wants sin to become associated with your **identity**.

But if you belong to Jesus Christ, your identity is not determined by your worst failure.

Your identity is found in Christ.

  (NIV) ***2 Corinthians 5:21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.⁹***

THE ENEMY USES LIES TO STRENGTHEN STRONGHOLDS

Jesus said something about Satan in

  (NIV) ***John 8:44 “You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth***

⁹ [The New International Version](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 2 Co 5:21.

in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.¹⁰

Satan deals in deception.

  Think about what happened in Genesis chapter 3.

The serpent did not begin by physically forcing Eve to eat the forbidden fruit.

He attacked God's Word.

“Did God really say...?”

The attack began in the  mind.

That same strategy continues.

 God says you are forgiven in Christ.

  The enemy whispers:

“Not after what you've done.”

¹⁰ [The New International Version](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Jn 8:44.

- God says He will never leave you.
- The enemy says:

“You're alone.”

- God says there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.
- The enemy says:

“God is finished with you.”

- God says:

“You belong to Me.”

- The enemy says:

“You'll always belong to your past.”

This is why Paul says:



(NIV)

2 Corinthians 10:5 “⁵ 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.¹¹.”

We don't simply ask:

“How do I feel?”

We ask:



“What has God said?”

JESUS DOESN'T JUST FORGIVE...HE SETS FREE

Listen to the words of Jesus in



(NIV)

John 8:34-36 “³⁴ Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. ³⁵ Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. ³⁶ So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.¹²”

¹¹ [The New International Version](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 2 Co 10:5.

¹² [The New International Version](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Jn 8:34–36.

Then Jesus gives us this incredible promise:

“So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.” (Jn8:36)

Maybe somebody needs to hear that today.

Jesus Christ still sets people free.

- Your past doesn't have the final word.
- Your addiction doesn't have the final word.
- Your anger doesn't have the final word.
- Your shame doesn't have the final word.
- Your failure doesn't have the final word.

 **Jesus does.**

The cross wasn't a partial victory.

When Jesus declared:

“It is finished,”

   He had accomplished the work necessary for our salvation.

WHAT IS YOUR STRONGHOLD?

Let me ask you personally:

- Is there an area of your life where you keep saying:

“I can't stop”?

- Is there a lie you have believed for years?
- Is there bitterness you refuse to release?
- Is there secret sin you keep feeding?
- Is there something you repeatedly run to instead of running to Jesus?

Maybe today God is putting His finger on that area.

- Don't hide it.
- Don't defend it.
- Don't excuse it.

 Bring it to Jesus.

  The stronghold may have taken years to develop, and changing established patterns can take time, discipleship, accountability, and perseverance.

 But never confuse a long battle with an impossible battle.

 **Jesus Christ is still Lord.**

SALVATION THE FIRST STRONGHOLD THAT MUST FALL

But perhaps your greatest problem today is **not** a particular habit.

Perhaps you have never been born again.

- You can break habits and still be lost.
- You can become religious and still be lost.
- You can attend church and still be lost.
- You can know Bible verses and still be lost.

The fundamental problem separating humanity from God is **sin**.

Romans 6:23 says:

“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”¹³

Notice that salvation is called a **gift**.

You do **not** earn it.

   You receive it.

- Jesus Christ died on the cross for our sins.
- He was buried.
- He rose again.
- He did what we could never do for ourselves.

¹³ [The New International Version](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Ro 6:23.

  (NIV) **Ephesians 2:8-9** says:

“⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.¹⁴”

INVITATION TO BE BORN AGAIN

If you have never surrendered your life to Jesus Christ, you can do that today.

Jesus isn't asking you to clean yourself up first.

- Come as you are.
- Bring Him your sin.
- Bring Him your failures.
- Bring Him your shame.
- Bring Him your brokenness.
- Bring Him the strongholds.

¹⁴ [The New International Version](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Eph 2:7–9.

➤ Bring Him everything.

Repent!!! turn from your sin and turn toward Jesus Christ.

Put your faith in His death and resurrection.



(NIV)

Romans 10:13 says:

“¹³ for, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” p¹⁵”

God made it that easy for us....

If you are ready to surrender your life to Jesus, you can pray something like this:



Let us pray...

“Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner.... I believe You died on the cross for my sins and rose again.... I cannot save myself.... I turn from my sin and put my faith in You.... Forgive me.... Cleanse me.... Come into my life.... I surrender

¹⁵ [The New International Version](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Ro 10:13.

myself to You.... Be my Lord and Savior.... Give me new life and help me follow You from this day forward.... In Jesus' name, amen.”

The prayer itself doesn't save you.

Jesus saves you.

We are saved by grace through faith in Him.

CONCLUSION FROM STRONGHOLD TO FREEDOM

So remember the difference.

Sin is rebellion against God...our actions, attitudes, and choices that fall short of His holiness.

A **stronghold** is an entrenched fortress of false thinking and destructive patterns that resists God's truth and can influence how we live.

- Sin needs forgiveness.
- Lies need truth.
- Strongholds need to be demolished.
- And Jesus provides everything we need.
- At the cross, there is forgiveness.
- In God's Word, there is truth.
- Through the Holy Spirit, there is power.
- And in Jesus Christ, there is freedom.

Do **not** simply say:

“This is who I've always been.”

Ask:

“Who does God say I am now that I belong to Jesus?”

You are not called to live chained to yesterday.

You have been called to walk with Christ today.

- The enemy may remind you of your past.

- Your flesh may tempt you.
- Old patterns may try to pull you backward.

But remember the words of Jesus:

  (NIV) ***John 8:36 “So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”¹⁶”***

And that is where we stand.

- Not in our strength.
- Not in our goodness.
- Not in our ability to fix ourselves.

We stand in Jesus Christ.

CLOSING PRAYER

Father God, thank You for Your Word.

Thank You that Jesus Christ came not only to forgive our sins but to give us new life.

¹⁶ [The New International Version](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Jn 8:36.

Lord, reveal any strongholds in our lives...any lies we have believed, any sinful patterns we have protected, and any areas we have refused to surrender.

Teach us to take every thought captive and make it obedient to Christ.

For the believer who has been struggling, remind them that their struggle does not have to define their identity. Give them strength through Your Holy Spirit to confess sin, reject lies, renew their minds through Your Word, and walk in obedience.

And Father, for anyone who has called upon Jesus today for salvation, establish them in Your truth. Surround them with mature believers. Lead them into Your Word. Help them grow in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

**Thank You that whom the Son sets free
is free indeed.**

We surrender ourselves to You.

**May our thoughts, our words, our
actions, and our lives bring glory to you
Lord Jesus Christ.**

**In Jesus' mighty name we pray,
Amen.**



Matthew 28:19-20