

How to Break Two Demonic Strongholds That Want to Destroy Your Hope

Where does most spiritual warfare take place? Immediately, images from movies like *The Exorcist* or, more recently, *Annabelle* and *Paranormal Activity*, come to mind.

The Center for Spiritual Warfare

Unfortunately, we have over-spiritualized spiritual warfare. Is this possible? Absolutely. The devil loves it because he can keep us trapped in a prison of deception. We are always looking for the *wrong thing* when it comes to engaging this battle. We are looking for demons, occult activities and those dabbling in the dark arts. We are seeking out séances, sorcery, and principalities exercising their malevolent influence over cities. Are these legitimate ways the devil gains a stronghold in people's lives? Yes, but it is not the most common way.

It is worth reminding ourselves that the main stage for all spiritual battle is in our *minds*. Even when it comes to those obvious expressions of demonic activity—the occult, witchcraft, sorcery, dark arts—people don't just end up ensnared in them one day. It all began with what the enemy planted in our minds, and what deception we decided to tolerate.

This is why Paul clearly tells us, "We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ." (2 Cor. 10:5, ESV)

What are we destroying? *Arguments*.

What are we instructed to take captive? *Thoughts*.

Equipped for Battle and Victory

In my book, *Breakthrough Faith: Living a Life Where Anything is Possible*, I am not out to give people some pie in the sky, health-and-wealth, “If you just do these things, you will never have a problem... ever” kind of formula. This is where I have strong opposition to the carnal prosperity message. God is not our butler. He is not Santa Claus. Let’s clarify that straight up.

However, God has made a sovereign decision to partner with redeemed humanity to bring His Kingdom purposes to pass on Earth as it is in Heaven (see Matt. 6:10). Jesus’ vision for the church was one of victory and advancement: “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven” (Matthew 16:19, NASB).

To partner with God to bring the demonstration of His Kingdom into this world—and our everyday lives—there are a few things we need to believe about God and the operation of His Kingdom. Okay, even though I say “believe,” we need to Biblically believe these things. A belief carries significant, transformational weight when it changes the way we think and ultimately impacts how we live. Otherwise, we are not believing anything; we are mentally agreeing with a concept. This is not belief; this is not hope. Believers don’t simply agree with the concept that Jesus was the Son of God or that He died on the cross. Even the demons believe this and the Bible says they “tremble” or “shudder” (see Jas. 2:19).

Hope Exposes You To New, Supernatural Possibilities

Here is my fear. In the age in which we live, we have unbelieving believers. This won’t cut it, friends. The enemy seeks to keep us from hoping. Hope is not wishing on a star. Biblical hope is the confident expectation of a certain

outcome. Where is this of hope born? In being exposed to new supernatural possibilities. Hope awakens in your heart when you are introduced to realities that were previously off your grid. But when you see the possible... the sick person healed. The dead man raised. The tormented woman delivered. The relationship hanging on by a thread restored. Exposure to the possible makes you discontent embracing the impossible as normal. How can you when you've been introduced to the God of miracles? Miracles awaken our hope. They aren't spectacles designed to dazzle and entertain. Such is the perspective of a carnal, "name it, claim it" theology. Miracles unveil the invisible God. They show us His nature. They reveal His character. Miracles remind us that there is another world at work in our world—the superior influence of God's Kingdom. These are the realities we are to live mindful of. The devil, on the other hand, would prefer the church to live blind and deaf to the miracle realm.

The statement of faith on our websites is not enough. It's nice that, on paper, we claim to believe in the historic doctrines of the faith. I celebrate the fact that as a Pentecostal or Charismatic church, you acknowledge that the gifts of the Spirit are still in action. Let me ask you this: Is your church operating in the supernatural as the normal? Or is it the exception? Are you seeing people healed, delivered and set free? Do you gather around God's Presence, or do you assemble around a pastor and his sermon?

Two Strongholds That Want to Destroy Your Hope

From what I have observed, there are two common strongholds that the enemy tries to use to restrain the church for moving in supernatural power and thus, prevents people from being exposed to new possibilities. In fact, these two strongholds work together: 1) Cessationism and 2) Legalism. I go into much more detail about them in *Breakthrough Faith*. For the sake of time, I want to give you a brief idea of what each concept is, why it is a stronghold, and how to start breaking it.

1. **Cessationism.** This has been a popular theological topic as of late, especially in the wake of last Fall's Strange Fire conference at John MacArthur's church. Basically, cessation theory believes that the supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit are no longer in operation today. The normative demonstration of God's miraculous power (namely healing, miracles, and tongues), in the Earth, ceased with the canonization of Scripture. Let me make it clear, not all cessationists are created equal. You have some who believe that God still performs miracles and heals today; they just don't believe it should be expected with regularity. You have much more stringent cessationists who not only believe this kind of activity has ceased, but accuse those who adhere to such belief systems as being under a deceptive or even demonic influence. Why is cessationism a stronghold? Simple and practical: It blinds people to hope of new supernatural possibilities. Can God heal? Will He perform the miraculous? Should we expect Him to deliver the tormented and demonized? Sadly, these questions are already answered when we uphold a cessationist viewpoint. We don't allow ourselves to hope for the supernatural and this is what restrains faith from operating. It's not that we don't have enough faith. Far from it. Cessationists have enough faith to be healed and release healing; the problem is they cannot activate this faith because they don't have hope that the supernatural is even a possibility for them. When we remain trapped in a strict cessationist perspective, we tend to uphold a theology of tradition above the theology of Scripture. Ask yourself: if someone was converted to Christianity and then dropped onto a deserted island with nothing but the Bible, what would he or she come back believing? It would not be cessationism. Let the Bible and the example of Jesus dictate what forms the basis of your hope, not the opinions of people.

2. **Legalism.** Commonly, we think of legalism as the classic “Do not” list of Christian culture. But there are other faces to this stronghold as well. Legalism keeps people trapped, in both religious works and religious doctrines. Cessationism is such a religious doctrine. Legalism prevents us from bowing low before Scripture and instead, it keeps us in bondage to the traditions of men. It’s how we’ve always done it or it’s what I have always believed. Legalism refuses to let us look past what we have been exposed to all of our Christian lives, even if we start to Biblically second guess what we have been spoon-fed by certain leaders. How do we overcome legalism? Once again, breakthrough is born in great simplicity. We simply need to look at Scripture and be confronted by the example of Jesus. That’s it! Jesus answers the “What is God’s will” question every time, from salvation to healing to deliverance. This is what completely demolishes the stronghold of cessationism. Scripture reminds us that “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Heb. 13:8, ESV). When we cling to this Truth of Jesus’ eternal sameness and make the decision to uphold it above anything else, we position ourselves to start hoping again.

The enemy is out to steal your hope. After all, a hope-full people are a tremendous threat to the kingdom of darkness. One of the most popular ways the devil tries to steal your hope is by convincing you that God doesn’t move anymore—that miracles, signs and wonders are not for today.

Today, I invite you to arise, look upon the Unchanging Jesus and remind yourself that the God Who did ... will do again. He has not changed. When you expose yourself to the possibility that Jesus wants to break through in your situation, hope is born and you have everything you need to release mountain-moving faith!

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