

THE BATTLE OF THE MIND

2 CORINTHIANS 10:1-6

This AM we're going to cover the first six verses of 2 Corinthians 10 - but let's begin by reading verses 4-5...

“For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ...

Am I the only person here who has this problem, *especially at Thanksgiving...* It's easier for me to **put on** a few pounds, than it is to **take off** a few pounds.

In fact, at times I've suspected just imagining a plate of food somehow added a few inches to my waistline?

All I have to do to gain weight is to think of a yummy sweet potato soufflé or eyeball a slice of pumpkin pie...

All I did was think the thought... Just put it in *my mind*, not *my mouth*... And presto, the mere idea of it, yielded instant inches... *or so it sometimes seems!*

Actually, I read recently my suspicion may not be far from the truth. New research indicates that for some people, just *thinking about food* actually increases their insulin levels - which in turn, makes them hungrier...

Thoughts about food may not directly add inches to your midsection - but it can increase your appetite and prompt you to eat more! *Thoughts are powerful forces!*

Which causes me to think... if thoughts can produce hunger pangs - can they stimulate other appetites?

And I'm certain they can! In fact, your thought life fuels many of your drives, and passions, and desires.

The thoughts you entertain mentally can effect you spiritually. They *lead you to Christ, or lead you to sin.*

In my opinion, one of big keys to living a victorious Christian life is found in this morning's text - here in 2 Corinthians 10:4-5... This is such a vital passage...

But before we dive into verses 4-5, first understand the context of Paul's comments... Paul and his ministry had come under fire in Corinth. There were critics in the church who were roughing up Paul's reputation.

In the first nine chapters of 2 Corinthians Paul has defended himself, but he's been diplomatic in his defense. He's been gentle... *Now his tone changes!...*

Chapter 10 begins, "Now I, Paul, myself am pleading with you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ..."

One of the errors the Corinthian Christians had made in their estimation of Paul was to mistake his "*meekness*" for *weakness* - *the two are not the same.*

Numbers 12:3 refers to Moses as "*the meekest man in all the earth,*" but Moses was certainly far from weak.

The Greek word translated "*meekness*" means "*power under restraint.*" It was used for a wild stallion after it was broken. Meekness refers to the person who has submitted to the bit and bridle of God's will.

Think of Jesus - no one who has ever lived was as strong and forceful a person as Jesus - yet all that power was harnessed and surrendered to God's will.

To this point in his letter, Paul has been gentle in response to harsh criticisms. But his *humility* was misinterpreted as *inability*. His critics assumed he was *kind* because he lacked *clout*. He was *tender* because he was a *tenderfoot* - he had no real spiritual authority.

Paul needs to grow more determined in his defense.

The apostle has been falsely accused, and it's tarnished the Gospel, and it's time to fight back. In Chapters 10-13 he "*takes the gloves off*" - as they say.

The Corinthians' caricature of Paul as timid and weak implied he could write a mean letter, but take away his pen, and in person he'd shrink away in fear.

Paul replies to this accusation in verse 2, "But I beg you that when I am present I may not be bold with that confidence by which I intend to be bold against some, who think of us as if we walked according to the flesh."

Paul is saying, "If you want bold, I'll bring bold!" He'd tried to be nice in his first letter, but they took it the wrong way. If he has to be more direct; then so be it!

Verse 3, "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh." When Paul says, "*In the flesh*" - he's speaking of human capabilities - physical stature, good looks, oratorical skills... and yes, in these areas Paul considered himself weak and unpolished.

But Paul didn't operate in the flesh - he wasn't limited by the flesh. For Paul walked and warred in the Spirit.

Rather than rely on physical ability, or human ingenuity, or even his personal grit - Paul trusted in the power of the Holy Spirit working in and through him.

He tells them in verse 3-5, **“we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ..”**

In these verses, Paul takes us to a battlefield - *but a battlefield of an unusual variety*. Here, you'll find no barbed wire, or tanks, or camouflaged tents...

Here the soldiers aren't worried about biological weapons, or laser-guided missiles... Here people get wounded, but the wounds are not the kind that bleed...

On this battlefield AK-47s and hand grenades are worthless... The weapons of choice in this battle are *spiritual and mental* not *physical and martial*.

Paul ushers us onto the battlefield of the mind.

Whether you overcome sin in your life - and live to the glory of God - and enjoy the blessings of your salvation - and end up productive for God's Kingdom...

It all will be determined by what goes on in the gray matter - what's housed between your two ears.

Bible teacher, David Needham, puts it this way, **"Virtually**

every battle we will ever fight with sin will be won or lost on the turf of our imagination."

There is a battle raging on the bluffs and buttes of your mind. Your thought life is not a *playground* - it's a *battleground* - and the stakes are eternally high.

1 Peter 1:13 echoes Paul's statement here. Peter tells us, "**Gird up the loins of your mind.**" The phrase, "**gird up**", means "**to get a grip.**" Peter tells us when it comes to our thoughts, let's roll up our shirtsleeves, it's time **to get a grip** on what we entertain in our minds.

For Peter and Paul this is an issue that calls for extraordinary effort, persistence, and determination.

This is where you should apply your energy until the job gets done. A serious follower of Jesus disciplines his mind to think pure, and holy, and godly thoughts.

Imagine the OT Temple clean and shiny on the exterior - but filthy and unkempt in the inner court.

That's hard to even picture. What good Levite or priest would ever allow garbage to pile up in the sacred temple? The caretakers of Judaism would never allow the Holy of Holies - the area nearest the presence of God - to become a trash-heap, a pigpen, a garbage can? Surely not! Such an idea was totally unthinkable.

And it should be just as unthinkable for us...

The NT tells us that Christians are the Temple of God. The Holy Spirit dwells within us. Thus, we need to keep our inner court - the inner person of our mind and soul - as pure as possible. Reserve your head and heart exclusively for the

enjoyment and glory of God.

Realize, "You are today where your thoughts have brought you. You'll be tomorrow where your thoughts will take you." Your *thought life* shapes the *rest of your life*. Be careful what you think, it's what you'll become.

I've heard it put, "We are not what we think we are, but what we think, we are." *Outlook produces outcome!*

This is what the Bible tells us. Proverbs 23:7 reads, "For as (a person) thinks in his heart, so is he." Thoughts yield attitudes - and attitudes yield actions.

If you're a Christian, God has done a miracle in your spirit - in the eternal part of your person. You've been *forgiven of your sin*, and *given a brand new nature*.

God has put a love in your heart for Him, and for the people around you. You are *a new creation in Christ...*

But that doesn't mean you'll immediately think like one. Following your conversion, the mind has to be renewed. *And this is where the battle begins...*

A Greek poet, Horace, once cautioned his students, "Rule your mind or it will rule you." Either you will control your thoughts, or your thoughts will control you.

One year I coached my son, Zach, in Little League baseball. These were 9-10 year-old boys, and most had played baseball before. It was our first day of practice and I was trying to teach them the importance of playing smart baseball. I asked the team, "*What's the most important piece of equipment in baseball?*"

I had asked this question in years past, and the boys had always answered, "glove," or "bat," or "catcher's mitt," or "face mask," or "batter's helmet." But when the kids were all done guessing, I would always surprise them by saying, "No, it's your brain - your mind."

Well, at this particular practice a boy named, Mark, raised his hand. He said, "Coach, the most important piece of equipment in baseball IS YOUR CUP."

Yep, Mark was a little wise guy, but I suppose he was right! After I stopped laughing, I asked again, "What's the second most important piece of equipment?"

This morning if I were to ask you what's your most important piece of equipment in the game of life - how would you answer? *Money? Connections? Talent?*

Well, the correct answer would be "your thought life."

We're in a battle, the theater of conflict is our minds, and in verses 4-5 Paul examines **the foe, the fight, and the firepower.** *But here's our starting point - the good news about this war is God promises it's a fight we can win!* And in these two verses we learn how...

First, let's identify our **foe**. Paul points to a trifecta of evil thoughts: "**strongholds,**" "**arguments,**" "**high things.**"

These are forms of thinking that rival the knowledge of God - that elevate themselves above the truth of God. These are thoughts that need to be cast down...

A September 9, 2015 article reported on a 48 year old Chinese woman. She was found to have a 1.8 inch long

needle stuck in her brain. She suffered headaches for four decades and had been to the doctor multiple times, but the problem had never been discovered.

Finally, a CAT scan revealed a nail under her skull.

The location of the nail caused doctors to speculate the sharp object had penetrated her skin shortly after her birth - before her skull had hardened into shape.

Everyone was amazed that a person could live so long with a rusty nail sticking into their gray matter.

Yet everyone of us have been victimized by rusty, polluted thoughts. As Paul puts it, "**strongholds,**" "**arguments,**" "**high things**" cause us pain and ailments.

If everyone here today were subjected to a spiritual CAT scan - trust me, it would reveal **a dirty brain!**

First, Paul mentions "**strongholds.**" These are false assumptions we develop about God, life, other people, even ourselves. These presuppositions form over time.

They're ideas that are drawn from relationships and life experiences - and dramatically effect our outlook.

Perhaps you grew up hearing people say "*you were worthless.*" This negative identity was supported by a lack of attention at home from your parents. Kids at school chimed in, and called you "*ugly.*" You were always chosen last. You weren't one of the cool kids.

And today, though your outward circumstances have changed dramatically, *the mental scarring remains...*

You're now loved and forgiven by God. He has blessed you

with friends and family of your own, but you're still tormented by the deep-seated, painful feelings of rejection that formed earlier in your life.

When you were younger, maybe your masculinity or femininity got clouded and confused. It was easier to bond with people of the same sex. This has impacted your sexual attractions. Today, you struggle with your own identity. This too, is a type of spiritual stronghold.

Realize, a **"stronghold"** develops over many years.

The constant dripping of disappointment and failed expectation creates *mounds of misconception - piles of self-pity - hills of hurt*. Emotional stalactites fill the cavern of our minds. Rusty nails put there earlier in life, *by people other than us*, still cause tremendous pain.

Sadly, **"strongholds"** create a real **"stranglehold"** on our lives, and rob us of the joy and peace God desires.

Then there are what Paul calls, **"arguments."**

These are the justifications, and rationalizations, and excuses we use to support the strongholds that form.

Strongholds are inadvertent. They're the result of being fed false information - but once they form rather than tear them down, *we often support them* - we even build up arguments for them in our own thinking.

One translation of verse 5 puts it, **"Our battle is to break down every deceptive argument and every imposing defense that men erect against the true knowledge of God."** Not only do we hold to false assumptions, but we try to excuse and defend them!

It reminds me of the bitter old lady who never got married. Rather than open up her hurts to the love of God - she spent her whole life angry at men in general.

In fact, when she died her Last Will and Testament contained an order: **no male pallbearers at her funeral.**

It also provided her reasoning, **"They wouldn't take me out when I was alive, so I don't want them taking me out when I'm dead."** Now that's some bitterness!

Strongholds point us in the wrong direction - but **"arguments"** keep us headed in that same misdirection.

It is one thing to be moving down the wrong track, but it's another thing to develop excuses and self-serving philosophies, to make us feel better about it!

Our excuses have got to go! We need to cast down both ***strongholds*** and the ***arguments*** that support them.

The third part of this evil trifecta are **"high things."**

"High things" are tall *walls* that form in our minds to keep evil in and goodness out. Keep digging a hole long enough and it'll get too deep for you to get out of - at least on your own. You're stuck until help arrives.

This is what we do mentally and emotionally when we develop false assumptions about life. Later, even when the weight of the evidence is clearly against it - we still proudly protect the lie, as if it were true.

"High things" blind us to God's truth, and bar us from the Bible's teaching about life and ourselves!

Here's a great little quip, "Sow a thought, reap an action; sow an action, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character; sow a character, reap a destiny."

"High things" are the destructive character that forms when you continually sow wrong thoughts. You can no longer see around or over the wall. Now stubbornness keeps you blind to the better ways God has in store.

On November 9, 1994, Geoffrey Mayne was driving through downtown West Haven, Connecticut. He thought he noticed a problem with his brakes.

When he came to a stoplight he put his car in park, and got out to check. Suddenly the car slipped into reverse and started flying down the street. The steering wheel spun and sent the car into a never-ending spin. Geoffrey's car started circling round and round, blocking traffic in West Haven's busiest intersection.

The police and fire departments were called, but there was nothing they could do, but watch. The car had a full tank of gas. For two hours they sat and watched the car speed around the intersection.

Finally, city officials called in road construction crews. Three earth-movers converged on the out-of-control car and held it until firefighters could break the window and turn off the ignition. The car was totaled!

And here's my question, [are you spinning in circles?](#)

"Strongholds" send us in the wrong direction.

"Arguments" keep us moving in that direction.

"High things" send us into a final tailspin - where we get

stuck, and can't receive the help we need...

All three are rusty nails that stick in our brains - *foes* that need to be removed. Thus, *the fight* begins...

And Paul tells us that the **fight** is in two stages...

He says **stage one** involves "pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God."

Then after the rusty nails are removed, we're ready for **stage two** - "bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ." The strategy for victory in our thoughts is twofold - casting down and bringing around.

When it comes to **casting down**, when the NIV translates the phrases, "pulling down strongholds" and "casting down arguments" it uses the term "demolish."

The reason we never get victory in our thought life is that we're not ruthless enough in our approach.

You don't transform years of wrong thinking by simply memorizing a few verses, or reading a "quote of the day" at breakfast. You have to hold up every area of your life, and inspect it in the light of God's Word.

And if an idea doesn't fit you need to blow it up!

It takes courage and brutal honesty to stop hiding behind excuses and justifications and old assumptions. High walls crumble only when our pride is put to death!

Too many people become Christians thinking all God wants to do in their life is to eliminate a few discomforts, and add the pleasantries they're missing.

Hey, God is far more ambitious than that in your life!

The Greek word translated "**pulling down**" can also be rendered "**extinction.**" God wants the false assumptions, and impure imaginations, and haunting insecurities that roam the forest of your mind to die off without multiplying. He wants you rid of them for good.

I like this poem - it makes the point... "**A naughty little weed one day poked up its tiny head. 'Tomorrow I will pull you up, Old Mr. Weed,' I said. But I put off the doing till, when next I passed that way, the hateful thing had spread abroad and laughed at my dismay.**

A naughty little thought one day popped right into my mind. 'Oh no!' I cried, 'I'll put you out tomorrow, you will find!' But once again I put it off, till like the little weed, the ugly thing sprang up afresh and grew into a deed."

You can't tolerate the mental weeds. Allow them to fester, and you won't live a life that's pleasing to God.

You've got to pull them up by the root.

But the path to victory is two-staged... First, you pull the weeds - cast down the strongholds. Then **capture and corral** all your wild and wandering thoughts.

The mind has to be retrained to obey God... or it'll return to the false assumptions you once tore down.

Paul writes we should be "**bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.**" Here's a couple of other renderings that help us understand Paul's point...

Peterson paraphrases verse 5, "**fitting every loose thought and emotion and impulse into the structure of life shaped by**

Christ." JB Philips puts it this way, "We fight to capture every thought until it acknowledges the authority of Christ." In essence, our minds have to be wrestled, pinned, and made to think godly thoughts.

Here's Paul's strategy... *bag up your thoughts!* Take charge of a wandering mind, and fickle emotions. Make every impulse harmonize with the truth that's in Christ.

When my son, Mack, was younger I'd take him to hit baseballs. I had two 5 gallon buckets filled with balls.

I threw and Mack hit. When he was done we'd have 75 baseballs scattered all over the outfield, and the parking lot. Then we'd gather them up, and return them to the bucket... This is mental image I have of verse 5.

We need to gather up every stray thought and put it in God's bucket - bring it into conformity with His will.

In Isaiah 55:8 God tells us, "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," says the LORD." God's thoughts don't come naturally. They have to be learned. Our minds need to be renewed.

This is true especially in the face of our *fluctuating feelings* and *fickle emotions*. We need to embrace and learn God's truth, and anchor our feelings to His Word.

Airplane pilots describe the dangerous phenomena they encounter when flying through a bank of clouds with zero visibility. The pilot is struck by the sensation that the wings of his plane are no longer parallel with the ground - the airplane has gone into a nosedive.

Of course, a quick peek at the instrument panel says that everything is okay... *This is a strange sensation...*

The urge is to grab the stick and right the plane, but the instruments say “no.” *What do you do, trust your feelings, or the instruments?* A pilot in that situation has to forcibly deny his feelings, and make himself trust in the truth he’s gleaning from the instrument panel.

And this is exactly what happens to a Christian.

God's Word tells us we were made in His image - He loves us - He forgave us - He'll see us through - *but we feel alone and afraid.* Worries run wild in our head.

In those moments we've got to capture all those wildcat, rebel thoughts - and make them obey what we know to be true - force our thoughts to trust in Christ.

Like a child with a net rounding up a butterfly, we need to snatch up and focus all our stray thoughts.

It reminds me of the cowboy driving down a deserted road. His dog was in the back of his pick-up, and he was pulling a trailer occupied by his faithful horse.

Suddenly he lost control and ran his rig down a steep embankment. All three parties - *the cowboy, the dog, and the horse* - suffered multiple wounds and fractures.

The policeman found the horse first. He saw the severity of the injuries, pulled out his revolver, and put him down... Then he found the dog. He too was critically injured, so he put him out of his misery...

Of course, the injured cowboy witnessed it all...

Thus, when the officer saw the busted up driver, he raced to his side, and asked him how he was doing... to which the cowboy replied, *"I've never been better!"*

He was aching, but seeing what had happened to his horse and dog, he suppressed his feelings, pulled his thoughts together, and uttered the right response.

And that's what we have to train ourselves to do.

We don't always feel like obeying God - or trusting God - that's when we have to deny those feelings, gather our thoughts, and conform them to God's truth.

Of course, this is all easier said than done. That's why we need help - we need some spiritual **firepower**.

Thus, Paul writes in verse 4, **"For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds."** God provides us a potent arsenal.

Did you know that the best selling video game franchise of all time is still **Mario Brothers**. Since Mario's first appearance in 1981, over 500 million applications of Mario have been sold worldwide.

I remember when my kids got their first Nintendo I spent more time than I care to admit bouncing Mario, and his brother Luigi, all over the Mushroom Kingdom.

And if I recall correctly, if you bounced Mario to the right spot he would swell and enlarge. He gained the capacity to fire a stream of BBs. It was called **firepower!** The key to success was getting *firepower*.

And this is the key to victory in the battle of the mind. In

Christ we've been given supernatural firepower.

The Spirit of God enlarges our capacities, and uses spiritual weapons to pull down **strongholds, arguments and high things** that stand against the truth of God.

The power of the Holy Spirit - the Scriptures - the blood of Jesus - the word of our testimony - spiritual gifts - prayer - love - hope - faith - fellowship - these are all the weapons of our warfare, and mighty in God.

The more we dwell on God's blessings and abide in His love, the more power is unleashed in our lives.

Paul states, **"the weapons of our warfare are not carnal."** The word **"carnal"** means **"fleshly"** - my **"flesh"** constitutes me apart from God - anything that derives from me - *my goodness, my muscle, my ingenuity.*

"Carnal weapons" are self-help techniques, and mind games, and behavioral modification. Remedies that are independent of the Word, and ways, and will of God.

Militaries don't fight nuclear wars with conventional weapons, and Christians don't fight spiritual battles with *fleshly* techniques. Bright ideas and manipulations are no substitute for the power of the Holy Spirit.

You'll never demolish spiritual **"strongholds,"** and **"arguments,"** and **"high things"** apart from God's power!

A bank loan alleviates your cash flow crunch, but how will it corral the greed that causes your spending?

A nicotine patch helps with withdrawals, but does it supply the calm you need the next time your stressed?

A cold shower might relieve some sexual tension, but how

do you conquer the lust that churns in your heart?

A bottle of pills will get you to sleep at night, but will it resolve the guilty conscience that keeps you awake?

Here's my point, human remedies may do some good - but *spiritual progress* and *permanent change* is the result of the power and presence of Jesus Christ.

When negative feelings or sinful impulses rise up to overwhelm your spirit - *open your Bible - turn to God.*

Remember you're the apple of His eye... He chose you... He'll never forsake you... He gave His only Son to make you His child... Grab hold of God's truth, and the Spirit will see to it that His Word grabs hold of you!

If you savor the truths of God, His Spirit will make them realities and validate them personally in your life.

Ask God to help you recall the Scripture at key points in the day. He has ways of making His truth real to us!

Author, GK Chesterton, once wrote, "I am convinced that the object of opening the mind, as of opening the mouth, is to close it again on something solid."

That means we need to chew on God's Word. The Scripture is the solid food we need to grow in our faith.

Here's what Paul is telling us... **As we** pull down strongholds - along with the arguments and habits that prop them up... **as we** capture every stray thought and make them obey the truth... **we're fueling** the process by digesting God's Word, walking by faith, abiding in His presence, and relying on His strength in us!

Once, a little girl complained about a stomachache.

Her mom explained her stomach hurt because it was empty. If she put something in it, she would be fine.

Weeks later the little girl overheard her pastor complain about a headache, and she remembered her mom's words... The little girl told him, "Pastor, my mom says your head hurts because it's empty. But if you put something in it, you'll be fine." And spiritually, that's true for us all. *We need to... open mind, insert Word.*

Be a student of the Scripture! Mull it over, hide it in your heart, apply it to your life. *You're not a serious Christian unless you get serious about God's Word.*

We create big problems for ourselves if we allow our minds to drift aimlessly, and never dwell on God's truth.

Think about it, you would never let a toddler wander through the neighborhood - or your dog wander around in the grocery store unattended - *why should we let our minds wander around aimlessly - without direction?*

Earlier I read 1 Peter 1:13, "Gird up the loins of your mind." You could put it, "Keep your mind on a leash."

I've heard it said, "Empty lots and empty minds collect trash." Vacant lots are notorious eyesores - and so are minds void of spiritual input. We'll lose the battle for our minds if we leave them empty and unguarded.

Not setting your mind on Jesus, is letting your mind get pulled and drawn toward the negative and nasty.

Paul closes this AM's passage in verse 6, "and being ready

to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled.”

This letter was prompted because the Corinthians thought it was their duty to correct Paul.

In reality, it was Paul who needed to correct them.

Here he tells the Corinthians if they want to discipline others, first they need to reorder their own thinking to obey Christ. Have a *disciplined mind* - live a *disciplined life* - then God can use you to *disciple others*.

Here's the question I want to leave with you this AM, *who minds your mind?* Is your mind being renewed?

For 40 years the United Negro College Fund has had a motto. It's now a famous jingle, “*A mind is a terrible thing to waste.*” That's especially true for a Christian!

If we don't win the battle over sin *in our minds*, we'll fight it *in our words* and *in our actions*. We need to put an end to sin before the thought grows into a deed!

Always remember, a life that glorifies God begins in the mind. This is the battle we can't afford to lose!