Taking Every Thought Captive – Get Away from “Stinkin Thinkin”

We began 2015 with a discussion of the insanity of doing the same things the same way expecting different outcomes. We also examined how to move forward when we get stuck in bad surroundings, circumstances, or become victims of our own bad attitudes. Attitudes are the results of our thoughts or perhaps, more correctly said, our thought processes.

“What were you thinking?” That question often accompanies the creative, albeit dumb, ways some men get themselves into trouble based on really bad thinking. We see or read examples every day. For our amusement, those examples often become fodder for TV shows like “The World’s Dumbest…” featuring criminals or daredevils doing really dumb things. These men appear to be considerably less skillful at thinking their way out of trouble.

If honesty prevails, we will admit that, while ours may not be TV fodder, we too have contemplated or hatched thoughts that had the Lord asking, “What were you thinking?” And if not the Lord Himself, certainly our parents, during our youth, or our wives asked that arresting question. It is for those of us who admit our intermittent flawed thinking and seek to know a better way, this lesson was written.

During the last few weeks, the Holy Spirit really impressed upon me the value of drilling down on what Paul had in mind when he wrote these words to the church, “taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ”. By the time you finish reading this lesson, I believe you will agree with me it is a lot harder than it sounds to put this simple phrase into daily practice. But doing so is critical to our success as Christian men, husbands, dads, and ambassadors for Christ. Let’s get started.

The Key Verse: “…We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ...” 2 Corinthians 10:5

The Context. We interpret Scripture in the context with which it is written to avoid creating biblical streams that suit our purposes instead of that which the Holy Spirit intended. Some experts suggest this was really Paul’s fourth letter to the church at Corinth. When he wrote this letter, there were ongoing problems in the church (sound familiar?). Paul spent this part of the letter dealing with challenges to his apostolic authority and accusations that he “walked according to the flesh”. His accusers’ thinking was clearly carnally not spiritually-minded. On that, Paul took them to task.

The Content. (2 Corinthians 10: 1-5)

- Spiritual Reminders. It is said that Paul’s previous letter contained very stern rebuke of some in the church. This letter was intended to smooth that over but not move away from the truth. Paul wisely begins the letter by pointing them to Christ, reminding them of the two key attributes Jesus used to describe Himself - humble and gentle. I remind us that these are the only two adjectives Jesus used to describe Himself. To the carnal mind of man, those words lack the bravado or machismo many men seek. That is the point! Such “stinking thinking”, as some refer to it, is the birthplace of sin in the mind men whose thoughts focus on themselves. They beget pride and arrogance.

- Spiritual Warfare. In several, as in this passage, Paul speaks spiritual warfare. This warfare is internal not external, being waged for our minds. This was strange teaching. Remember that Paul’s words were to relatively new Greek converts. Imagine how hard these concepts would be to hear from any man, much less a converted Jew! They did not like Jews. And Paul claimed to have been hand-picked and given direct authority by Jesus through a strange supernatural event on the road to Damascus. Greeks were typically rational thinking highly philosophical people. Paul speaks to them of fighting wars that did not include real weapons!

- Spiritual Weaponry. God supplies His people with spiritual WMD’s. That term, weapons of mass destruction, has received a lot of print in recent years. God’s WMD’s are “divinely powerful” and designed for completely destructive purposes. Their target is our minds. When Paul refers to the “destruction of fortresses”, he is using a metaphor that the Corinthians would understand since the Romans had fortresses and armed soldiers all over the place.
The Confrontation. Verse 5 is all about the war for and within our minds.

- **Destroying** two areas of thought over which Satan has a lot of success with non-Christians, and, sadly, with most of us on occasion. He is the prince of lies and deception. He worked on the mind of Christ for forty days in the desert. So you may rest assured, we are not excluded.

  - Speculations. Other Bible translations use *imaginations, arguments, or reasonings*. Thoughts that originate in the minds of men they conjure up for a variety of reasons. Examples include efforts to confuse the truth with lies, efforts to look wise to other men (that was a big deal to Greeks), and act like they know what they are talking about when they are clueless. A specific example would people today speculating that if there is a God, He will make a way for all people to go to heaven assuming there is one. Or as long as I am good or better than most, I will surely go to heaven.

  - Lofty things (thoughts) raised up against the knowledge of God. These thoughts were specific challenges to God, His Sovereignty, and the teachings of His Word. The Greeks believed in many gods that covered all kinds of things. But to accept the teaching that there is One God Jehovah seemed ridiculous in that culture. It still does to many in ours today! We are accused of being arrogant and narrow minded for having the audacity to believe and teach our God is LORD. (See Deuteronomy 6: 4, the first verse of the Shema.)

- **Taking captive** (enslave) EVERY thought to the obedience of Christ. If you have ever been involved in prison ministry, you have learned that nothing goes in or gets out of a prison without incredible scrutiny. You will be checked going in and coming out. That is a good picture for our thoughts and how to successfully capture each one and scrub it against the words and example of Christ.

Tense Matters. I call to your attention the **tense** of the two words Paul uses. *Destroying* and *taking* are in the present progressive tense which means they are ongoing or continuous. It is a process, and this side of Heaven, we cannot stop. *Breathing* is also in that tense. You do not want to stop that do you?

Throughout ancient history when walled cities or fortresses were conquered, they were often completely destroyed not leaving one stone upon another. The conqueror wanted to send a strong message to make sure everyone knew the place had been utterly destroyed and that they should not consider rebuilding.

How do this apply to us today? God’s intends for us to fully engage in spiritual warfare using the WMD’s He has provided, not our ability to think and reason as was common among the Greeks. Failure to utterly destroy these sinful thoughts or thought process leaves behind remnants of **fortresses or strongholds** that can retake ground or hold captive un-surrendered areas of our minds. That can lead to addictive behaviors, life-altering bad choices, and consequences for ourselves and loved ones we do not even want to consider. We are painfully aware some consequences are generational. No man is exempt.

The Mind of Christ. “*We do not know the mind of God that we are able to instruct or teach Him, “BUT we have the mind of Christ.”* (1 Corinthians 2:16). It is safe to say for all men, there are thoughts that pass through our minds we would not want to share with anyone even though we know that God knows all of them. (For some reason, we seem to be less embarrassed by that thought than we should be.) But if that amazing statement is really true, why do we struggle with our thoughts? We need to finish this lesson by examining what having the **mind of Christ** really means.

Understanding what it means is not nearly as difficult as its application. As Christians, we have been given the Holy Spirit to comfort, strengthen, and guide us through life. He even prays for us when we are so desperate, words fail us. We have the Bible that reveals a lot about the mind of God and Christ. While Isaiah 55:8 tells us that God thinks and acts on a higher level than man, He has revealed much of Himself and all we need to know this side of Heaven. Thus we have access to God through Christ and access to the mind of Christ from the Bible and revelation of the Holy Spirit.
Further because we have the mind of Christ, we should not think or reason as unbelievers no matter how intelligent or “successful” they appear to the rest of the lost world. Do not be envious of or intimidated by such men. We have the mind of Christ and the accompanying wisdom and power of the Holy Spirit to guide our thoughts, one at a time. Positional authority or wealth cannot compare to our ability to draw upon infinite wisdom and discernment as sons of the Most High God. NEVER FORGET THAT!

We must be deliberate to take each thought captive and allow Him to “scrub” them, as we say today of prepping for surgery or data cleansing in our IT driven world. Finally, we have the mind of Christ so that we can live in obedience to His Word. The mind of Christ also shares the hope of the Gospel with people confused by what the world teaches as truth or, worse yet, asserts there is none.

Let me close with four observations of the mind of Christ from the life of Christ.

† Jesus thought about His purpose and it was His only passion. He came to call lost sinners to repentance. Then He died so that we might live. (Mark 2:17; Luke 5:32)

† Jesus thought about lost people not lost opportunity. (Luke 15:4, Matthew 28:19-20)

† Jesus thought about glorifying His Father only. His mind was focused on His calling and the cross in front of Him. He would not be distracted from that singular purpose. (John 17:1-5)

† Jesus thought about serving others no one else would get within shouting distance of much less reach out and minister to them. Demon-possessed. Poor. Crippled. Beggars. Lepers. Prostitutes. Samaritans. Widows. Orphans. How many of these people types are on your mind and occupy your thoughts? (The Gospels.)

I want to encourage you to use the Lord’s weapons of mass destruction to completely destroy all fortresses in your mind that cripple and hold you captive. It is only then that the Holy Spirit can really set you free and give you total access to the mind of Christ.

Something to think about,