

Bringing Thoughts Into Captivity

(2 Corinthians 10:5)

- I. Preamble.
 - A. Wrong thinking distorts perception of God, man and man's environment.
 - B. Wrong thinking impairs personal development.
 - C. Wrong thinking impairs relationships with God and man.
 - D. Wrong thinking produces conduct and conclusions based on unproven assumptions.
 - E. Wrong thinking produces wrong emotions which facilitate more wrong thinking.
 - F. Wrong thinking produces confusion and chaos.
 - G. Right thinking produces order, soundness, peace, right emotions and right conclusions.
 - H. God is truth. God is right. Anything that contradicts Him is wrong.

- II. Paul wrote of "...bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (2CO 10:5).
 - A. In context, he is focusing on his method of evangelizing and his gospel authority. **2CO 10:1-11.**
 - B. In v. 5, he uses the language of political and military conquest that was typical of Israel of old when they fought against idolatry and heathen.
 1. Idols and religious images were to be eliminated, even *cast down*. **EXO 23:24; JDG 6:30.**
 - a. The casting down of idols justly accords with *casting down imaginations*.
 - b. imagination: The action of imagining, or forming a mental concept of what is not actually present to the senses (cf. sense 3); the result of this process, a mental image or idea (often with implication that the conception does not correspond to the reality of things, hence freq. **vain (false, etc.) imagination**). 2. The mental consideration of actions or events not yet in existence. **a.** Scheming or devising; a device, contrivance, plan, scheme, plot; a fanciful project. *Obs.* exc. as a biblical archaism.
 - c. Rejecting the obvious knowledge of God opened the door for *vain imaginations* which became the basis of idolatry that accommodated lusts. **ROM 1:21-25.**
 2. Enemy survivors of nations which were not slated for complete annihilation could be taken captive. **DEU 21:10-11.**
 - a. Such became subject to the laws of Israel which applied to Jews and strangers which dwelt among them. **NUM 15:15-16.**
 - b. Israel's laws forbidding idols and idol customs (**DEU 12:29-32**) would have been imposed upon them.
 - c. If Israel fell away from true religion, God would suffer the stranger among them to dominate them. **DEU 28:43-44.**
 3. Thus, that which was taken captive was not annihilated and could be serviceable, but, without godly personal supervision, could gain dominance in the land.
 - a. This has a relevance to Paul's words about bringing thoughts into captivity to the obedience of Christ Who preached deliverance to those held captive by Satan's lies. **LUK 4:18 c/w JOH 8:31-36.**
 - b. That every vain thought is not annihilated does not mean that it can't be held captive, and in fact demands that it should be held captive.
 - c. In our Christian experience, we will have to contend with the foolish thoughts of our Adamic nature, including errant thoughts of God, religious errors of our past or those still rooted in "methinks," as well as the thoughts

- we have about our desires of both unlawful and lawful things.
- d. Our thinking needs continual personal government or, like the stranger in Israel, those thoughts foreign to Christ will lead us astray or even into spiritual destruction.
4. Consider how much of our Lord Jesus Christ's earthly ministry was devoted to correcting or refining men's thinking. Examples:
 - a. "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil" (**MAT 5:17**).
 - b. "Ye have heard..." (**MAT 5:21, 27, 33, 38, 43**).
 - c. "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword" (**MAT 10:34**).
 - d. "...Suppose ye that these Galilaeans were sinners above all Galilaeans, because they suffered such things?" (**LUK 13:2**).
 5. It was owing to the people's *imagining vain things* about Messiah, the kingdom of God, and even about Moses' Law that they called for Christ's death. **ACT 4:24-28**.
- C. Consider Paul's contrast of Old Testament conquests by force of arms and New Testament conquests by the force of good arguments in **2CO 10:1-5**.
1. Paul himself, in his pre-conversion antichrist days, thought it proper and necessary to stamp out "wrong-think" and wrong-thinkers by political, legal and physical force. **ACT 22:3-5; 26:9**.
 2. Paul was one who actually thought he was doing God a good service. **JOH 16:1-3**.
 3. "There is nothing more terrifying than ignorance in action." (J. W. Von Goethe)
 4. Paul's transition from arms to arguments was owing to his thoughts about Jesus Christ and about his own sinfulness being brought into captivity: he could not erase the former thoughts but, being delivered from them, could reign over them and actually use them to instruct others.
 5. Grace had given him "...the mind of Christ" to receive instruction from God rather than presume to instruct God. **1CO 2:16 c/w ROM 11:33-36**.
- D. The truth of the gospel accords with soundness of mind. **2TI 1:7; ACT 26:25**.
1. Paul was saved from irrational thoughts about good people. **ACT 8:3; 9:1; 26:11**.
 2. He was ignorantly zealous, a dangerous premise he later denounced. **ROM 10:1-3**.
 3. His pre-conversion problem was a false belief about acceptance with God: his self-righteousness impaired his personal development and facilitated his unhealthy view of others different from himself, per **LUK 18:9**.
 4. Conversion to Christ changed Paul for the better in every way. Contrast Paul's former disposition with the way he conversed with the ignorant philosophers on Mars' hill. **ACT 17:22-23**.
 5. Being delivered from a lie was not only his personal salvation but also the salvation of others from the implications of the lie.
 6. Paul could still claim to be a Pharisee but the errant thinking of Pharisaism was held in captivity as being nothing more than dung buried outside the camp of his mind. Only the valid aspects of a Pharisee were worthwhile. **ACT 23:6 c/w PHIL 3:4-9 c/w DEU 23:12-13**.

III. As the apostle to the Gentiles, Paul particularly was warring evangelistically against the long-standing idolatry which defined the nations, a deceptive bondage to lies.

1CO 12:1-2; GAL 4:8-10.

- A. The casting down of their imaginations of deity was critical to his mission. What they thought about the invisible God was invented and irrational, leading them to ridiculous

conclusions. **ACT 14:8-18; 17:24-29.**

1. They looked to the creation, to nature to formulate their thoughts about deities. **ROM 1:24-25.**
 2. But the creation is under the bondage of corruption and cannot accurately proclaim God: it is a broken book that provides inaccurate and incomplete answers that then facilitate vain imaginations. **ROM 8:20-21.**
 3. Their customs were therefore accordingly vain, ugly and deadly. **DEU 12:30-31; JER 10:1-4.**
 4. It is this very thing that God chiefly forbade Israel to do, for the consequences of it not only distorted the Godhead but also how men should live. **EXO 20:1-4; DEU 4:16-19.**
 5. Whatever man holds as his supreme authority becomes his director. Therefore if his perception of the supreme authority is faulty, the directions of that supreme authority must also be faulty and compliance with those directions fraught with vain consequences.
 6. As such, it is manifest that man must have an accurate perception of God.
 7. NOTE: Perception (the apprehension of the mind) of something may be accurate or inaccurate but either way becomes the basis of thought and action. A faulty perception can be as powerful as a correct perception but it can be dangerous.
- B. A distorted perception of God misrepresents Him and His order for man, and this is a major source of bondage: bondage to a lie, which is bondage to Satan. **JOH 8:44.**
1. We may deceive ourselves into thinking that God is as us and thinks like us and in this case our efforts to follow God are actually little more than following our own natural instincts which are corrupted by sin. **EPH 2:1; ROM 7:18.**
 - a. In so doing we are little different from the idolater who is in bondage to his own deception. **ISA 44:13, 20.**
 - b. Whereas man is made in the image of God (**GEN 1:26; 1CO 11:7; JAM 3:9**), man has no right to assume that God is just like him and that He thinks like him. **PSA 50:16-21; ISA 55:8.**
 2. Depending on our ignorance, gullibility or reaction to circumstances, Satan may con us into perceiving God as being a tyrant, a pushover, unfair, unapproachable, unknowable, disinterested, etc.
 - a. Satan will try to wrest Scripture or distract us from Scripture so as to distort our perceptions of God. **PSA 77; LAM 3:1-26.**
 - b. This should remind us of how important it is to learn of Jesus Christ by Whom God is made known to us. **JOH 1:18; 1JO 5:20.**
 - c. This should also remind us how important it is to increase our knowledge in the Scriptures which expressly testify of Christ. **JOH 5:39; 2PE 3:18.**
 - d. The more we understand of Jesus Christ by searching His testimony (**REV 19:10**), the better will be our perception of God.
- C. Much theological error (which produces improper conclusions) is the false worship of the notorious god, Shirley/Surely. This is wrong-thinking about God fleshed out in creed and conduct.
1. “Surely God doesn’t care about my apparel or hair-length.”
 2. “Surely God honors all forms of religion.”
 3. “Surely God would approve of invented festivals and customs to honor Him.”
 4. “Surely God isn’t taking notice of my secret sins that nobody else sees.”
 5. “Surely God is approving of me because I have been successful in material life.”
 6. “Surely God begat an Eternal Son in His deity.”

7. “Surely God didn’t mean that humans are sexually binary.”
 8. “Surely God still condones polygamous marriage.”
 9. “Surely God cannot save sinners without sinners’ cooperation.”
 10. “Surely God loves all mankind without exception.”
 11. Over against this nonsense, “Surely God will not hear vanity, neither will the Almighty regard it” (**JOB 35:13**).
- D. God made man in His own image but sinful man makes a god in his own image, and also has the tendency of raising children after his own image instead of the image of Christ (as God intends for His people). **ROM 8:29**.
- E. In bringing our thoughts into captivity to the obedience of Christ (**2CO 10:5**), we are not bringing our thoughts into captivity to the obedience of only a man like Moses.
1. This captivity is unto *God manifest in the flesh*. **1TI 3:16**.
 2. In rendering obedience to Christ, we are rendering obedience to God Himself.
 3. Of all men, Jesus Christ showed us that the path to fulness is full obedience to God the Father. THIS mind is to be in us. **PHIL 2:5-8**.
 4. We can have complete assurance that submission to Jesus Christ is the best and only way to please God Who invested Him with all power in heaven and earth and with all judgment. **JOH 14:6; MAT 28:18; ACT 17:30-31**.
- IV. The government of our thoughts is what determines our actions and character, good or bad. **PRO 23:6-7; ROM 12:3**.
- A. The *pursued* thought (in contrast to the *passing* thought) of foolishness is sin. **PRO 24:9; MAT 5:28**.
- B. It behooves us to guard against allowing temptation to take root in our thoughts. **JAM 1:14-15**.
- C. Mind that evil thoughts proceed from the heart, not the brain. There is a moral dimension to thought beyond the cognitive, analytical aspect. **MAT 15:19 c/w HEB 4:12**.
- D. As noted already, blanking out God leads to *vain imaginations* and further darkening of the heart unto uncleanness and a *reprobate mind* under Satanic control. **ROM 1:21-28**.
1. Scripture warns about sinning away the voice of conscience. **EPH 4:17-19**.
 2. Scripture warns of a *seared conscience* under the power of a *seducing spirit* which forbids one from enjoyment of lawful things. **1TI 4:1-4**.
 3. Learning of Christ and implementing the same delivers one from such unprofitable thoughts. **MAT 11:28-30; EPH 4:20-24**.
- E. Have you ever asked yourself after a failure against better knowledge, “What was I thinking of?” Letting ungoverned thoughts run our lives is a real problem.
- V. It is vital to remember that the nature of man under sin is such that his very impulses are corrupt and accordingly affect the thought process.
- A. The power of lust/natural desire is so strong that it convinced sinless Adam to forfeit eternal life and perfect communion with God. **GEN 2:16-17; 3:6**.
1. If this aspect of human nature could gain dominion over a sinless man’s thoughts and conduct, how much more can it do for us who are by nature sinners?
 2. Therefore we should not underestimate the power of the impulses of human desire.
- B. The heart is highly deceitful and desperately wicked, one of the reasons that God searches it first in judging men. **JER 17:9-10**.
1. The heart thus cannot be trusted. **PRO 28:26**.
 2. How many put their trust in what God says cannot be trusted and justify themselves rather than Him, or make their heart’s impulse the determiner of God’s will?

3. We are not to trust our heart to understand God but rather **PRO 3:5-6**.
- C. The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth. **GEN 8:21**.
 1. This predisposition unrestrained provoked God's flood. **GEN 6:5**.
 2. This shows us that not even the greatest judgments change man's heart.
 3. This nature is what necessitated the act of God to change the inward part of man according to His own will and grace, giving him a new heart and nature synced to God. **HEB 8:10-12; EPH 4:24**.
 - a. This new heart and nature enables God's child to war against the old heart and nature which otherwise would have undisputed mastery of thoughts. **ROM 7:21-25**.
 - b. Unaltered human nature cannot make sense of this, having not the mind of Christ. **1CO 2:14-16**.
 - c. The conflict of the natural heart v. the new spiritual heart, though a turmoil, at least shows that a new nature is present which can effectively battle base natural thinking.
- D. Reconsider **JAM 1:14-15**.
 1. It is NOT a sin to be tempted or feel a lust.
 2. If that were the case, then Christ was a sinner. **HEB 4:15**.
 3. The sin occurs when the lust draws us away from what is right and we become *enticed* (stirred up and attracted to action) by the sinful proposition.
 4. This is the womb of sin: the evil *concupiscence* (vehement desire) in the lusts of the heart. **ROM 7:8; MAT 5:28**.
 5. Lust has conceived at this point, per v. 15.
 6. What follows is sin and death (in its various facets). v. 15.
 7. This is why it is critical to not indulge lust since it will draw the soul away into sin.
 - a. Sin is obeyed in its lusts. **ROM 6:12**.
 - b. Flee lusts at their *inception* rather than let them mature to *conception*. **2TI 2:22**.
 8. v. 15 sets forth the genealogy of death.
 - a. Lust conceives and brings forth sin.
 - b. Sin brings forth death.
 - c. This is not an *endless genealogy* (**1TI 1:4**). It has an end: death. **EZE 18:4; ROM 6:21-23**.
 - d. This is a stark contrast to the *crown of life* which is the end of faithfulness. **JAM 1:12**.
 9. (**JAM 1:16**) Do not err, my beloved brethren.
 - a. The thought of a sinful desire, if held captive to the obedience of Christ, is best rebuked promptly by what Scripture SAYS about that desire. **MAT 4:8-11; PSA 119:11**.
 - b. Flirting with that thought, or dwelling on that thought is akin to showing your captive the combination to your gun safe as if he would never think of using your arms against you to make you his captive.

- VI. Peter tells us to "...gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (**IPE 1:13**).
 - A. gird: To surround, encircle with a belt or girdle, esp. for the purpose of confining the garments and allowing freer action to the body. *Fig.* To prepare for action; to brace up for, to, or to do something.
 - B. The image is of a warrior or runner whose excess garment hinders his progress. So are the

- myriad of excess thoughts that are part of our being which need to be confined.
- C. Note the usage of *gird* in **EXO 12:11; LUK 12:35-37.**
- D. Of all the thoughts with which we should gird our loins, spiritual truth is paramount.
EPH 6:14.
1. There is much other “truth” that can preoccupy our minds: scientific, philosophical, historical, even dark truth of a Machiavellian bent. But none of these should have dominion in our lives over the truth of the gospel; those thoughts must be held captive.
 2. We are not to be wise in *doing* evil nor *concerning* evil but rather wise in genuine goodness. **JER 4:22; ROM 16:19.**
- E. As Peter wrote, the believer's mind is to be in a state of preparation for the coming of the Lord. Disregard of that great end is to open oneself up to carnal hedonism which lives only for the present world and its delights. **MAT 24:44-51; 1CO 15:32.**
- F. Gird up the loins of your mind against the toxic thoughts of futility. **MAL 3:14.**
1. It may seem that conformity to God’s righteousness and expectations is futile when you are only looking at the immediate picture. **PSA 73:13-18.**
 2. Living for Christ is not futile: the reward is certain. **ROM 2:6-7; 2TI 4:7-8.**
- G. Gird up the loins of your mind against the notion of “I’m all alone” and so lose hope.
1. Elijah thought he was all alone but he wasn’t. **ROM 11:2-4.**
 2. Believers are never truly all alone, even in the darkest valleys. **PSA 23:4-5; 27:10.**
 3. The world will mock those who thus trust in God (**MAT 27:43**) but such believers cope with and overcome this world. **JOH 16:33; 1JO 5:4.**
 4. Faith joins with hope to the end of the visible present which shrouds the invisible future state. **HEB 11:1.**
- H. Gird up the loins of your mind against the false treasures that mislead us and dethrone God from His rightful dominion over our hearts, souls, minds and strength. **MAR 12:30.**
1. One’s attention and affection will necessarily be directed according to what he values most, so choose wisely. **MAT 6:20-21.**
 2. Think not that you can “have it all” without forfeiting what is best. **MAR 8:36.**
 3. The unlawful things like the lusts of the flesh must be mortified or they will make you their captive and will chastise you. **COL 3:5-6.**
 4. Lawful things must be governed lest they become *inordinate* (not regulated, controlled, or restrained) affections. **1CO 6:12.**
 - a. This includes everyday needs and desires, including relationships. David’s love for his rebel son, Absalom, muddled his thinking about him while he lived and still controlled him after his death. **2SAM 18:5; 19:1-4.**
 - b. NOTE: the greater our emotional investment in anything or anyone, the more power that thing or person has over our minds and decisions.
 5. There is peace and joy that believers cannot have stolen from them. They can only lose it by forfeiture. **JOH 14:27; 16:22.**
 - a. No joy means no strength (**NEH 8:10**) and girding requires strength.
 - b. Excess care wars against the peace of God which keeps our emotions and thoughts healthy. **PHIL 4:6-7.**
 - c. Contentment is attainable regardless of gain or loss. **PHIL 4:10-13.**
- I. Gird up the loins of your mind against focusing on outward appearances of things which appeal to our senses and appetites.
1. Satan cloaks his deceptions in outwardly righteous garb. **2CO 11:13-15.**
 - a. The Pharisees appeared outwardly righteous. **MAT 23:28.**
 - b. Mystery, Babylon the Great is richly appareled, materially prosperous and

full of sensual delights. **REV 18:16-23.**

- c. Paul warned about those who have "...a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof..." (**2TI 3:5**).
 2. God judges according to the heart, not the outward appearance. **1SAM 16:7.**
 3. Jesus taught, "Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment" (**JOH 7:24**).
 4. Jesus appeared "...as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him" (**ISA 53:2**).
 5. An undue deference to outward appearance brings men into bondage. **2PE 2:18-19.**
 6. Again, do not confuse *beauty of holiness* (**PSA 29:2**) with *holiness of beauty*, and end up errantly concluding, "Surely the LORD is in this place..." (**GEN 29:32**).
 7. We must renounce any tendency to judge the validity of something based upon its outward appearance and resolve to agree with God in judging according to truth, measuring all things by His word. **PSA 119:128; 1JO 4:6.**
 8. This principle applies in everyday matters: watch out for premature conclusions about others before getting the bigger picture. **JOH 7:51; JOS 22.**
 - J. Gird up the loins of your mind against the notion that circumstances are signposts from God informing you of His will, leading you to ask, "What is God trying to tell me?"
 1. It must be understood that God is not *trying* to tell you anything. He has already told you in His word what He wants to say. **ISA 8:20; HEB 1:1-2.**
 2. Relying on circumstances alone to determine right or wrong can be very misleading. It is actually akin to pagan superstition. **ACT 28:3-6.**
 3. A Biblically-informed saint who has the word hidden in the heart (**PSA 119:11**) may be able to wisely interpret circumstances and act appropriately. But this is not a matter of circumstances containing divine messages: it is the divine messaging of Scripture prompting the mind to wisely interpret the circumstances.
 - K. Gird up the loins of the mind concerning the influences of conscience.
 1. Conscience is an important part of our being and should not be flippantly violated. **ACT 24:16; 1TI 1:19.**
 2. But, as seen earlier, conscience can be corrupted by sin or searing. **EPH 4:17-19; 1TI 4:1-4.**
 3. The conscience may be weak through lack of knowledge of the truth. **1CO 8:7.**
 4. "Always let your conscience be your guide..." but understand that your conscience may be inaccurately burdened and may need to be amended by the truth of God.
 5. The best conscience is one that is formed by perfecting knowledge of good and evil according to the word of righteousness. **HEB 5:13-14.**
- VII. Paul also in **2CO 10:5** emphasized the casting down of "...every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God..." This may apply to what God knows, and to what may be known of God.
- A. Worldly wisdom challenges God and blocks men's minds from knowing Him in truth. **ROM 1:21-23; 1CO 1:17-21; 2:4-8.**
 - B. We are warned against worldly philosophy. **COL 2:8.**
 - C. We are warned against "...oppositions of science falsely so called..." (**1TI 6:20-21**).
 - D. The Jews exalted Moses and the Law for knowledge of God's will but missed its message of natural corruption and of Christ as the Answer. **ROM 2:17-20 c/w JOH 5:45-47.**
 - E. Job thought himself clever enough to challenge God until God dared him to make a

complex universe and then get back to Him. **JOB 38-41.**

F. Universities pale in knowledge and wisdom to the One Who made the universe.

G. All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ. **COL 2:3.**

1. Christ is the Supreme Revelator of God. **1JO 5:20; JOH 1:18.**

2. He is the perfect Man Who shows us also how best to overcome Satan's lies while still under the restraints of corruption. **EPH 4:13-15.**

H. **“and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God;** every proud thought of the heart, every great swelling word of vanity, every big look, even all the lofty looks and haughtiness of men, with every airy flight, and high towering imagination, reasoning, and argument advanced against the Gospel of Christ; which is here meant by the knowledge of God, and so called, because it is the means of leading souls into the knowledge of God, even into a better knowledge of him than can be attained to, either by the light of nature, or law of Moses; to a knowledge of him, and acquaintance with him in Christ the Mediator, in whom the light of the knowledge of the glory of God is given; and with which knowledge of God eternal life is connected, yea, in this it consists; it is the beginning of it, and will issue in it.” (John Gill Commentary)