

MINDING YOUR MIND 2 CORINTHIANS 10:4-5

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 today who has this problem, or do any of you find it easier to **put on a few pounds**, than you do to **take off a few pounds**?

Have you ever suspected that just imagining a plate of food somehow added a few inches to the waistline?

It seems all I have to do to gain weight is to think of a calorie-stuffed dessert... a creamy *hot-fudge sundae*!... a mouth-watering *chocolate layered cheesecake*...

All I did was think the thought... I just imagined the edible... I put it in *my mind* - not *my mouth*! Yet presto, it yielded *instant inches*... or so it sometimes seems!

Actually our suspicions 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?

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

The thoughts you entertain effect you spiritually. They either *lead you to Christ*, or *lead you into sin...*

In my opinion, it's not an overstatement to say, the key to living a victorious Christian life is found here in 2 Corinthians 10:4-5. This is such an vital passage...

In this morning's text, Paul takes us to a battlefield - *but a battlefield of unusual variety*. Here you'll find no barbed wire, or tanks, or camouflaged tents...

Here the soldiers aren't worried about biological weapons, or lazar-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 become productive for God's Kingdom... *will all be determined by what goes on in the gray matter 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.

That's why 1 Peter 1:13 tells us, "**Gird up the loins of your mind.**" The phrase, "**gird**

up", means "get a grip."

You could say "tighten the chinstrap on your mind" - or "pull up your mental bootstraps" - or even "role up your spiritual shirtsleeves." In essence, Peter is saying to us, it's time to **get a grip on our thought life.**

For Peter this is the issue that demands extraordinary effort, persistence, and determination.

This is where you should spend 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, Zack, 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.**"

This morning I want to take a closer look at the battle raging in our minds. We'll look at **the foe, the fight, the firepower.** But here's our starting point - **the good news about this battle is God has promised it's a fight we can win!** This morning we're going to 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...

In 1994 Reuters News Service issued a report about a Chinese woman who was experiencing numbness in her legs and arms. She consulted doctors, but to no avail. For nearly two decades her symptoms worsened.

Massive headaches were added to her ailments. Again, her piercing pain drove her to the doctors.

This time a CAT scan revealed the problem - a rusty pin lie under her scalp. The head of the pin was outside her skull, but the point poked into her brain.

The location of the pin caused doctors to speculate that the sharp object had penetrated through her skin shortly after birth - before her skull had hardened into shape. Everyone was amazed that a person could live so long with a rusty pin 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 - 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 affect 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 popular kids. When prom-time came you stayed home.

Today, your circumstances have changed...

You're loved and forgiven by God. You're surrounded by *an adoring spouse, admiring kids, faithful friends,* but you're still tormented by these deep-seated, painful feelings of rejection that formed early in life.

Perhaps you had a demanding dad you could never please. You resented his constant pressure, and were so relieved to leave home and get out from under his disapproval... but to this day his expectations still haunt you. *You work and work, and don't know why!*

Your God, your family - they love you for who you are - but you're still trying to win

that elusive approval.

These are attitudes Paul labels “**strongholds.**”

A “**stronghold**” develops over 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 pins put there earlier in life, *by people other than us*, still cause tremendous pain.

Even in our thoughts about God we can become victimized... Hellfire and damnation preachers gave us the idea that all God *wanted* to do was judge us. He desired to squelch any fun, and doom us to boredom.

Over the years we've lived in confusion. We've needed God, but we've failed to reach out to Him.

Instead we've muffled our hurts, and muddled along trying to get by without the God who made us and loves us. We've kept God and Christians at arm's length - rather than risk another round of rejection.

Sadly, “**strongholds**” have created a “**stranglehold**” on our life, and have robbed us of real joy and peace.

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 married. Rather than open up her hurts to the love of God - she spent her whole life angry at men.

In fact when she died her last will and testament ordered 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 - 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 - then 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 insulate 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 addictive and destructive character that forms when you continually sow wrong thoughts. You can no longer see around or over the wall. You assume escape and change are impossible.

Tell a man who's built up these mental walls that it's time to do a little "*soul-searching*" and he thinks you're asking him to go through his Motown music collection. *Get it... soul-searching...* He's oblivious to the issues.

"High things" are walls of stubbornness that blind us to the truth about God, ourselves, and relationships.

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.

The 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!

But here's the 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 pins 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 pins 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**.

At first glance, Philippians 4:8 is a sugary, syrupy, little verse that seems to promote the naivety of the positive thinking crowd. Perhaps you've heard it...

"Whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just,

whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy - meditate on these things."

If Paul were texting he'd add a smily face at the end.

But what at first appears a mushy verse is not what it seems. This verse follows a chapter of intense choices.

In Philippians 3 Paul tell us he's forgotten the religion of his past. He's turned his back on his self-righteous achievements, and claims to fame. He tore his former values out by the root - and charted a new course in life. When he met Jesus everything in his life changed.

He's now made it his goal to press on... *Paul is putting on a full court press to know Jesus in all His fullness - to experience His power and His sufferings.*

Read through Philippians and by the time you get to 4:8 Paul has ransacked his thought life. He's pulled out and cast down all his assumptions and justifications.

He's cleaned house. He's undergone a total home makeover - and now in verse 8 he tells us how he intends to redecorate his life, *"whatever things are true, noble, just, pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous, praiseworthy... meditate on these things."* And this is what Paul says to the Corinthians. **Clear out your old thought life and begin to redecorate with godliness.**

When the NIV translates the phrases, **"pulling down strongholds" and "casting down arguments"** it uses the term **"demolish."** It's time to schedule our **"strongholds"** and **"arguments"** and **"high things"** for total demolition!

The reason some of us never get victory in our thoughts is we're not ruthless

enough in our choices.

You don't transform your outlook on life by simply memorizing a few verses, or reading a *"quote of the day"* at breakfast. If you want your life to really reflect the glory of Christ you have to hold up every area of your life, and inspect it in the light of God's Word.

It takes courage, and commitment, and brutal honesty to stop hiding behind excuses and justifications - and tear out old assumptions. High walls crumble only when pride is dealt a death-blow!

Too many folks 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!

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.

And the path to victory is two-staged... First, you pull the weeds - cast down the strongholds. *Then your wild and wandering thoughts have to be corralled and tamed.* The mind has to be retrained to obey God... or it'll return to the false assumptions you once tore down.

Paul says 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 and pinned and made to think godly thoughts.

In Isaiah 55:8-9 God speaks through the prophet, "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," says the LORD. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts."

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 He loves us - that He'll see us through - that He'll never forsake us - *but we feel alone, we grow afraid.* Worrisome thoughts run wild.

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 kid with a net rounding up all the butterflies, we need to snatch 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 the 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.

During my research this past week, I learned that the best selling video game franchise of all time is **Mario Brothers**. Since Mario's first appearance in 1981, 446 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 the Word of God 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 in God's blessing 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 that's independent of God's *Word and ways and will*. And when these carnal tools are used *man* is glorified, rather than *God*.

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

When negative feelings or sinful impulses come out of nowhere and try to overwhelm your spirit - *open your Bible and read how you're the apple of God's eye...*

Remind yourself that He chose you before the foundation of the world... He promises to never leave or forsake you... Remember that God sacrificed Jesus, His most precious possession, to make you His child...

If you didn't have a reason before to rise up, and resist sin, and be who you are in Christ - *you will now!*

Here's the point, grab hold of God's truth, and the Spirit will see to it that His Word grabs hold of you!

If you savor the Word, God's Spirit will bring it to life and validate it by working personally in your life. Ask Him to recall Scripture to your mind at key points in the day. God has ways of making His truth real in daily life!

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 to do... **As we** pull down strongholds - along with the arguments and habits that prop them up... **as we** capture every stray thought and make it obey the truth of Christ... **we're fueling** the whole process by chewing on the Word, and walking by faith, and abiding in God's presence, and trusting in His strength, and relying on His power!

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.*

Are you a student of the Scripture? Do you mull it over in your mind, and hide it in your heart, and apply it to your life. *You're not a serious Christian until you get serious about studying and applying God's Word.*

Our minds need to be renewed.

In Psalm 119:9 the psalmist asks the question, “How can a young man cleanse his way?” Then he provides the answer, “By taking heed according to Your Word.”

It's interesting that the psalmist picks out the young man. He doesn't say “How can a baby or grandma cleanse their way?” No, he mentions adolescent boys.

Teenage boys are notorious for being reckless, and impulsive, and driven by untamed passions. Yet the psalmist is confident there's a way to corral him - and if it can shape up the young man, then the same method will be successful on every other category of persons.

So what is the solution? “By taking heed to (God's) Word.” It's no exaggeration - the most crucial step to take in your Christian life is to daily set aside a time to get into God's Word, and apply it throughout the day.

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

Think about it, you would never let a toddler wander through the neighborhood - or your dog wander around in the grocery store - *why should we let your mind wander around aimlessly and 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.”

It's been 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.

Here's a recap of today's lesson... To *conquer the foe*, and *win the fight*, then *interject the firepower*.

Let me ask you a vital question, *who's minding your mind?* The UNCF's famous slogan is now 40+ years old. You've heard it, "a mind is a terrible thing to waste." Well, that is especially true for a Christian!

If you don't win the battle over sin in your mind, you'll next be fighting it in your words and actions. Put an end to sin before the thought becomes a deed!

Let's glorify God in the inner court of our thoughts and feelings - as well as, the outer court of our deeds.