

Battle for the Mind – Lesson 3

Taking Your Thoughts Captive

Introduction:

We established in lesson 1 that as a person ‘thinks within himself, so he is’ (Proverbs 23:7). It is of great importance how I think and what I think about because this will play an important role in the forming of my character, personality and behavior patterns.

In this lesson we will give further consideration to the importance of thought control and how to actually achieve it on a daily basis. It is important to remind ourselves at the outset of this study that we are not at the mercy of every passing thought which drifts into our minds – we have the ability to take each one captive and control it:

2 Corinthians 10:4-5 – *“For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ...”*

1. Creatures of Choice

In his wisdom God created man with a free will. We are creatures of choice able within certain bounds to determine our own success or failure in life.

Our coming into a relationship with God was an issue of choice. Though we now know that God ‘chose us in [Christ] before the creation of the world’ (Ephesians 1:4), at the point of our salvation it was our choice, and act of our free will, to open the door of our heart and invite Christ in:

Revelation 3:20 – *“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.”*

In our ongoing Christian life, we are confronted with issues of choice on a daily basis. In these situations we can choose to approach God and ask him for whatever we need. By doing so we will be in a stronger position and able to do what God wills in our lives.

Mathew 7:7-8 – *“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.”*

James 4:2 – *“You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask.”*

We should determine in our hearts to follow Christ wholeheartedly by deliberately choosing to live in the centre of his will at all times.

Joshua 24:15 – *“And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”*

This ability to exercise free will and choice extends into the area of thought and mind control. You can choose what to think about and therefore affect the type of person you will ultimately become.

2. Worked In and Worked Out

At the point of our salvation God started a life-embracing work in each of us. We were reborn and made new creations so that the old was replaced with the new (2 Corinthians 5:17). Our responsibility now is to work out what he has worked into us.

Philippians 2:12-13 – *“Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”*

As you grow in your understanding of what God has done for you in salvation, you must choose to work it out. You decide whether or not to do his will in every situation.

3. Obedience and Disobedience

Romans 6:23 – *“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

The decision to obey or disobey starts in the mind.

We will ultimately have to give account to God for every thought, word and deed. As we grasp this truth, we are provoked to live in a healthy fear of God. We deliberately think in line with God’s will and deal with any sinful thoughts which would cause us to live contrary to his desire for us.

Proverbs 16:6 – *“By steadfast love and faithfulness iniquity is atoned for, and by the fear of the LORD one turns away from evil.”*

Proverbs 19:23 – *“The fear of the LORD leads to life, and whoever has it rests satisfied; he will not be visited by harm.”*

4. With God We Have Control

Some people are locked into wrong patterns of living and, when recognizing that the way they think is part of the problem, say: ‘I can’t help thinking these things. I know they’re wrong but they just keep coming back into my mind.’ I’m sure we can all identify with this sort of comment. But it is the thin end of a large wedge of deception. Satan certainly is the source of sinful thoughts, but that does not absolve us from the responsibility of handling them correctly when they arrive in our minds. In God we have the strength to be free from these thoughts.

Considered the following scriptures, noting particularly what we are required to do:

2 Corinthians 10:5 – *“We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ...”*

Ephesians 4:22-24 – *“...to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”*

Colossians 3:2 – *“Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.”*

Philippians 4:8 – *“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.”*

Our responsibility is to ‘take captive’, ‘put off’ and ‘put on’, ‘think about’ – in other words, let our minds dwell only on wholesome thoughts. We must literally sift our thoughts and entertain only those that will work for good in our lives.

You have the ability to entertain and ultimately produce the fruit of that thought from the enemy or to reject it and live free from its effect. You are not at the mercy of every passing thought, with God we are free!

5. Take and Make

2 Corinthians 10:5 - *“We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ...”*

The New testament in Basic English renders this verse: ‘Causing every thought to come under the authority of Christ.’

In order to take hold of a thought, make it obedient to Christ’s authority and then deal with it accordingly, we must have a rule for sorting our thoughts.

a. The thought filter

Because we are meant to be like Christ, we need to filter our thoughts in such a way that those which reflect his heart, mind and will are entertained, and those which are clearly contrary to his will are rejected. Our criteria for doing this is a knowledge of what God approves and what he hates. Knowing this gives us a firm basis on which to sort every thought entering our mind.

Your knowledge of what God hates and approves is so fundamental to your success in the battle for your mind that Satan seeks to undermine it. He tries to argue against what you know to be the truth. Scripture provides the answer to this:

2 Corinthians 10:5 – *“We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ...”*

The battle is against every thought which sets itself against the knowledge of God. Your knowledge of him will only be as great as two interacting factors:

- Your knowledge of his Word.
- Your sensitivity to the Holy Spirit's promptings within you.

b. Using the filter

Working together, the Spirit in you and your knowledge of the Word equip you to deal with every wrong thought. Each thought is taken captive and filtered to find out:

- Does it agree with God's Word?
- Does it grieve or rest easily with the Holy Spirit within me (Ephesians 4:30)?

It is then handled accordingly. An easy way to remember how to use the thought filter is by memorizing three simple words:

Recognize: Recognize the source of the thought by lining it up with your knowledge of God's word and what the Spirit says to your heart. In other words, 'make it obedient to Christ.'

Refuse: If its source is unwholesome, refuse to dwell on it. Actively put the thought out of your mind. Refuse to conform to it.

Romans 12:2 – *“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”*

James 4:7 – *“Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”*

Replace: Replace the negative, evil, critical, impure thoughts with God's Word.

Psalms 119:15-16 – *“I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways. I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word.”*

Replacing the wrong thought with a good one is vital so that it is not able to bounce straight back once you've refused it. Replace it by filling your mind with all God's goodness to you.

6. Guard the Gates

Someone once said: 'If you keep your mind sufficiently open, people will throw a lot of trash into it.'

Many of the wrong thought patterns that produce a battle in our minds can be prevented simply by guarding the access points to our minds. Such thoughts are often the product of situations we knowingly walk into. By guarding the gates to our minds we can in many instances prevent bad thoughts from intruding on our thinking.

- a. Guard what you look at.

Mathew 6:22-23 – *“The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!”*

Many thoughts find access to your mind through what you see. The television programs and videos you watch, the books and magazines you read, the films you go to see can all be a springboard for positive or negative thinking. Feed your mind with good things, by reading the Scriptures and other helpful literature and by watching films and videos that are edifying as well as enjoyable.

b. Guard where you go

Many wrong thoughts are triggered off by our being in the wrong place. David’s sin with Bathsheba didn’t take place just because he saw her. The truth is that he shouldn’t have even been in the palace at that time:

2 Samuel 11:1 – *“In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel. And they ravaged the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem.”*

David should have been at war with his army but instead sent someone else and therefore had time to let his eyes and mind wander.

If you know that attending certain parties or going to specific places will give an opportunity to put wrong thoughts in your mind – don’t go!

c. Guard who you spend your time with.

It is a fact that we become like those with whom we spend most of our time. Recognizing this, the Bible exhorts us:

Proverbs 22:24-25 – *“Make no friendship with a man given to anger, nor go with a wrathful man, lest you learn his ways and entangle yourself in a snare.”*

1 Corinthians 15:33 – *“Do not be deceived: ‘Bad company ruins good morals.’”*

This doesn’t mean that we should never mix with nor befriend non-Christians. It does, however, put a responsibility on us to be wise. Make sure you are the source of influence and not the other way around.

Also, be sure to maintain the fellowship of the spirit with other Christians. We can help support and strengthen one another.

Proverbs 27:17 – *“Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another.”*

d. Guard what you listen to.

What we hear goes into our minds whether we like it or not. We then have to deal with it. In some situations, however, we can prevent ourselves from hearing potentially bad things by taking suitable precautions:

Listen to good music with wholesome lyrics.

Don't entertain gossip. If a person starts telling you some gossip about a third person, refuse to listen. In this way you prevent a seed of division entering your mind and becoming a barrier between you and the third person.

Proverbs 20:19 – *“Whoever goes about slandering reveals secrets; therefore do not associate with a simple babbling.”*

Don't let negative words fill your mind with doubts and fears. Watching the news late at night can unsettle and cause disillusionment in some people's minds. They then go to bed depressed and pessimistic about the future. If that is your problem, watch the news earlier or avoid it altogether.

Isaiah 26:3 – *“You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you.”*

e. Guard your reaction to your feelings

Philippians 4:8 – *“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.”*

Our application of this verse does not depend upon how we feel. So often the 'Monday morning blues' or changing moods can plant wrong thoughts in your mind. Instead, fill your mind with good things, no matter how you feel. As you do this, declaring them to God and yourself, you will start to feel better, too!

Psalm 42:5-6 – *“Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God. My soul is cast down within me; therefore I remember you from the land of Jordan and of Hermon, from Mount Mizar.”*

Conclusion:

Guard the gates to your mind. In this way you will immediately reduce the ability of the enemy to sow wrong thoughts into your mind.

Take captive and make obedient to Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5) any that do pass the gate. Thus you will fill your mind only with God's thoughts and serve to speed the transformation of your whole being into the image and likeness of Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18).