

**HOW TO GAIN VICTORY OVER DARK PLACES:
Part 1: How to Bring Every Ungodly Thought into Captivity ©**

Aichmalōtizō

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2 Corinthians 10:5

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I. INTRODUCTION:

- A. In this four-part series titled, *“How to Gain the Victory over Dark Places,”* we will explore some of the hauntings that are keeping us from being all that God has called us to be. So many of us long to have fulfilling lives where we have made a significant impact in those that come in our sphere of influence. Yet, if we are brutally honest, we know we are not where we should be! So, if you are ready to change, and live a life that is filled with lasting joy, purpose, meaning, and fulfillment unto the glory of God, then let us explore one of the most pervasive problems in the dark places of our lives.
- B. One of the deepest struggles many of us find ourselves experiencing is not found in the greater world of evil, injustice, malice, and treachery but within the very domains of our minds.
- C. The experience is all too common and perhaps all too routine. It begins when the enemy surrounds our stronghold, that is, our personhood. But we believe our fortress is tough enough to withstand evil forces in view of our slick, tall, and thick stone walls, interlocking gates and drawbridge, huge towers, and a deep moat; it took years to build and a lot of people contributed to its formidable success. Its treasures within are priceless. We’ve soon good people fall! But we are convinced that it will not happen to us! We are secure!
- D. Instead of catapults, knives, swords, and terrible sounds that would normally foreshadow what is expected to be unleashed, the enemy, namely, the dark forces of evil (i.e., the “world,” “flesh,” and “devil”) cleverly uses attractive devices of enticements. Even though we fully know the attractive allurements are disguises, bit-by-bit we are taken in by the

intoxicating pheromones that are released from the “spectacular” fires they stoke around our walled stronghold. We longingly take in the trappings, rationalizing what we are experiencing within all sorts of excuses... trying to convince ourselves and perhaps even those around us that they are not what we think they are. We feel the warmth touch us, and as a result our pulse quickens, feelings are stimulated, and possibilities are generated. As our imagination is inflamed, the temptations incrementally hook themselves into us like lures into a fish’s mouth. Idly we float.

- E. Once the enemy has secured our minds, our wills are surrendered. As a result, we willfully lower our drawbridge and allow the enemy forces it have its way with us. Like a victor’s flag over conquered territory, everything we stood for is torn apart and trampled. The enemy consumes us as we lay on the floor stupefied in our chains, intoxicated by the false pleasures they richly but deceptively bestowed upon us. Once the spoils of war are taken, things we once held dear, once our innocence is extracted from us, the conscience, which served as our prophetic voice of warning the moment the enemy was sighted changes tone and becomes the weeping cry of conviction within.
- F. We long to be free from the deadly battles within, the gut-wrenching anxieties, and the cancerous- like regrets that keep on emerging. We lie in our beds, sit at our desks, and drive our cars with tears going down our faces after a moment, an evening, or even a night of sinful indulgence. Our stomachs are tied in knots as we feel the waves of regret break upon us. We allowed their intoxicating weapons of temptation to cause us to lower the draw bridge and allow them in. Like the Trojan horse that entered into the walled city of Troy, we blindly welcome our enemy. After the plunder us, we find ourselves grappling in the ruins.
- G. Time goes by; we pick ourselves up. We start anew! But did we learn something from the last invasion we experienced? The castle is rebuilt. Things are going well. But this time, we think we are ready for whatever might come our way!

H. Sure enough, and when we least expect it, the enemy returns! Once again, they encircle our fortress. We yell, "You will not take us down!" Though our posture tightens in resolve, our rhetoric is tough, and our spirits high, we find ourselves incrementally slipping once again unto their invitation! One action, one image, one sound, and one word and the pheromones of temptation take us down once again... and again... and again. Their tactics are all too familiar; yet we fall prey repeatedly.

The bottom line: We can't seem to gain victory over our conscious thought life!

I. What can we do to win the battle within our minds in a world that is saturated with activities, images, and sounds that enter and inflame our dark desires? How can we gain a victory that will last? How can we calm the raging seas within and find peace that is both wholesome and holy? Consider the words of the Apostle Paul from 2 Corinthians 10:5:

"5 We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."

1. But what does this command really mean? Do we accurately understand the context in which it is given by the apostle Paul? How can we execute this principle of taking captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ in a post-Christian culture whereby that which exotic, profane, and sexual is not only promoted, but also celebrated?
2. If we can really grasp this practice that the Apostle Paul and others have used then we will have a tool that will aid in handling all sorts of things that are contrary to our majestic God:
 - a. Temptations
 - b. Slander

- c. Gossip
- d. Worry
- e. Un-forgiveness
- f. Immorality
- g. Various bad desires and habits
- h. Anger
- i. Unrealistic appraisal of a situation
- j. Jealousy
- k. Resentment.

3. See, this command has something for every type of struggle because so much of the war is in our thoughts:
 - a. Does not Proverbs 23:7: *"For as he thinks in his heart, so is he?"*
 - b. But we can also think about it this way: So a thought, reap an action. Sow an action. Reap a habit. Sow a habit. Reap a Character. Sow a Character. Reap a destiny.
4. If we want to get the victory we must engage the enemy where it is first found: our minds. If we lose the mind to the enemy, the enemy will undoubtedly take control of our wills. But how terrible it will be if the enemy is able to conquer our hearts, that is, our deep-seated affections, the control center of our personality! When that happens, apart from divine deliverance, we could find ourselves sinking to the bottom. Not only are we addicted to this vice, but we can't seem to function without it. We might find ourselves like Gollum in Lord of the Rings as reported by Gandalf to Frodo: He hates and loves the ring just as he loves and hates himself.

III. EXPOSITION OF 2 CORINTHIANS 10:5:

- A. In the context of spiritual warfare in Chapter 10 of Second Corinthians we have the following words from the Apostle Paul to the Corinthian Church, a church known for allowing the world's actions, affections, attitudes, and desires to invade every corner and crevice as reported on 1 Corinthians: 10:3-6:

³ For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. ⁴ For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, ⁵ casting down arguments against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled:

- B. The context of this passage is found in his appeal against those in the Corinthian Church who challenged his apostolic authority by arguing that that he himself was a carnal Christian.
1. Thus, Paul readily admits in verses 3-5 that he walks in the flesh. He walks in the flesh because he is made of human flesh and blood as "we" all are."
 2. But he goes on to say that he does not work according to the flesh, that is, his sin nature. In other words, he is denying he is a carnal Christian.
 3. Thus, he claims that the weapons Paul uses are not carnal weapons in view of this spiritual warfare, weapons like threats, trickery, duplicity, and manipulation. Rather, Paul relies on the supernatural ministries of the Holy Spirit.
- C. Overlooking ancient city of Corinth is a hill that stands about 1, 875 feet high. On top of this hill was a fortress. Paul uses the site of the fortress on top of a hill as an illustration of the spiritual warfare he has been engaging. In essence, Paul asserts that he has destroyed strongholds, cast down towers, taken captives. Of course, the fortress, towers, and captives are

ungodly arguments, ungodly rationalizations, and ungodly thoughts.

- D. Looking more closely at verse 5: I like the way Dr. Tom Constable, retired chairman of the Bible Exposition Dept. at Dallas Theological Seminary, puts it in his Expository Notes of 2 Corinthians:

10:5 As in Ephesians 6:12, Paul described the enemy as impersonal. We wage war against invisible, intangible spiritual forces, though obviously Satan is behind these forces. Satan's strategy is not only to use demons (Eph. 6:12) but also speculations (theories) and incorrect information that contradicts God's revealed truth. The propaganda of our enemy consists of ideas that run counter to the truth of God. "Speculations" or "arguments" (v. 4 in NIV) contrast with revelations that God has given, and they contradict those revelations. "Lofty things" or "pretensions" include any human act or attitude that asserts itself as being superior to God's will or truth.¹

- E. But what does it mean to bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ? Consider the following three nuances of the "captivity" (**αἰχμαλωτίζω; aichmalōtízō**) in the Greek New Testament:

1. First nuance: "Captivity" can be used to refer to a literal prisoner; one who has been taken captive or led into captivity. For example, consider Luke 21:24:

²⁴ And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

2. Second nuance: Greek word for "captivity" can also mean to captivate someone. For example, listen to 2 Timothy 3:1-7 (emphasis on verse 6):

¹ Dr. Thomas Constable, Notes on 2 Corinthians at www.soniclight.com, retrieved on 5 October 2014.

2 Timothy 3:1-7: But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: ² For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, ³ unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, ⁴ traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, ⁵ having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away! ⁶ For of this sort are those who creep into households and make captives of gullible women loaded down with sins, led away by various lusts, ⁷ always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.

3. Third nuance: In Romans 7:23 and here 2 Corinthians 10:5 we see the word “captivity” being used to mean:

- a. to subdue;
- b. to bring into subjection;
- c. to gain complete control over;
- d. to imprison.

4. In Romans 7:23 the sin nature is attempting to seize him. But in 2 Corinthians 10:5 Paul seeks imprison ungodly thoughts.

F. But before we turn our attention to applying the principle Paul and other exercised in 2 Corinthians 10:5 let me point out some interesting details about Romans 7 & 8 that will help us understand *how* it is possible that we can imprison ungodly thoughts.

G. In Romans 7 and 8 we come to discover that despite Paul’s good intentions and best efforts to do good, he always failed because they were no match (in themselves) for the sin that was determined to keep him in slavery. In fact, like Paul we know that there is not the slightest trace of goodness to be found in this lingering sinful “*nature*” (Romans 7:18).

F. F. Bruce’s insights are helpful:

Here then is the self-portrait of a man who is conscious of the presence and power of indwelling sin in his life; it is a tyrant whose dictates he hates and loathes, but against whose power he struggles in vain. When He is compelled by *force majeure* to obey the tyrant’s dictates, he does not acknowledge the ensuing acts as his own; they are the very opposite of what he desires to do.²

G. See, in and of himself he cannot defeat sin and do what the law requires (Rom. 7:21-23). Paul uses the personal pronoun “I” twenty-four times in these twelve verses (Rom. 7:14-25)! It is a testimony to the intensity of Paul’s effort to defeat sin and the absolute failure of self-effort to achieve sanctification. There is no reference to the Holy Spirit in chapter 7. That will come dramatically in Romans 8. Here in chapter 7 Paul is proving conclusively that sanctification (like justification) is impossible by our own self-efforts.

H. Quoting F. F. Bruce again:

Paul himself knows what it is to be torn this way and that by the law of his mind which approves the will of God, and the law of sin and death which pulls the other way. The Christian in fact, lives in two worlds simultaneously, and so long as this is so he lives in a state of tension. ...for all his desire to obey God’s law, he is compelled by the malignant power within to disobey it.³

I. Thus, Paul exclaims: What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? (Romans 7:2-25). This is a heart-rending cry from an exhausted soul in the depths of despair. This is the voice of one who has waged the battle and lost! But his cry, his plea is not one of hopelessness. Paul knows only a Person can deliver him from the power of sin... that Person is none other than Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 7:25), whose power is released through the indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:2-11), who is fully and equally God!

J. Renald Showers captures Paul’s anguish with this description very well:

² F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, 152.

³ *Ibid.*, 151-152.

Paul had struggled so long and strenuously through self-effort against the sinful disposition that he had exhausted all his strength. With no reserve left upon which to draw he collapses in the clutches of the sinful disposition. While in this desperate plight, Paul finally recognizes that he himself does not possess the power necessary to overcome the controlling power of the sinful disposition and to do the good. It dawns upon him that if he is ever to get victory over sin someone must provide that victory for him.⁴

- K. Of course that someone to deliver Him is Jesus Christ. Thus, in Christ, we are able to be empowered by the Spirit to live for Christ. Now, because he is in Christ and Christ is in Him, he is able to take captive His thoughts. In other words, the ministry of the Holy Spirit described in Romans 8 is the answer to the cry of Paul in Romans 7:25. Therefore, Paul's declaration of "**no condemnation**" refers to the continuing power of sin from which the Law and self-effort could not bring deliverance (Romans 7:14-25). Thus because of the Holy Spirit living in Him, Paul is not only free, but he also possesses the capability to have a victorious life that truly honors God. And one of the spiritual resources he now possesses is the capability to imprison ungodly thoughts.

IV. HOW SHOULD WE THEN LIVE?

- A. If we want to end what seems to be a losing battle with your thought-life, here's what we need to do:
1. Place your faith in Jesus Christ, believing that He is God, who died on the cross for your sins and rose bodily from the dead.
- Once you place your faith in Jesus Christ, you receive a new nature. You receive a new mind to know God, a new heart to love God, and a new will to obey God. Thus, the issue is no longer capability, but a willingness to align your mind, your heart, and your will with God's mind, heart, and will. When you are aligned with God, you are enjoying intimacy with God. As a result, in fellowship with God, you have the spiritual resources to

⁴ Renald Showers, *The New Nature*, 103-104.

imprison ungodly thoughts and have a conscious thought-life that truly worships the Lord in moment-by-moment living.

2. You must realize that the mind is the center of your spiritual life. If you are not where you are spiritually, it is time to examine what you think about the most... what arrests your attention... what is it that you linger on?
3. What objects, images, sounds, etc., do you surround yourself with that motivate you to turn to and perhaps open up those prison doors where ungodly thoughts are lie? What objects, images, or sounds are encouraging you to not only open those doors, but allow those ungodly thoughts to roam freely within your personhood, affecting and infecting your emotions, your affections, and your will? See, your surroundings say a lot about you! What you like! But your surroundings also influence you! Thus, free yourself of those things that are inflaming, feeding, and nurturing those dark areas in your life.
4. When that thought enters into your mind, you must imprison it. How you imprison it:
 - a. Do not dwell on it!
 - b. Lock it and throw the key away!
 - c. Do not feed it!
 - d. Do not nurse it!
 - e. Do not care of it!
 - d. Do not welcome it into your life.
 - e. Immediately dismiss it!
 - f. Put the ungodly thought in lockdown! Solitary confinement!

Once you start meditating it, the ungodly thought releases its pheromones. Eventually if you keep turning to the imprisoned thought and relish it repeatedly enough, you will develop a habit for it. Habit will then make its way into your affections.

5. Relish on what is holy, Good, and honorable!
 - a. We have to meditate, not merely read the Scriptures (Psalm 19:7-11; John 17:17).
 - b. Comprehend the mind of the Lord and do the will of God (Eph. 5:8-17).
 - c. Pray... the Peace of God guards the mind and heart of believers (Phil. 4:6-7).
 - d. Cultivate the disposition that you seek to magnify Jesus Christ in all things (Phil. 1:19-26).
6. Develop godly intimate relationships to mutually encourage one another. Do not forsake the assembly of healthy, Christ-centered, Bible-teaching church.

V. CONCLUSION:

- A. I find it so interesting how so many of us fail to imprison thought that are contrary to God, but so readily dismiss God-honoring thoughts that should be set free to dominate our actions and delight our affections. But the opportunity is before us each and every day to gain the victory! Like Martin Luther once said, you may not be able to stop the birds from flying over your head, but you can stop them from nesting in your hair." As long as we resist ungodly thoughts, they remain temptations; it is only when we embrace and welcome them that they us places we don't want to go.
- B. Therefore, if you have placed your life in Jesus Christ, then you have resources that are designed to give you the victory. In fact, if you are a believer, how you fight will be different. God has given you resources unmatched by anything the enemy has to offer. In contrast, if you don't follow after Christ, if you are not enjoying sweet intimacy with Christ in fellowship, the resources you are using to against spiritual forces of evil are finite. You will not win! If the apostle Paul couldn't win by his own resources, even with all of his best efforts, I don't suspect you will be able to as well. To fight a spiritual enemy you need

spiritual sources that flow from our infinite-personal God. Will you not right now turn to Him and gain the victory that He is able to offer you?