

CONQUORERING YOUR IMAGINATION

2 CORINTHIANS 10:5

FCF: The imaginations created by our depraved minds tend to hinder our obedience to God.

Proposition: It is possible to conquer your imaginations through the power of God manifest in the Gospel of Jesus.

Objective: To lead God's people to conquer imaginations in their minds that are hindering their full response to the Gospel of Christ.

Introduction:

You are a complex being. The most obvious part of you is the body, the material part of your being. However the non-material or spiritual part of you is just as essential to whom you are as your body.

The non-material or spiritual part of you includes the mind. While no one fully understands the working of the brain, and the formation of thought on the part of the brain, it is an essential part of you. The mind suffered greatly from the fall of man into sin. The Apostle Paul particularly has many negative things to say about the "mind" of the unsaved. Even in the saved Paul taught that it is important to keep it renewed in the Lord.

Your mind performs many tasks. It aids your will in decision-making. It serves as the storage space for the memory. It enriches your life through imagination. It reasons, argues, passes judgment on matters. Your mind is extremely active in you.

In this letter to the Corinthian church, the Apostle Paul puts before us some basic things about the mind in the non-Christian and the Christian. It is important that we understand these matters.

The beloved Apostle is actually defending his ministry in this passage. He is defending it from false teachers who had legalistic tendencies.

They were corrupting the thoughts of the believers and of the unbelievers. He is also defending it against critics in the church who were critical of the way he had handled some divisive issues in the fellowship. In defending his ministry Paul uses military language and figures. He also sets for some very fundamental truths about conquering the mind so that it can be obedient to Christ in everything. The objective in the Christian life is to bring every activity of the mind into obedience to the Lord Christ.

What are the truths we need to understand and the issues that we must face?

I. THE BATTLE FOR LIFE IS FOUGHT IN THE MIND.

This is the first issue for us to face—the battle is in the mind. Obviously since the mind is a part of your spiritual being, both God and Satan have access to the mind. Whichever one of them controls your mind will control you. This is the reason for the transfer of military language to the mind—campaigns, strongholds, weapons, struggles, casting down—all of these words have a military connotation.

- 1. The mind has imaginative powers that create strongholds, barriers to keep us from obedience to Christ.**

One of the powers of the mind relates to the formation of imaginations. The new version reads, “We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself against the knowledge of God.” “Arguments” is translated “imagination” in the King James and in the American Standard Version of the scriptures. The word could be translated either way, but imaginations make sense in this passage.

Our mind imagines things that become very real to us. They become so real that they become a “stronghold” or a “fortress”. They are a mental barrier in our Christian lives. The thing imagined may be utterly false, but it blocks the progress of the truth of God in our lives. Before we can

make progress in our walk with God, these strongholds have to be destroyed.

- 2. These creations of our evil minds are contrary to the truth that God has revealed in Christ and in His Word.**

II. THE IMAGINATIONS OF THE MIND CAN HINDER OUR OBEDIENCE TO THE GOSPEL.

This is the concern of the Apostle in this passage. He seems certain imaginations in the mind of believers and unbelievers standing the way of their obedience to Christ. His objective is to see each life and the thoughts in that life lived out in obedience to the Savior. Let us explore together the history and nature of these hindering imaginations.

- 1. Some of these imaginations come from the culture around us.**

The biblical word for culture is the world, meaning the world system.

One of the things that the world does is impose upon us a way of reasoning, a way of looking at things. A part of this is giving to us imaginations, or mental images by which we interpret the world and our lives.

The culture can nurture in you a false image of who you are. The world offers to you a mental image of who you are. They nurture this image in

your mind through all of its institutions and forces. As example the world offers you a very natural image of who you are. They interpret your life as a being a part of a natural evolutionary process. They would deny that you are created in the image of God, and that you have a lasting accountability to God. The world wants to control your imaginations—if they can control your imaginations they can control you.

The culture can nurture in you a false image of who God is. Our God does try to deny the existence of God; they just offer you another image of who God is. If I asked you, “What is God like?” how would you answer? Your answer will tell me so much about you. Do you see God as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob? It may well be that your image of God is a great hindrance to your obedience to the Lord Jesus.

The culture can nurture in you a false image of the people of God. The culture imagines Christians as being out of touch with reality. They imagine that Christians are meeting secretly to plot the burning of an abortion clinic. They imagine that Christians despise everyone who differs with them, such as people who follow other religions, and that Christians want to cram their view of right and wrong down the throat

of everyone. They want you to believe that Christians are an enemy of freedom, and that they are all hypocrites. Such an image causes many people to refuse obedience to our Savior.

2. Some of them are formed by our interpretations of things that happen to us.

We may begin to imagine that God does not love us because of some hurtful thing that happened in our lives. Some of us live with an image of God that is negative. The God we see in our minds is not a person of love. We base this image on some hurtful thing that happened in our lives in the past. In our understanding God is responsible for the hurtful experience, and we have no desire to know, worship, or obey such a God. Where did you get your image of God?

We may begin to imagine that we are worthless because of some moral failure in our lives. Our imaginations are powerful. How you see yourself is so important in your life. Some of you live with a negative image of who you are, and it is based on a failure in the past. It becomes the basis for your interpretation of your whole life. Since you failed one time, you must be a failure. The one moral transgression has forever marked you—or so you feel.

We may begin to imagine that we are failures because of one failure.

We may begin to imagine that we do not need God because of one success in our lives. This may well be the primary concern in this text. It may be imaginations that have been built up in the mind that exclude any need of God. You have a good job, have above average intelligence, and superior health. Surely God is for people who need a crutch. You feel perfectly adequate for whatever life may bring you. You are not a weakling.

Do you see how imaginations are formed? They may come to us from the culture, or they may come from our own experience, but there is one more element to be considered.

3. The Adversary of God nurtures all of them.

Satan always encourages us to receive the lies put out by the culture.

The culture is to Satan what the church is to Christ. It is the instrument through which he carries out his evil plots in his attempt to overthrow the purpose of God in history. Since he has access to your mind, he encourages through his deceptions the false images about God and about yourself that you pick up from the world.

Satan always acts as the accuser of the brethren to bolster all of our negative imaginations. This really becomes personal. Whenever he hears expressions from you that suggest unbelieving images of God or of

yourself or of the people of God, he will move immediately to encourage those negative images. He is by nature the accuser. In this he is the opposite of the Lord Jesus who is our advocate. The accuser will fill your mind with negatives, with accusations against yourself. The Advocate will remind you of the love of the Father through the indwelling Holy Spirit, and will speak on your behalf before the Father.

Satan always encourages our thoughts of independence from God. This is the essence of the plan of the enemy. He wants you to sin—the essence of sin is rebellion against God, declaring your independence of God. The enemy will cause you to imagine that your life is perfectly complete without the Lord.

From this it should be rather obvious that this struggle is real, and fierce, and that the stakes are high in the conflict.

III. EVIL IMAGINATIONS CAN BE REPLACED WITH FAITH-BUILDING IMAGINATIONS.

Paul approached this conflict with great confidence in his weapons. As he sought to destroy the mental and spiritual strongholds that were keeping individuals from a life of obedience to the Lord, Paul felt well equipped. He had learned the power of these weapons in his own life.

What are the weapons with which we destroy, tear down, demolish the old imaginations and replace them with a life of obedience to the Lord?

1. There is imagination-destroying power in the Gospel of Jesus.

The Gospel is our primary weapon. In another context Paul referred to it as “the sword of the Spirit”. There is something that we need to understand about the destruction of these strongholds of imagination. Ordinarily you do not make a direct frontal attack on the stronghold. For example, if there has been built up in your mind a stronghold around a negative self-image, God’s strategy is not to denounce this negative self-image, but rather to bring to you the liberating power of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus. The image set forth in the gospel will deny that you are an unworthy sinner, but will also comfort you with the truth that Christ died for you. Surely if the Eternal God considered you worth the death of His Son, you must have some value to yourself.

If you have in your mind an image of God that impersonal and unloving, the Gospel will replace that with the image of the Father who

lovingly sent His Son to be the propitiation for your sins, and for the sins of the whole world.

If you have put yourself under a cloud of condemnation and guilt because of some past failure, the Gospel will bring the light of forgiveness and hope into that darkness.

There is a wonderful power in the Gospel to transform your thinking. It can tear down old imaginations and replace them with new structures of faith and love.

2. There is imagination-destroying power in the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is the other element in our weaponry. We are armed with more than just a word—it is the sword of the Spirit! It is the word in the hand of the Holy Spirit that makes it sword against the false, and renewing power to replace the old with images that produce faith.

In your personal life this means that you must spend much time with the Gospel as it is recorded in the Scriptures. You must meditate on it day and night. You must think much upon it. You must read and study it daily. It is God's weapon to destroy the old and negative, and God's reconstructing power in your life. But you must do all of this in the Holy Spirit. He is your victory in this struggle for transformation.

As we are attacking the strongholds in the lives of others, these are our only weapons. We do so with the word of the Gospel and the power of the Holy Spirit. These are mighty weapons that can even bring every thought into submission to Christ.