

## **Bold, Part 17: “Take Every Thought Captive”**

### **2 Corinthians 10:1-6**

Pastor Eric Yee

### **Sermon Series Introduction**

Hi church. If you don't know me, my name is Eric and I'm one of the pastors.

We're currently in our sermon series through 2 Corinthians called “Bold.”

And I have the privilege to preach the Word of God to us today, so let's get right into it.

### **Sermon Introduction**

How much would you say our culture has influenced you in your thoughts and perspectives?

David Wells, author of *Above All Earthly Pow'rs*, said this in a 2007 interview:

I believe, in our time, understanding our culture takes on an urgency because this culture is so intrusive and it is so powerful in its capacity to shape our souls and our minds that if we're not, as it were, pushing back from an explicitly biblical Christian point of view, we're going to get swallowed up....

[I]t is more intense because we never escape from it.... When you read a book, you may get very involved in the plot and in the characters, but at any moment, you can close it. So there's always that distance between you and the book, and you can stop and think and maybe have a conversation about what you've just read. But when you're in a movie, the movie never stops, and you are enveloped in it, and your emotions are engaged in a way that they're not quite engaged by a book.<sup>1</sup>

So would you agree with what Wells says? Think for moment: How has our present culture influenced you in ways that you may not even be aware of?

Listen closely to some of our modern-day slogans and mottos, and let's think about what the underlying thoughts and ideas are behind them.<sup>2</sup>

- **<Show Adidasmotto.jpeg>** Adidas tells us that “Impossible is Nothing.” But the thoughts behind that are self-sufficiency and self-actualization.
- **<Show BKmotto.jpeg>** Burger King tells us to “Have It Your Way.” But the thoughts behind that are self-centeredness and self-indulgence.
- **<Show Oprahmotto.jpeg>** Oprah Winfrey tells us to “Live Your Own Truth.” But the thoughts behind that are individualism and relativism.

These are the ideas and thoughts that we're constantly bombarded with in our world. And unless we stop to think about our thoughts, and to evaluate them from the lens of God's Word—to *close* the world's book and to *open* God's book, so to speak—the movie of this world won't just turn itself off. And if we're not careful, the ideas and thoughts of this world will begin to shape our souls and our minds more than God's Word and the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Unless we're “pushing back from an explicitly biblical Christian point of view, we're going to get swallowed up.”

<sup>1</sup> David Wells and Mark Dever, “Above All Earthly Powers with David Wells,” July 31, 2007, <https://www.9marks.org/interview/above-all-earthly-powers-david-wells/>.

<sup>2</sup> Mark Dever, *The Message of the New Testament* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 169.

So that's what we're going to look at in today's passage.

## **The One Thing**

*Take every thought captive to obey Christ,  
or else you will be taken captive by every thought.*

## **Scripture Introduction**

Turn your Bibles to 2 Corinthians 10:1-6.

Just want to give a bit of context before jumping into today's passage.

So the church in Corinth was first started by Paul and his companions, but after he left, the church fell into all kinds of sin, they started following false teachers, and they started rejecting Paul as an apostle of Jesus Christ—even though he started the church!

But after several painful letters and visits, Paul gets word that the church as a whole has repented and they're eager to see him again. So Paul writes this letter of Second Corinthians to send ahead of him before he visits.

Now so far in this letter, Paul has defended his legitimacy as an apostle of Jesus Christ (1:1-7:16); he's addressed the repentant majority in the church, asking them to fulfill their promise to contribute to the collection of funds for the impoverished Jerusalem church (8:1-9:15); and now as we begin this third major section (10:1-13:10), Paul specifically addresses the slanderous accusations that the false teachers have been saying about him, calling for the rebellious minority in the church to repent before he arrives in person.

So that's where we are in today's passage.

## **Scripture Reading**

So let's read 2 Corinthians 10:1-6.

<sup>1</sup> I, Paul, myself entreat you, by the meekness and gentleness of Christ—I who am humble when face to face with you, but bold toward you when I am away!—<sup>2</sup> I beg of you that when I am present I may not have to show boldness with such confidence as I count on showing against some who suspect us of walking according to the flesh. <sup>3</sup> For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. <sup>4</sup> For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. <sup>5</sup> We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, <sup>6</sup> being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete.

This is God's Word.

## **Overview**

We'll look at this passage in two parts.

- I. Paul's defensive approach against accusations (vv. 1-2).
- II. Paul's offensive approach against thoughts (vv. 3-6).

So defense and offense. Since Paul's defensive approach against accusations will come up repeatedly in this third major section, we'll have opportunities to touch on that more in subsequent sermons, so we'll touch on that a bit today, but we'll spend the majority of our time looking at Paul's offensive approach against thoughts.

## I. Paul's defensive approach against accusations (vv. 1-2)

Verse 1 says this:

<sup>1</sup> I, Paul, myself entreat you, by the meekness and gentleness of Christ—I who am humble when face to face with you, but bold toward you when I am away!—

We know from later in this passage that the parenthetical statement, “I who am humble when face to face with you, but bold toward you when I am away,” is actually one of the *accusations* raised against the apostle Paul (2 Cor. 10:10).

Have you ever only talked to someone over email or messaging? After a while, you might think you have a good sense of who they are. But then, later on when you finally meet them face-to-face, you find out that they weren't exactly what you expected them to be like. Maybe they sounded chattier and more confident *over messaging*, but then they were so shy and quiet *in person*.

So perhaps the accusation against Paul was that he was two-faced, or inconsistent, or too cowardly to be bold with the Corinthian church *in person*, so he could only write boldly *in letters*.

But remember the relationship that Paul had with the Corinthian church. It wasn't a *blind* relationship only over letters, but he *started* the Corinthian church *in person* by boldly proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ into that pagan culture. And this wasn't just in Corinth, but as he went from city to city, he faced constant beatings and imprisonments for boldly proclaiming of the gospel. So Paul had integrity, he was genuine and consistent, and he certainly was no coward.

But by the *world's* standards, Paul wasn't a very impressive person. In an earlier letter to the Corinthian church, he described himself as being with them “in weakness and in fear and much trembling” and that “[his] speech and [his] message were not in plausible words of wisdom” (1 Cor. 2:3-5).

So by his own admission, Paul seemed like a weak, fearful, and ineloquent person. And so, when the stronger, more confident, and more eloquent false teachers came to the Corinthian church after Paul had left, the people stopped thinking much of Paul and began to question whether he was really an apostle at all.

<pause>

Now Paul was accused of being “humble.” I know that might seem like a strange accusation today, but at the time, “humility” was not a positive trait to have. It was seen as a slavish attitude only appropriate for the lowly and despised, but not the noble and dignified.<sup>3</sup> So the very attack against Paul was based on a *worldly* idea and thought of his time: “It is not praiseworthy to be humble.”

But Paul defends his humble demeanor by appealing to “the meekness and the gentleness of Christ.” In the only place in Scripture that Jesus ever describes his own heart, he says, “I am gentle and *lowly* in heart” (Matt. 11:29 ESV) or “I am gentle and *humble* in heart” (NIV). In other words, if the Corinthians have an issue with Paul's humble demeanor, then they *really* have a problem with *Christ*, for *he* is gentle and humble in heart.

<pause>

When you think back on your interactions with others, have you ever had any of these thoughts come to mind?

- “Why are you walking so slowly?”
- “Why do I need to keep repeating this to you?”
- “Why is this so difficult for you?”

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<sup>3</sup> David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, NAC 29 (Nashville, TN: B&H, 1999), 429, Kindle.

Think for a moment: what are the thoughts *behind* those thoughts? Efficiency, competency, self-sufficiency.

This world praises efficiency, competency, and self-sufficiency *more* than it praises meekness, gentleness, and humility. Of course, we may *say* we value those things, but when push comes to shove, when we examine our *thoughts*, we see what *really* drives us—God and his Word, or ourselves and this world.

<pause>

Going back to the passage, the question still stands: if Paul was humble *in person*, why was he so bold in *his letters*?

Paul explains in verse 2, which says:

<sup>2</sup> I beg of you that when I am present I may not have to show boldness with such confidence as I count on showing against some who suspect us of walking according to the flesh.

Paul writes boldly to the Corinthians in his letters *so that* he won't have to be bold in person with them. He "begs" them to repent *in his letters*, so that he will not need to deal severely with them when he arrives *in person*. Paul is not *cowardly*, but he is *compassionate*. Here, Paul expects that he'll need to "show boldness" to "some" of his accusers when he arrives, but he's writing to them ahead of time, warning them and pleading with them to repent before he gets there, so that he will not have to execute the painful consequences that unrepentant sin warrants.

<pause>

So, first, Paul's defensive approach against accusations, and second...

## II. Paul's offensive approach against thoughts (vv. 3-6)

Verses 3-5 say this:

<sup>3</sup> For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. <sup>4</sup> For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. <sup>5</sup> We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ,

Here, Paul moves from defense to offense. He's no longer defending against accusations, but he's describing his offensive approach—not against the false *teachers*, but against arguments, opinions, and thoughts. He goes to war against *thoughts*—and not so much thoughts against *him*, but thoughts against the knowledge of *God*.

This puts Paul's defense of his apostleship in perspective. Paul is only concerned about defending himself *inasmuch* as it means defending true knowledge of God.

The main problem with these false teachers is not that they're more eloquent than Paul, but that they're teaching a *different* gospel—a *different* Jesus—and are leading the thoughts of the Corinthian church away from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ (2 Cor. 11:3-6).

So it's not so much Paul against the false teachers, but it's more fundamentally the *true* gospel against *false* gospels, the *true* Jesus against "another Jesus," or *true* knowledge of God against *false* arguments, opinions, and thoughts.

<pause>

When Paul says that "we are not waging war according to the flesh," he's referring to what has become commonly referred to as "spiritual warfare" or "spiritual battle."

Now what comes to mind when you hear the words “spiritual warfare”? Perhaps we think of supernatural phenomenon like God sending the 10 plagues against Egypt and the miraculous deliverance of the Israelites through the Red Sea. Or perhaps we think of overt demonic activity like demonic possession, leading people to cause physical harm to themselves and others.

I’m not denying those aspects, but here, Paul describes spiritual warfare *primarily* as a war against *thoughts*.

Satan didn’t *possess* Adam and Eve into sinning, but he lured them into sin with a *thought*. Before there were the consequences of pain and death, before there was the first sin of disobedience, there was a *thought*—a lie about God, that God is withholding something good from them, that there won’t be consequences for sin, that they should have the right to decide for themselves apart from God what is good or evil, right or wrong (Gen. 3:1-5).

Perhaps we think eating a piece of fruit is a “neutral” act, but that act was driven by sinful rebellion against God, and that sinful rebellion was driven by the thought—the lie—that God is not good. Sin is always driven by unbelief; God tells us the truth in his Word, but instead of taking God at his Word, we entertain other thoughts that lead us away from him.

And again, it’s not always so obvious. You may *think* that you’re just making money for your family, that it’s a “neutral” act, and that there’s nothing wrong with it. But what might be the thought *behind* the thought? Perhaps you *believe* that money will provide fulfillment and satisfaction for your family *more* than anything else. And so, like Adam, you exchange the truth about God for a lie and end up worshiping and serving a created thing rather than the Creator (Rom. 1:25). A good thing is no longer a good thing if it becomes an ultimate thing.

<pause>

So “spiritual warfare” is primarily about the battle of *thoughts*. We will either take every thought captive to obey Christ, or we will be taken captive by every thought.

We’ll look at a few examples of what that might look like, starting with ourselves and then moving outward to one another in the church, and then further out to others outside the church.

So first...

## A. Personally

We need to be able to identify *thoughts* that are *against* the knowledge of God.

But again, the problem is that it’s not always so obvious. Satan is “the father of lies” (John 8:44) and “the deceiver of the whole world” (Rev. 12:9), but he “disguises himself as an angel of light” (2 Cor. 11:14). In other words, Satan is very good at making lies seem good and plausible.

And one of the most dangerous lies to believe is a *false* gospel. It’s so destructive because you *think* you’re believing in the *true* gospel, but it’s actually *counterfeit*.

In the past, we’ve talked about counterfeits like the therapeutic gospel<sup>4</sup> and the prosperity gospel, but one false gospel that is becoming more popular these days is what one person has called “The New Prosperity Gospel.”<sup>5</sup>

It’s not so blatant as the old “health and wealth” prosperity gospel that if you believe enough and give enough, then God will make you healthy and wealthy. No, it’s more subtle than that. The New Prosperity

<sup>4</sup> David Powlison, “The Therapeutic Gospel, Part 1,” Boundless, September 11, 2008, <https://www.boundless.org/adulthood/the-therapeutic-gospel-part-1/>. David Powlison, “The Therapeutic Gospel, Part 2,” Boundless, September 12, 2008, <https://www.boundless.org/faith/the-therapeutic-gospel-part-2/>.

<sup>5</sup> Dean Inserra and Jason K. Allen, “Episode 216: The Pastor and the New Prosperity Gospel,” Preaching and Preachers Podcast, June 7, 2021, <https://jasonkallen.com/podcast/preaching-and-preachers-episode-216-the-pastor-and-the-new-prosperity-gospel/>.

Gospel says that God's purpose in life is *your* fulfillment in terms of the things of this world—to help you advance and achieve *your* dreams and reach *your* ultimate potential.

It's about "being the best version of yourself." But the problem is that the best version of yourself isn't defined by walking in newness of life in Christ or by the fruit of the Spirit, but it's defined by the thoughts and values of this world rather than by God's Word.

It suggests that the desires you had *before* you were saved should be the same desires you have *after* you're saved. You *still* want platform, influence, advancement, accomplishment, fame, self-actualization, self-importance, self-fulfillment. The thought of *not* maximizing your gifts and potential—the thought of *not* achieving your dreams—is unthinkable because "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13).

The New Prosperity Gospel takes verses out of context to say what we want to hear and skips passages that talk about things we don't want to hear. It doesn't like to talk about sin, repentance, or judgment, but prefers to use the language of "brokenness" and how God just wants to take our "brokenness."

Church is where you go to consume an *experience*; it's where you go to get inspired. But it's seen as largely *optional*; you go every now and then "to fill the tank," but you don't see church as the family of God that you're saved into, that you sacrifice for, that you open up to, that you live life closely with to grow together in your followership of Christ. No, why would you do that? That would only distract you from achieving *your* dreams that God wants to help you achieve.

The entire system of belief is built around a God that is for *your* dreams and ambitions. But the truth is that God is first and foremost for his *own* glory; and the story of God redeeming a people whom he loves to himself is not primarily about *you* but it's about *him* and *his* glory.

John the Baptist, at the peak of his ministry, when he had platform, influence, fame, and crowds—when he realizes that *Jesus* is the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29), he says "*He* must *increase*, but *I* must *decrease*" (John 3:30). The New Prosperity Gospel has no place for that; it has no problem saying "Jesus must increase" but we want to increase *with him*. To *decrease* as we follow Christ is unthinkable.

And all this leads to an eventual faith crisis because people have been ascribing promises to God that he *never* made. You *thought* that you'd be doing your dream job, achieving your dream goals, living in your dream city with your dream family. But what happens when you've been supposedly following Christ for a long while, but you're still at the same job in the same house in the same city doing the same thing—living a very ordinary life by this world's standards? What do you do with that?

The New Prosperity Gospel has no theology of daily faithfulness and seeing how God uses daily faithfulness for your own good and his own glory. There's no eternal perspective, but it's a Christianized "you only live once" mentality where you need to maximize your life now because that's all there really is. There's no theology of suffering and sanctification, but if any suffering takes place, it's not because God is using those trials to make you more like Jesus, to mature you in your faith, and to help you to be more dependent on him; instead, it's only happening to you so that God can set you up for a comeback—"Your setback is for a comeback," they might say.

And what's so insidious about this New Prosperity Gospel is that it's actually not *completely* false; there's an element of truth to it, but *that's* the problem—it's *incomplete*.

And as one person said, "A half-truth masquerading as a whole truth becomes a complete untruth" (J. I. Packer).

<pause>

Now why am I spending so much time talking about the New Prosperity Gospel? Because it's becoming more and more prevalent, and if we're not careful, without even realizing it, we'll also begin to find that our thoughts are being taken captive by it, rather than taking it captive to obey Christ in the true gospel.

When you examine your thoughts, your heart, your patterns, and your social media, is your life about advancing *yourself*? Is it about self-actualizing *yourself*? Is it about having more and making more out of *your* life by this world's standards?

If that's the case, then we need to look again at how we are wretched sinners before a holy God, and yet how while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Rom. 5:8). We need to soak in again every spiritual blessing we have in Christ now and forever, so that we don't feel the need to try to squeeze out every worldly blessing in this temporal life.

Live your life fully for *Jesus* and it will be no wasted life. May we be able to say with the apostle Paul and all the saints, "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me (Gal. 2:20).

If you want to be able to spot a counterfeit, you need to know the real thing *really* well. Of course, there's no replacement for regularly being in God's Word, but reading and discussing good books with others is also very helpful. One resource that we have available for free to anyone in our church is a book very explicitly titled *What is the Gospel?* by Greg Gilbert. It comes with a Study Guide that we also have available for free. So just talk to any of the leaders or anyone on our Resources Team and they'll make sure to get that to you.

I'd also encourage you to not just read the book and go through the study guide on your own, but to do it with someone else in our church, so that you can help each other better understand and apply the gospel in your lives. Even if you're just a little fuzzy on the gospel—if you have trouble clearly articulating the gospel in less than a minute—please don't try to hide that, but be open about that and ask someone to read and discuss *What is the Gospel?* with you. It's of eternal consequence that we get the gospel right.

<pause>

So first, personally; and second, let's see what this spiritual battle of *thoughts* might look like with...

## **B. One Another**

In our relationships with one another in our church, we want to be intentional about helping one another understand and apply the gospel in our lives. That means, we need to help one another identify *thoughts* that are not in accord with the gospel. And these may not just be passing thoughts here and there, but "strongholds" in a person's life, meaning that they've built much of their lives around this thought and have defended it against anyone who has tried to tell them differently. "Strongholds" don't come down easily.

But the problem is that we don't often know that these "strongholds" exist in us unless someone helps us to uncover it. Primarily, it's the Holy Spirit who exposes us and convicts us as we are in God's Word. But God often uses fellow brothers and sisters around us to help point these out to us, so that we can take them captive to obey Christ.

And one of the best ways you can do that for one another is to listen well and ask good questions.

Paul Tripp, author of *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands*, suggests different things to listen for and different questions to ask.<sup>6</sup>

[We should] Listen for:

- Issues where the person responds in anger or defensiveness

They might feel accused by a question that was actually open-ended; it may have required sharing personally but it didn't attach any blame. So if the person gets upset or defensive by

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<sup>66</sup> Paul David Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands: People in Need of Change Helping People in Need of Change* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2002), 301-317.

certain issues, that may be a potential “stronghold” in his life.

- Times when the person is closed and self-protective

This might be more subtle. It’s interesting how someone can share a story about themselves, and yet omit what they *themselves* were thinking, wanting, and doing in their story. So listen for times when the person omits themselves from their sharing.

- Instances when the person places blame for their own behavior on someone else

This is when the person cannot separate their own sinful actions and attitudes from the sins of others; rather, all their sins are excused and hidden behind the sins of others.

- Occasions when the person has clearly erected a logical defense of their viewpoint and actions

This is when the person already comes in *convinced* that they are right; they come in ready to reference past experiences, field experts, and Scripture passages to support their viewpoint, rather than coming in open and humbly admitting that they might possibly be wrong.

So listen well, and then ask good questions.

Ask:

- What was going on in that situation?
- What were you thinking and feeling as it was going on?
- What did you do in response?
- What did you want, or what were you seeking to accomplish by what you did?
- What was the result?

These are questions that I ask myself all the time. If you’re familiar with the *How People Change*<sup>7</sup> framework, it’s very similar. It doesn’t have to be these *exact* questions, but ask questions that peel back the layers to better understand what was going on in the mind and heart of person in the particular situation.

- Why did they do what they did?
- How did they interpret the situation?
- Were the emotions they felt appropriate for the situation?
- In that moment, what did they believe about God, themselves, and that other person?
- What did they want out of the situation and how was it threatened?

In any given moment, we’re all driven by *something*—we’re all *captivated* by something—either the ideas and thoughts of this world, or God’s Word and the gospel of Jesus Christ.

So all this is to help the other person to see for *themselves* what thoughts might be taking them captive—what “strongholds” they might’ve erected for themselves—and help them to take those thoughts captive to obey Christ. So it’s important to *always* point one another back to Christ and his gospel—God and his Word.

And of course, this should be *mutual*. Don’t just *hide* behind listening well and asking good questions either. But *you* should be willing to open yourself up to one another in the church as well, so that together we might intentionally help one another to better follow Christ.

<pause>

So first, personally; second, one another, and now third, let’s see what this spiritual battle of *thoughts* might look like with...

## C. Others

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<sup>7</sup> Timothy S. Lane and Paul David Tripp, *How People Change* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2006).

In our relationships with others outside the church—those who don't know Christ yet—we want to be intentional about helping them to understand and apply the gospel too. Now why would we do that?

Because if we *really* believe that the God who created us will hold us accountable for our sins and that there will be eternal consequences, then the most *loving* thing to do for people around us who don't know Christ yet is to share that Jesus Christ has come to be King and Savior over our lives if we would repent of our sins, believe in him, and follow him.

Still, we ought to do the most loving thing in the most loving way. And here, I'd again encourage us to listen well and ask good questions in the context of genuine friendship.

Friends have conversations where they open up about their lives to one another. In fact, I'd say that's a core element of friendship (cf. John 15:15); if you don't open up to your friends, you may have acquaintances and companions (Prov. 18:24), but I'm not sure if they could *really* be categorized as "friends."

So if you're having conversations with your non-Christian friends, listen well and ask good questions.

Rebecca Pippert, author of *Stay Salt*, suggests asking three kinds of questions:<sup>8</sup>

- Ask Interest Questions: What are their interests and why do these things bring them such joy?

Are they interested in politics, sports, music, or work? Do they enjoy gardening, spending time with their family, or playing video games? Do they prefer staying indoors or being outdoors? Do they have a favorite vacation spot? People are actually very interesting, even though they may not necessarily feel like they are. But everyone has a story; and asking sincere questions about *what* they enjoy and *why* that is—and then listening well—gives us the privilege of hearing their story.

- Ask Issue/Opinion Questions: What are their opinions, views, or beliefs about a particular topic?

This can really be about anything. What do they think about a particular sports teams, racial injustice, their own families, their work, the meaning of life? What do they think about how different governments are handling COVID-19? What do they think about people being able to disagree and yet still be friends? You can learn a lot about a person as they share about their passions and beliefs.

- Ask God Questions: [These are] Questions that get them to engage with their own worldview and consider what difference God would make to this topic.

Rebecca Pippert shares about a conversation between Joe, a Christian and a surgeon, and his colleague Sam, who wasn't a believer.

Joe and Sam first started chatting about what drew them to medicine in the first place, and then they shared their various views on issues being discussed in the medical community.

But then Joe raised an issues question: "I don't know about you, but I've found that the most difficult aspect of our work is dealing with patients who are dying. Have you found a way to give hope to your patients who are terminal?"

Sam agreed that was by far the hardest thing for him too, and then asked Joe if he had found anything helpful, which led Joe to share about God: "You know, after seeing some patients die, I realized what a difference faith seemed to make in how some patients handled death. So I began asking myself, 'What if this life isn't the only life and there is another life that awaits us? What

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<sup>8</sup> Rebecca Manley Pippert, *Stay Salt* (Epsom, UK: The Good Book Company, 2020), 197-215, Kindle. For a summary article, see Ginger Blomberg, "The Evangelistic Power of Listening and Asking," The Gospel Coalition, July 22, 2020, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/reviews/stay-salt-becky-pippert/>.

difference would it make to know there is a God who can offer hope in the most dire circumstances?”

Sam then asked, “So what did you discover?” and Joe began to share his spiritual journey of how he eventually became a Christian.

Of course, conversations don’t always flow this smoothly, but as we genuinely love and are genuinely interested in our non-Christian friends and are willing to open our lives up to one another, we’ll continue to be able to engage and challenge one another about our *thoughts*.

There may also be times when it may be helpful to push the logic of some of our friends’ views—not to debate them or try to prove them wrong, but to lovingly help them *think* about whether they *really* believe what they say they believe.

For example, if they believe that we’re all cosmic accidents and nothing more than physical matter without souls; that morality, love, and beauty are just chemical reactions in our brains and the result of social-cultural constructs to live at peace with one another; then what’s their foundation for human rights, for loving a spouse, for grieving the loss of a child, for right and wrong, for meaning in life? What’s the basis for those other beliefs that they hold?

For the Christian who believes that we are all made in the image of God, that God delights in his good creation, that God alone defines what is right and wrong, that we love because God first loved us, that God alone as our Creator gives meaning and purpose to what he’s created, then we have a firm foundation for the other beliefs that we hold. What we *think* in our heads fits what we *know* in our hearts.

[<sup>3</sup> For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. <sup>4</sup> For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. <sup>5</sup> We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ,]

But remember, we ought to do the most loving thing in the most loving way. We destroy strongholds, arguments, opinions, and thoughts, but we never destroy *people*. We’re not focused on winning arguments but winning *people*. We’re called to love our neighbor as ourselves (Matt. 22:39) and to give a reason for the hope that we have with gentleness and respect (1 Pet. 3:15). Or as Paul wrote in verse 1, we are to “entreat” our non-Christian friends “by the meekness and gentleness of Christ” to turn *away* from thoughts against the knowledge of God and to turn *towards* true knowledge of God in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

<pause>

So that’s what this spiritual battle of *thoughts* might look like personally, with one another in the church, and with others outside the church.

And Paul concludes this passage with verse 6, which says this:

<sup>6</sup> being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete.

Here, it’s clear that Paul is talking to Christians inside the church—not non-Christians outside the church. And Paul is specifically talking about the final act of church discipline, where a member of the church is put outside the church for serious, outward, and unrepentant sin. That means that the church publicly revokes their affirmation of them as followers of Christ and they are no longer to be recognized as members of the church. We know this is what Paul is talking about because of what he wrote earlier in this letter in the context of church discipline in...

2 Corinthians 2:6-9 = For such a one, this punishment by the majority is enough, so you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. So I beg you to reaffirm your love for him. For this is why I wrote, that I might test you and know whether you are obedient in everything.

Paul uses the same language and concepts of “punishment by the majority” and “obedien[ce] in everything.” The Corinthian church had disciplined an unrepentant member out of the church, but after he had repented, Paul called the church to welcome him back into the church—and Paul says that the church’s willingness to practice church discipline evidences their obedience to Christ and his gospel.

[<sup>6</sup> being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete.]

Going back to verse 6 in our passage, Paul wants the Corinthian church to be ready alongside him to discipline the false teachers and their followers out of the church if they continue to remain unrepentant.

Remember, this is the *final* act of church discipline. In Matthew 18, we see the process more clearly laid out: one person first confronts the person of his sin; if he doesn’t listen, then with two or three people, they confront him together of his sin; if he still doesn’t listen, then they are to tell it to the church; and if he still doesn’t listen and repent when the church confronts him for his sin, the church has the responsibility of removing him from membership.

And it seems like Paul has followed this process. Remember that Paul has been struggling with the Corinthian church over the span of *years*, where he visited them in person and wrote letters to them. Some have repented but some have not. So now, after having done all they can to lovingly confront and plead with them to repent of their sin, if they still choose to remain hardened and unrepentant in their sin, then out of *love* (Heb. 12:6; Ps. 94:12; Rev. 3:19), the church must be willing to remove them to protect God’s honor and his gospel witness (1 Pet. 2:12), to protect the body of Christ who may be led astray (1 Cor. 5:6), and to restore the person after he hopefully repents (Matt. 18:15; Gal. 6:1).

The church is responsible to discipline both false *teaching* and false *living* that does not accord with the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is vital because the church is “a pillar and buttress of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:15), so if the church loses the gospel, it has lost everything; it’s no longer a true church.

And how quickly a church can lose the gospel if we’re not careful. It’s not long after the gospel is *assumed* that the gospel is then *confused* and finally *lost*. That’s why the church must be *vigilant* to understand, believe, uphold, protect, preach, share, and show the gospel of Jesus Christ—and to take every thought captive to obey Christ, so that we will not be taken captive by every thought.

The gospel is “that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (1 Tim. 1:15; cf. 1:11) and it is “the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes” (Rom. 1:16). It is of eternal consequence that the *church* gets the gospel right.

## **The One Thing**

***Take every thought captive to obey Christ,  
or else you will be taken captive by every thought.***

## **Life Application**

1. Read through a Bible Reading Plan.

We take in so many other thoughts throughout the day that are contrary to Christ and his gospel. So if we don’t want to be conformed to this world, there’s really no shortcut to having our minds renewed than to regularly take in God’s Word (Rom. 12:2).

2. Memorize Scripture.

When you find yourself tempted to believe a lie, you don’t want to be fighting that by saying, “Pastor Eric said this.” No, you want to be able to say, “God’s Word says this.” There’s so much more weight to God’s Word than anyone else’s word, so I definite commend Scripture memorization to you.

3. Read and discuss *What is the Gospel?* (Greg Gilbert) and its study guide with others.

Again, these are great free resources we have available to anyone in our church, so just ask any of the leaders or anyone on the Resources Team for it and we'll make sure to get that to you.

4. Explain the gospel in less than a minute.

This is actually something we ask every membership candidate to do during their membership interview. If our whole lives, now and forever, rest in this gospel message—this good news of Jesus Christ—then we should know it better than we know anything else.

May we be a church that is so saturated with the gospel that we see *all of life through* that lens, so that we can spot counterfeits and can take those thoughts captive to obey Christ, and so that we're always ready to share to anyone who asks us for the hope that we have (1 Pet. 3:15).

## **Conclusion**

Let's take some time now to respond to God's Word.