

Midweek Message

“We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.”

(2 Corinthians 10:5 ESV)

This past year is one we might all like to forget. The chaos, the violence – especially what we witnessed just this past week – as well as the pandemic that seems to be gaining strength through these winter months have all weighed heavily on the minds of many. As Christians we’re not immune to the influences of our current culture and the things upon which we might ponder can often lead us to the pit of despair. I know this year hasn’t been easy and yet I also know that God is at work in our world using everything around us to perpetuate His plan and purpose to redeem His people and usher in eternity. In the Scripture above, the Apostle Paul is interacting with a situation at the Corinthian Church in which some are misleading the people with false teaching and unsound doctrine. His point has to do with the power of biblical truth and how we can overcome the problems associated with how our minds process information as well as the effect of that information on us. He tells us that we must “take every thought captive to obey Christ” which is another way of asking us to assess what we’re thinking in light of Jesus and all He’s told us in His Word. So, with that in mind what I’d like to do is present just a few Scriptures about how we can go about bringing our thoughts into line with biblical teaching.

First, we need turn our minds to what we know is good. It’s so easy to fall into the trap of only seeing the problems in life, whether it’s something personal to us or something around us that may or may not even affect us. I’m sure we all were sad to see what happened at the capitol and if you’re like me you began think about all the negative consequences that might follow should things escalate in the weeks and months ahead. However, it’s here that Scripture helps us out when we’re told:

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. 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. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.”

(Philippians 4:6-9 ESV)

Now, there’s a lot there but let me just point out two very important truths in that text. You see, we’re not to ignore the problem that’s causing distress. Instead, we’re to present it to God, leaving it with Him, and resting in the assurance of His peace. Then, once we’ve done that, we’re to refocus our minds on the good things of life that God has already provided to us. That sounds simple enough, doesn’t it? And yet, if you’re like me, it’s something that’s only perfected as we put into practice what we’re told in that passage.

Second, we need to be continually transforming our minds to the will of God. I’ll be honest with you in that finding the will of God for our lives really isn’t that hard. Scripture itself tells us:

“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. 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.”

(Romans 12:1-2 ESV)

You see, the secret to discerning the good and acceptable and perfect will of God is a three-part step. 1). We must present our selves to God completely, not reserving anything but being willing sacrifices for Him. 2). We must examine our lives and rid ourselves of those things that are worldly, those behaviors that are based on Human conceptions when such are in contradiction to what God has revealed, and 3). We must renew our minds, which being built on the previous statements tells us we need to know our Bibles and put it's teaching into practice. I believe Christians get themselves into more spiritual trouble when they attempt to use the world's way of doing things instead of looking to God and how He has told us, how we're to live and accomplish great things for His glory and good of all who love Him. I hope we all realize that change does need to occur in our country, and even throughout the world, but the kind of change that's needed must come from hearts that have been transformed by the power of God. In other words, it's the gospel that needs to be preached and preached with great passion. As God told the Old Testament prophet, Zechariah: *"Then he said to me, 'his is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts'"* (Zechariah 4:6 ESV). We need, more than anything, to be praying for revival, first in the hearts of God's people, and then that God would send forth the Holy Spirit to *"convict the world of sin, and righteousness, and judgment"* (John 16:8 ESV).

Third, we need to train our minds to trust completely in the Lord. Scripture tells us *"fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand"* (Isaiah 41:10 ESV). This is one of those Scriptures we should all memorize and bring to mind when things appear to get out of hand and our personal world seems to come crashing down. When we're in the midst of personal struggle, or we're overly concerned with those things going on around us, it's easy to forget that God still has everything under His sovereign control. And what we need to remember is that this God, who is moving all things toward the day of our redemption, is walking with us in the way we're going. God is always there with us, strengthening us, helping us, upholding us. We may not always sense His presence with us as our own personal feelings often get in the way but that doesn't change the truth that God has revealed about His continual abiding with us every moment of every day. There's no reason for us to be captivated by fear because we know this God who has loved us perfectly in Jesus, will never leave us to fend for ourselves.

And that takes us to the **final** point for this message and that is we must tell our minds to take comfort in Jesus. Our Lord made that quite clear when He said: *"I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world* (John 16:33 ESV)." This world in which we live is a cursed world filled with fallen people. We're all sinful rebels if left to ourselves and as such we'll do sinful things. I don't believe I'd have to argue with anyone about that point especially with what we've experienced this past year. However, as Jesus tells us, when we're in Him, that is, when we've come to faith in Him, we will have peace within even though the world around us is in turmoil. In fact, Jesus tells us that in this world we will have troubles, but then He adds that we can take heart because He's overcome the world. You see, each moment brings us ever closer to our Lord's return when He'll usher in the Eternal Kingdom in which there will be no more chaos, no more riots, no wars, no hatred, no disease, and no death. I know it's hard for us to imagine what that will be like, but I can assure you it'll be a whole lot better than what we have now even in the best of times.

What we've experienced this past year is heart-wrenching. The pandemic has taken a toll on all of humanity causing stress, despair, discouragement, sorrow and every negative emotion that we could ever possibly feel. However, as God's people, if we listen quietly, we just might hear the voice of our Lord calling to us, "Rest yourself in Me. I've got this."

Pastor Mark