

**TAKING PRISONER EVERY THOUGHT AND PROJECT
TO THE OBEDIENCE OF CHRIST**

II Corinthians 10: 3-5 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

How many of us are opinionated, strongly opinionated? How many of us believe we have a strong sense of justice? How many of us often let our sense of justice turn into judgment and an accusatory spirit? Beloved, I tremble as I realize how vulnerable we are as strong believers to being a law unto ourselves, since we are, all of us as believers, we are free to think and say almost whatever comes to our minds and to judge others by our convictions? Today's message has been a meditated thought that has become more and more urgent in my heart—a message God tells me in my spirit is earnestly needed. If any of us would say, "I know who needs this message, be careful about such a thought. It may be a selfish shield from facing the fact that God is after us today—and that He has called us to answer to Him for our words and thoughts and actions. When Jesus knew the thoughts of the Pharisees in Matthew 12: 25, He went on to teach about spiritual warfare saying that "If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself" and "how then shall his kingdom stand?" Then in Matthew 12: 36, 37, Jesus continued on this theme, saying, "And I say to you, that every careless word that men shall speak, they shall render account for it in the Day of Judgment. For by your words you shall be justified, and by your words you shall be condemned."

Today, the Holy Spirit is calling me to exegete and preach to you on what it means, II Cor. 10: 5b for us to be "taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ." James Moffatt translates this phrase, "...I take every project prisoner to make it obey Christ." In short, every last one of us are daily tested by our responses to frustrations that arise in our lives. In the main, most of us perhaps here today are true believers who love Jesus. But, the test of our metal and our devotion to Jesus comes not in how many years we have been generally faithful to Jesus, but the test, as Martin Luther says, is how we respond to the battle raging in our souls at this very moment. Part of why many of us begin to feel inadequate and stale in our relationship to Jesus is because of our inability to cope with the flies in our soup, the drivers we call stupid drivers around us, and the issues that make us angry. Anger management in America is a billion dollar business. Judges are continually sentencing otherwise great people to attend a course in anger management. As we speak, there is yet another Anger Management Class being taught at the Sweetwater Family Resource Center at 538 Pilot Butte, here in Rock Springs. The class is for Adults and Teens, 14 and older. It will be taught on

Mondays and Tuesdays Nov. 14, 15, 21, 22 and Dec. 5, 6. The class wisely teaches how to handle angry feelings in ways that avoid damage to family and other relationships. The study speaks of what anger is, what triggers it and what to do when it occurs.

Such classes are helpful, without a doubt. Yet, even Christians can respond, “I don’t need anger management. I need Jim to quit acting the way he does. I need some stupid drivers to go back to school. I need some perverts in Sweetwater County to be arrested.” The way we respond, you and me, is about how successfully we have learned to take prisoner every thought and project to the obedience of Christ. A radiant Christian in West Wales was crippled by polio. His name is Mordecai Price. Recently he went to be with the Lord. Crippled in his legs, he, for years, drove a hand controlled car. His job was selling seed to farmers in outlying farms. Sometimes it took him up to an hour just to get out of his car to open a farm gate, but he persevered. Why didn’t Mordecai settle for a lifetime of inactivity and invalidism? When asked that, he once answered, “I take every project prisoner to make it obey Christ—even the project of poliomyelitis.” Mordecai lived out his years making his frustrations fruitful. His bringing every project captive to Christ turned ugly into beautiful, evil into good, and frustration could not reign in his life. He took every project prisoner for Christ.

I believe it is the Oxford Dictionary that defines frustration as “being baffled, balked, neutralized, and disappointed.” Beloved, how can we as believers stay spiritually fresh, undaunted by daily frustrations and able to live out the Gospel in our private lives? The answer I am convinced from the Word of God is in our text. II Corinthians 10: 3-5 declares, “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.” Oswald Chambers, on Friday of this week in “My Utmost For His Highest,” wrote, “It does require the supernatural grace of God to live 24 hours in every day as a saint, to go through drudgery as a disciple, to live an ordinary, unobserved, ignored existence as a disciple of Jesus. We must be holy in mean streets, among mean people, and this is not learned in five minutes.”

So, what does it mean to bring every thought into captivity unto the obedience of Christ? I see three helpful meanings in the Word that will

change our lives if we are willing to honor God's Word in our thoughts, words and deeds in this way on a daily basis. What are they?

TAKING EVERY THOUGHT CAPTIVE TO THE OBEDIENCE OF CHRIST MEANS ADMITTING WE ARE TIRED OF LOSING THE FRUSTRATION BATTLE IN OUR DAILY LIVES. (I.)

None of us start a new course of action because we are satisfied with our present situation. What makes us buy a new home or car or appliance? Something is unsatisfactory. How many of us have in this last month pondered a situation that has arisen in our home, in our marriage, at work or here at church—a situation that we wish we could redo our quick words, our quick accusations, our quick justifications, our quick judgments, and our quick surrender to temptation? If everything is perfect in your life, this plan of Paul may be unattractive to you. Assuming none of us are perfect, I want to suggest that improvement in our walk with the Lord might be an optimal option we could all use profitably. So I ask you all humbly, “Are any of us or all of us in need of a spiritual tune-up? Are all of us on God's gold standard of winning spiritual warfare in which we take each of our thoughts captive to the obedience of Christ? Proverbs 23: 7 declares, “As a man thinks in his heart, within himself, so is he.” Winning the battle in our thought life, means we know the score James speaks of in James 1: 19. He writes, “This you know, my beloved brethren. But let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger.” So how are we coming on interrupting each other, judging each other, accusing each other and raising our voices at each other? Are we ready for a new course having this one down?

I looked up the Greek word for slow to speak and slow to anger. The word is bradus. (Brad-ooce) The word means sluggish and idle. That was a shocking definition when I saw it. It makes us say, “How do we ever get sluggish to speak or interrupt or get angry? Answer: We must bring every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. It means we bring our ready replies to Jesus like the jail takes in new prisoners. All new prisoners wear yellow while being processed in intake. Afterward, they wear green, and do so for days, weeks, months and up to a year at times before they go free. Friday, I was out at the jail wearing my identification badge. I had three contact visits. All the inmates, two men and one woman were wearing green with orange sandals or shoes. None of them were close to getting out. Can you imagine what would happen if we took our thoughts to Jesus for intake and agreed with Him we could not speak those thoughts until our obedience is complete, so that our thoughts are not inflammatory, battle producing, and disobedient

to Jesus? Let's examine for a moment what happens in most of our lives. Someone says something unkind to us or about us. Perhaps we are falsely accused of something we have not done, something God the Holy Spirit does not convict us of. Perhaps the words spoken are spiteful and critical, claiming to be just, when rather they are judgmental words. What happens in most of our lives? Be honest. We begin to think about it, we repeat it over and over to ourselves with increasing anger rising inside us. The thoughts we feel fill our every crook and cranny in our minds. We think of little else. Then we tell our spouse, or if the problem is our spouse, we tell our children or our friends or co-workers, with our additions, never subtractions. At last, by frequent repetition, we sense we have been insulted 20-50 times instead of once. Then we calculate a counterattack or we just immediately shoot from the hip in a bar room brawl kind of "Boot Hill" shoot out. As we and the other person are bleeding on the floor or appear dead, it occurs to us, "I wonder if I handled this matter God's way, and deep within we know the answer. In those matters, even if we feel we got the better of our new or old opponent, isn't there something inside us that says, "Oh, God, help me. I am tired of losing the frustration battle that often raises its head daily in my life." And if we are listening, how many of us have heard the Holy Spirit respond, "Have you determined to take every thought and word you are ready to speak prisoner to the obedience of Christ?" 2ndly,

TAKING EVERY THOUGHT CAPTIVE TO THE OBEDIENCE OF CHRIST MEANS GIVING UP OUR INDEPENDENCE AND FREEDOM BY TAKING TIME TO TELL IT TO JESUS. (II.)

I have wrestled over an illustration I read a few weeks ago in a book called "Devotions For Deer Hunters." I have brought it to Jesus for intake, it has worn yellow, then green, and today, God is releasing me to read it to you all. However, I read this devotion in a kind of fleshly fear that someone among us may want to shellack me or take me on for using such an illustration during hunting season in Wyoming. Nevertheless, it is the best illustration I know today that speaks of taking our negotiated reasons for what we do, our good reasons, our smoke screen reasons and bringing them to jail for God's design and desire. Here goes: Fasten your seat belts, hunters. The author is a deer hunter in Minnesota by the name of Ken Koch. The title of the devotional is – "Are You The Provider?" Listen!

"For a long time, hunting was about the most important thing in my life. I always counted the days until deer season opened. In order to be able to hunt for a longer period of time, I eventually took up bow hunting. Even during

high school, sports were of no real interest to me because they only interfered with hunting. When I got married, my wife became a hunting widow. Many times I left her for the woods, and all the time, I justified my behavior by telling myself and her that I was only trying to be a “good provider. It wasn’t that I was unsuccessful. However, I didn’t want to waste an opportunity to hunt. Even after my children were born, many a day and evening my wife cared for the kids while I played the “provider” role. One day while I was in my tree stand, I suddenly realized that while I was trying to be the “provider,” in fact, I was just the opposite. Instead of being the father to my children and husband to my wife as God had intended, I was actually providing for my own selfish desires. I decided it was time to set my priorities straight: God, wife, family, self. I wish I could tell you that it was easy, but it wasn’t. In fact, I still struggle against the old sinful nature. Nevertheless, God has truly blessed me in every way. Even though I spend only a small fraction of the time hunting that I once did, I have never had my freezer so full of game! Heavenly Father, thank You for Your promise of blessings to those who seek You first. Help me to keep my priorities straight. I ask this in Jesus’ name. Amen.”

Beloved, what if we brought our priorities to God related to sports, movies, relationships, desires, computer time, cell-phone time, and texting? What if we asked God if He minds when those areas trump Him, our time with Him, and our time in His house in fellowship? What if we brought to God our sharp words we speak to others, our gossiping, our bitterness, and our pre-occupations in thought to be His prisoners, waiting in yellow in intake, waiting to wear green until they could go free, obedient to Christ? Notice II Corinthians 10: 6 continues, “And we are ready to punish all disobedience, whenever your obedience is complete.” Let’s attempt another paraphrase to see if it helps. Eugene Peterson is helpful here with these paraphrased words. “Our tools are ready at hand for clearing the ground of every obstruction and building lives of obedience into maturity.” Long story short, Paul is saying we are willing to take any means God suggests or that He prompts us by His Spirit to take. We don’t balk and yell and dig in our heels. Whatever methods God leads us to take to win the battle, we take obediently. Beloved, just know that prisoners don’t willingly get talked into going to jail. It’s not a matter of coaxing that get them there. They most often go in hand-cuffs. Taking captive our thoughts will end freedom for lots of old habits. The thoughts we are used to having, the words we are used to speaking, the judgments we are used to making, and the wrong priorities we are used to keeping will not come to Jesus without a fight. Taking our thoughts captive

will take lots of time, effort, and ultimately, taking them prisoner will appear at times to leave us with our words and thoughts slaves, not free. It's a new kind of life, taking every thought, imagination and project prisoner to Jesus for His correction, discipline, and release in His time. How many of us will spare the time, realize the need, and live to see the mighty difference when our thoughts and words are disciplined to Jesus, our obedience complete?

TAKING EVERY THOUGHT CAPTIVE TO THE OBEDIENCE OF CHRIST MEANS A RADICAL HOLY SPIRIT CHANGE IN OUR WALK WITH GOD. (III.)

Leading our patterns of thoughts and words and deeds off hand-cuffed to Jesus for His decisions on them, for His discipline and correction, and final release for His purpose is a radical shift.

Nevertheless, it is the only way to win the battle over frustration in our daily walk. The Greek word for bring into captivity is **aichmalotizo**. What a word and what does it mean? It means to capture, to lead captive, to take as prisoners of war, to be taken by a spear, or to bring under control. Paul admits the battle even raged in him as an apostle of Christ. In Romans 7: 22-8: 2 he confesses his struggle and his final road to success: "For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind, and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh, the law of sin. There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death." Wow! Even Paul had struggles. And how did he make the radical shift? With the help of the indwelling Holy Spirit., Paul overcame. Paul warns us that if we do not make the radical change, it will be "dog eat dog" in our relationships. Paul teaches in Galatians 5: 14-16, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself. But if you bite and devour one another, take care lest you be consumed by one another. But I say, Walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh."

So, beloved, how do we take prisoner our every thought, word and deed? Can you say it after me? **Only with the help of the Holy Spirit--can I take prisoner--my every thought, word and deed.** Let's try that two more times. Say it after me. Paul continues saying in Galatians 5: 25, "If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit." Let's close this message by reading together our text on the power point. II Corinthians 10: 3-5. Amen.