

Bible Readings for “Captive Thoughts”

NIV (New International Version) – PEW Bible

10 ¹By the humility and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you—I, Paul, who am “timid” when face to face with you, but “bold” toward you when away! ²I beg you that when I come I may not have to be as bold as I expect to be toward some people who think that we live by the standards of this world. ³For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. ⁴The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. ⁵We 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. ⁶And we will be ready to punish every act of disobedience, once your obedience is complete. ⁷You are judging by appearances.^[a] If anyone is confident that they belong to Christ, they should consider again that we belong to Christ just as much as they do.

NLT (New Living Translation)

10 ¹Now I, Paul, appeal to you with the gentleness and kindness of Christ—though I realize you think I am timid in person and bold only when I write from far away. ²Well, I am begging you now so that when I come I won't have to be bold with those who think we act from human motives.

³We are human, but we don't wage war as humans do. ⁴^[a]We use God's mighty weapons, not worldly weapons, to knock down the strongholds of human reasoning and to destroy false arguments. ⁵We destroy every proud obstacle that keeps people from knowing God. We capture their rebellious thoughts and teach them to obey Christ. ⁶And after you have become fully obedient, we will punish everyone who remains disobedient.

⁷Look at the obvious facts.^[b] Those who say they belong to Christ must recognize that we belong to Christ as much as they do.

The Message

10 ¹⁻² And now a personal but most urgent matter; I write in the gentle but firm spirit of Christ. I hear that I'm being painted as cringing and wishy-washy when I'm with you, but harsh and demanding when at a safe distance writing letters. Please don't force me to take a hard line when I'm present with you. Don't think that I'll hesitate a single minute to stand up to those who say I'm an unprincipled opportunist. Then they'll have to eat their words.

³⁻⁶ The world is unprincipled. It's dog-eat-dog out there! The world doesn't fight fair. But we don't live or fight our battles that way—never have and never will. The tools of our trade aren't for marketing or manipulation, but they are for demolishing that entire massively corrupt culture. We use our powerful God-tools for smashing warped philosophies, tearing down barriers erected against the truth of God, fitting every loose thought and emotion and impulse into the structure of life shaped by Christ. Our tools are ready at hand for clearing the ground of every obstruction and building lives of obedience into maturity.

⁷ You stare and stare at the obvious, but you can't see the forest for the trees. If you're looking for a clear example of someone on Christ's side, why do you so quickly cut me out? Believe me, I am quite sure of my standing with Christ.

“Captive Thoughts”

2 Corinthians 10:1-7

1 By the humility and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you—I, Paul, who am “timid” when face to face with you, but “bold” toward you when away! 2 I beg you that when I come, I may not have to be as bold as I expect to be toward some people who think that we live by the standards of this world. 3 For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. 4 The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. 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. 6 And we will be ready to punish every act of disobedience, once your obedience is complete.

7 You are judging by appearances. If anyone is confident that they belong to Christ, they should consider again that we belong to Christ just as much as they do.

(NIV)
Red

NLT 1 Now I, Paul, appeal to you with the gentleness and kindness of Christ—though I realize you think I am timid in person and bold only when I write from far away. 2 Well, I am begging you now so that when I come, I won’t have to be bold with those who think we act from human motives. 3 We are human, but we don’t wage war as humans do. 4 We use God’s mighty weapons, not worldly weapons, to knock down the strongholds of human reasoning and to destroy false arguments. 5 We destroy every proud obstacle that keeps people from knowing God. We capture their rebellious thoughts and teach them to obey Christ. 6 And after you have become fully obedient, we will punish everyone who remains disobedient. 7 Look at the obvious facts Those who say they belong to Christ must recognize that we belong to Christ as much as they do.

Green

The Message 1 And now a personal but most urgent matter; I write in the gentle but firm spirit of Christ. I hear that I’m being painted as cringing and wishy-washy when I’m with you, but harsh and demanding when at a safe distance writing letters. Please don’t force me to take a hard line when I’m present with you. Don’t think that I’ll hesitate a single minute to stand up to those who say I’m an unprincipled opportunist. Then they’ll have to eat their words.

The world is unprincipled. It’s dog-eat-dog out there! The world doesn’t fight fair. But we don’t live or fight our battles that way—never have and never will. The tools of our trade aren’t for marketing or manipulation, but they are for demolishing that entire massively corrupt culture. We use our powerful God-tools for smashing warped philosophies, tearing down barriers erected against the truth of God, fitting every loose thought and emotion and impulse into the structure of life shaped by

Christ. Our tools are ready at hand for clearing the ground of every obstruction and building lives of obedience into maturity.

You stare and stare at the obvious, but you can't see the forest for the trees. If you're looking for a clear example of someone on Christ's side, why do you so quickly cut me out? Believe me, I am quite sure of my standing with Christ.

See how different these versions are? The NRSV is helpful to better understand verses 4 & 5, "For the weapons of our warfare are not merely human, but they have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments 5 and every proud obstacle raised up against the knowledge of God, and we take every thought captive to obey Christ."

The Good News Translation helps with verse 1, I who am said to be meek and mild when I am with you, but harsh with you when I am away. By the gentleness and kindness of Christ, 2 I beg you not to force me to be harsh when I come. And then later at the end of verse 2 into verse 3 "they say we act from worldly motives, but we do not fight from worldly motives."

NOW please don't throw up your hands and think or say, "that's it, nobody knows what the original language is saying so how do I know I am reading the right version. Let me be very clear that no matter the circumstances anytime you try to translate any writing or speech from one language to another you lose things in the translation and there are words in one language that don't translate well from one language to another. When I was in Honduras, I preached at a church and had an interpreter, so I had to preach one sentence at a time. There were times when the interpreter would summarize my sentence in what sounded like two words and other times he would explain my sentence with what felt like was two paragraphs because there was no way to directly (word for word) explain in Spanish what I had just said in English. Now try adding 20 centuries in between when something was written and when it is being translated. It is difficult work. And it is often NOT precise. So in most of these translations, committees get together and do their best to be as accurate as they can in translating and interpreting what the original, Greek or Hebrew writer was trying to convey. So it is helpful to read things in different versions so you get a breadth of what is out there and the width of interpretations/translation. It is very important to understand what the committee was trying to do. For the NASB and ESV the translators were doing their best to do a word for word equivalent. The NIV, NRSV, and the NLT or New Living Translation are trying to make each sentence say as accurately as possible what the original sentence was conveying. And then for the Good News Bible and the Message, the translators are trying to convey paragraph by paragraph, in today's vernacular, language, slang, etc. the ideas that they believe the original writer's were trying to put forth or convey. So let's look at this passage closely.

Verses 1-3. Pew Bible: By the meekness and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you—I, Paul, who am "timid" when face to face with you, but "bold" when away! 2 I beg you that when I come I may not have to be as bold as I expect to be toward some

people who think that we live by the standards of this world. 3 For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does.

This illustrates how even the same general version can be different as a committee or translation like the NIV will go through and update to see if there are ways they can be more “accurate” according to their particular committee and change words. My phone automatically goes to the most recently updated version and has humility and gentleness instead of “Meekness and gentleness.” They decided that we just don’t use the word meek very often in our culture anymore.

Red **NLT** 1 Now I, Paul, appeal to you with the gentleness and kindness of Christ—though I realize you think I am timid in person and bold only when I write from far away. 2 Well, I am begging you now so that when I come, I won’t have to be bold with those who think we act from human motives. 3 We are human, but we don’t wage war as humans do. To me, it makes a big difference if Paul is identifying himself as one who is timid when face to face or saying (I realize you think) that of me. So then I look to the Good News Bible and read, “I am said to be,” and the Message, “I am being painted as cringing and wishy-washy when I’m with you, but harsh and demanding when at a safe distance writing letters.” And I think it makes the most sense to me that Paul doesn’t think of himself that way, but is answering his critics in general. **[NOTE 1]**

Then I did more research and found some helpful information. The philosopher Aristotle defined gentleness as the perfect middle, mean, or average between too angry and never angry. So because Paul felt empowered by Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, he could be meek or humble and gentle, because he didn’t need to yell and scream because he had given it over to God. Since we don’t use the word meek very often I thought it was helpful to think of meekness as sweet reasonableness. That is different than thinking of meek as bowing, weak, crawling on your belly, or of little stature. Words matter and your culture, how you were raised, etc. effects how you define words. For instance, my parents grew up on a farm so the four letter S-word just referred to what comes out of the back end of the cow, not a swear word. Some city slickers never come across that except for an occasional dog log on the street from time to time or pigeon droppings. So it is a bad swear word to them.

Anyway, when you have confidence in God and the power of the Holy Spirit it is possible to be humble and gentle and still be a strong male influence. You can still be a strong woman that impacts your friends, w/o having to be pushy or divisive. **[NOTE 2]**

It is also helpful to understand that someone who is meek feels frustration, impatience, and anger, but because they have the power of the Holy Spirit and they have plugged themselves into God’s resources of power, patience, and love they can choose not to be controlled by those feelings. Nobody can make you feel a certain way. You can let them make you mad, or sad, or worried, but ...in the power of the Holy Spirit, by the name of Jesus Christ, you can CHOOSE to continue to feel at peace, humble, meek, strong, and refuse to worry, or get mad or sad. From these first three verses I learn that I need to choose to be strong in the peace of Christ and choose to focus on love rather

than choosing to focus on what is wrong, what is terrible, the things that produce anxiety, despair, depression, and/or anger. You choose what you focus on.

NIV Okay now let's look at verses 4-7. Your pew Bible has it: "The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. 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. 6 And we will be ready to punish every act of disobedience, once your obedience is complete. 7 You are looking only on the surface of things. If anyone is confident that he belongs to Christ, he should consider that we belong to Christ just as much as he.

NLT 4 We use God's mighty weapons, not worldly weapons, to knock down the strongholds of human reasoning and to destroy false arguments. 5 We destroy every proud obstacle that keeps people from knowing God. We capture their rebellious thoughts and teach them to obey Christ. 6 And after you have become fully obedient, we will punish everyone who remains disobedient. 7 Look at the obvious facts Those who say they belong to Christ must recognize that we belong to Christ as much as they do.

The Message The world in unprincipled. It's dog-eat-dog out there! The world doesn't fight fair. But we don't live or fight our battles that way—never have and never will. The tools of our trade aren't for marketing or manipulation, but they are for demolishing that entire massively corrupt culture. We use our powerful God-tools for smashing warped philosophies, tearing down barriers erected against the truth of God, fitting every loose thought and emotion and impulse into the structure of life shaped by Christ. Our tools are ready at hand for clearing the ground of every obstruction and building lives of obedience into maturity.

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Okay, there are three very different ways of saying that Paul and the people working with him, his team, are fighting a spiritual battle and that they are using spiritual weapons like the Word of God and Prayer and the Holy Spirit. They will not tolerate anything that puts itself equal with the Scriptures, with the Bible. The power of the Holy Spirit can break through all forms of strongholds. Strongholds of sin, fear, lust, divisiveness, anger, or greed. They can't stand in the midst of power of prayer and the filling of the Holy Spirit. **[NOTE 3]**

As we read in Ephesians 6:12 our fight isn't with people but the influence of evil, devils, demons, and the like. They seek to create extreme busyness, tiredness so you spend all your energy doing things of no spiritual significance, so you don't have time for Christ, for the gospel, for learning or teaching, for discipleship. They seek to create fear so you are afraid to go out and minister. I believe that Paul is talking about doing warfare with spiritual weapons to help explain why it might seem that he is wimpy at times, by the world's standards. The weapons of humility and meekness don't translate in this world of brutality, yelling, and physical hurting signaling strength. Living Jesus' way, though still strong and powerful, doesn't look that way by the world's standards.

By the power of the Holy Spirit within you ... When you receive Jesus Christ into your life as Lord and Savior, the Bible tells us that you are filled with the Holy Spirit. So, the Spirit is in you, but you need to keep on, keeping on, giving the Spirit control of your life and keep on giving it all to God. Let go, let go, and let God. When you start to feel worried, anxious, out of control, impatient, or angry, stop and go to the Lord in prayer and pray to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

[NOTE 4] By the power of the Holy Spirit you can surrender your will, surrender your plans and purposes, surrender your feelings, and choose to grab a hold of those things and arrest them, throw the handcuffs on them, and bring them under obedience to Jesus Christ. Let the power of the Holy Spirit subdue them and let the peace of Christ rule in your heart and in your mind, and in your soul.

We need to choose daily to take our thoughts captive. Like Paul and His friends we need to belong to Jesus Christ fully and completely. So when you are tempted, when you catch yourself starting to worry, starting to covet, starting to get angry, starting to lust, bring those thoughts to Jesus and ask Him by the power of the Holy Spirit to lock them up. Take those thoughts captive and make them obedient to Jesus Christ. So you are walking through your day and you get a message on Prayer Warriors that your loved one is sick and struggling. When you start to worry, take that thought captive and take it to Jesus in prayer and let the Spirit guide you to peace and faith. Don't give in! Jesus promised that He always provides a way out, a way to say no to temptation. It sounds so simple, but oh, so hard to put into practice consistently. It sounds so easy, just bring every thought into relation to Jesus. Keep Jesus at the center of your life. Make Him the priority.

You don't have to work today so you sit down and turn on the TV. The next thing you know you are watching people raping or killing others, using language that is the farthest thing from building up your neighbor there is, and two hours later you are still watching TV. You take a nap, cook, do this and that and pretty soon the whole day is gone and you haven't once thought about God, the one who created you, who loves you unconditionally, without limit, and you haven't prayed once. You got a call about your grandchild and they are sick so you say you will pray and all of a sudden the day is gone and you haven't even prayed. It may be simple, but it is certainly not easy.

Now, let me be clear, taking every thought captive does not equal cramping the mind or denying the right to think. But if you don't like the output, the fruit you see or lack of fruit you see in your life, fruit like love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control then change the input. Every decision you make is vote for the kind of person you will be.

Paul is talking about bringing our plans, our purpose, our mission, our goals, and bringing them to Jesus so they are subject to His guidance by the Holy Spirit. Max Warren tells a story of a custom of the natives in New Guinea. At certain times they had ritual songs and dances. They would work themselves up into a frenzy and the ritual culminated in what are called "murder songs," in which they would shout before the world/their god, the names of the people they wished to kill. When the natives became

Christians they retained these customs and that particular ritual. But after bringing it to Jesus in prayer they were moved to no longer utter the names of the people they hated during the “murder songs” but the names of the sins they hated. They shouted before God and called on Yahweh to destroy the evil desires and bad thoughts, destroy the strongholds.

A pagan custom had been captured for Christ. That’s what Dry Bones Walking does with rock-n-roll songs we take the music we love and bring it under obedience to Christ and serve Him with the lyrics. Take a hold of the thoughts in your mind and make them a prisoner of spiritual war and lock them in the dungeon so that the thoughts of peace, joy, and love and reign in your life. Take ahold of the thoughts in your head and transfer them to a new authority. Transfer them to become under the authority of Jesus Christ. Why does Paul insist on this?

Because the evil one will seduce you away from Christ. The evil one wants you to be surrounded by the world, filled with worldly pursuits, consumed by getting more stuff, more money, and being more comfortable. But Paul is telling us that we need to apply the truth of the gospel, the Word of God, to any and every situation. We are in a battle. The evil one wants to fill us with unchristian thoughts. Paul tells us here we need to belong to Christ in every way. We need to capture every intention, and bring it to obedience to Christ and His ways.

[NOTE 5] So what are you going to do about it? Are you going to think or even say out loud, “good sermon pastor,” and then live your life next week the exact same way you did last week? My prayer, my hope, is that you will write down on your bulletin, or on the NOTES app in your phone an “I will _____” statement. Write down something that you will do different this week because of what God said to you through me this morning. How might you take captive your thoughts this week to bring them to obedience to Christ? Write down how you might live out and let your life show better that you belong to Christ, just as Paul and his associates did. Let’s pray ... AMEN

Sermon Notes for “Captive Thoughts” based on 2 Corinthians 10: 1-7

Given at Doster Community Church April 16, 2023

- I. Aristotle said, “Gentleness is the perfect middle/average between too angry and never angry.” Meekness can also be sweet reasonableness. Meekness and gentleness = the way of Jesus Christ. Comes from confidence in God and His message.
- II. Meekness does not imply we never feel frustration, impatience, or anger but rather that these feelings are controlled in the power of the Holy Spirit.
- III. “Our war is not against flesh and blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places.” (Eph. 6:12)
- IV. When Christ has won the surrender of the will, our plans and purposes must become subject to His guiding Spirit. Take hold of all thoughts and lock them down until they come into obedience to Jesus Christ.
- V. What are you going to do about it? Write an “I will _____” statement indicating what you will do this week to take captive your thoughts to bring them to obedience to Jesus and His will.