Fact Sheet for "Taking Every Thought Captive" 2 Corinthians 10:1-6

Pastor Bob Singer
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^{NAU} **2 Corinthians 10:4-5** for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. ⁵ *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,

Here is a quote on these verses from the NKJV Study Bible… "He *(Paul)* took captive **to the obedience of Christ** every perception and intention of the heart that was against God. Our actions reveal our thoughts. We should not cling to thoughts that do not conform to the life and teachings of Christ. Paul did not walk according to the flesh or his worldly desires; instead he conquered the flesh. He explains his strategy in 1 Cor. 9:24-27: 'I discipline my body and bring it into subjection."

I've heard sermons on taking every thought that I think captive to the obedience of Christ. Here are those two verses again in the KJV…

^{KJV} **2 Corinthians 10:4-5** (For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) ⁵ Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;

But… here are those two verses in the NLT…

^{NLT} **2 Corinthians 10:4-5** 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.

What's going on? Is it *our* thoughts or *their* thoughts? Are these translations translating different Greek manuscripts? No. The Greek literally reads "every thought". Then why the difference in the NLT? Why does it read, "We capture their rebellious thoughts and teach them to obey Christ"?

The answer lies in the goals of each of these translations. The New American Standard Bible and the King James Version stay as close as they can to a word for word rendering of the original languages. Notice that in both of these versions it doesn't say whether these were Paul's thoughts or someone else's thoughts since the original Greek doesn't say. Without considering the context of these verses carefully it is easy to assume that these were Paul's thoughts and read that into our understanding of the text. The NLT is not a strict word for word translation. Its purpose is to bring a contextual meaning into the translation. Thus they end up with the translation, "We capture their rebellious thoughts and teach them to obey Christ."

But are the NLT translators correct?

The following is an audio transcript from the ministry of John Piper.

> *"Sarah writes in to ask: "Pastor John, what does it mean to 'take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ?' (2 Corinthians 10:5). How can I take this command and apply it to my incorrect or sinful thoughts, that I may obey Christ and have joy in Him?"*
> Well, here is the text. Let's read it and then we will see if we can figure this out. 2 Corinthians 10:4–5 says, "For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh. That is, they are not merely human." This is not a mere battle between one philosopher with some human wisdom against another philosopher with a human wisdom. "But the weapons of our warfare have divine power to destroy strongholds." And then he defines this powerful stronghold-destroying activity in two steps. Verse 5: "[First,] we destroy arguments and every lofty or proud opinion raised against the knowledge of God and [second,] we then take every

thought captive." It's like when you move in a battle and you destroy the fortress and then you take captives. We take every thought captive to obey Christ.

So Sarah asks how she can approach verse 5, taking every thought captive, and apply it to herself to be more obedient to Christ in her thought life. The first thing I think that needs to be said is, when we apply this to ourselves, we have to make sure we are in the right place in the text. When Paul says first he is destroying arguments and arrogant opinions against God and, second, that he is taking thoughts or minds captive, we need to realize it is the minds and thoughts of others. He is not talking about taking his own thoughts captive. It is the thoughts of others."[1]

Before we get into these verses let's surface some of the things Paul would go on to say concerning those who were influencing the Corinthian believers (2 Cor. 10:7, 10-12; 11:4, 12-15, 20-23; 13:2).

^{ESV} **2 Corinthians 13:2** I warned those who sinned before and all the others, and I warn them now while absent, as I did when present on my second visit, that if I come again I will not spare them--

Those last words highlight what is a distinct change in Paul's tone beginning in chapter 10. His thoughts largely concern those who were influencing the Corinthian believers with wrong beliefs and actions. Let's now begin with 10:1…

^{ESV} **2 Corinthians 10:1 ¶ 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!-- ² 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.**

This reminds me of what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 2:3-5.

³ For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. ⁴ For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. ⁵ We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, ⁶ being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete.

Paul uses military imagery ("war", "weapons", "strongholds", "captive") to make his point. The fleshly weapons of warfare used by these false teachers included impressive credentials (1 Cor. 1:26), rhetorical polish (1 Cor. 2:1), learning, personal influence, and false accusations (of Paul). Paul's weapons that had divine power against these false teachers included the Word of God and prayer. These had the power to **"destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God."** Look at what Paul wrote in Ephesians 6:13-18. His intent was to make the Corinthians obedient to Christ, not to make them subject to himself.

And take another close look at 2 Corinthians 10:4-5. There is no command by Paul here to "take every thought captive to obey Christ". This was only a statement of what he was going to do when he came to Corinth. Paul then follows this up with verse 6.

⁶ being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete.

But there are ways to apply this to ourselves.

1. Be wary of the teaching of those who preach a different gospel, or who do not preach the Word of God, or who preach with wrong motives.
2. Remember that evangelism is best done among those who are not Christians. But remember to do your best to take every thought of theirs captive to obedience to Christ.
3. Ask yourself if there is any thought of yours that is not consistent with good biblical teaching. Let God take that thought of yours captive.

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[1] http://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/how-do-i-take-my-thoughts-captive.