

# The battle for the mind

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HAWKINS, Texas—One evening I spent some time listening to an old radio rerun drama, *Suspense*. The entire program, including commercials, announcements and station ID (recorded during World War II), were recorded intact. At one point the announcer said, "Pacific war time is now 8:30." The commercials for this program consisted of Roma wine and war bonds."

From those spot announcements I began to sense the mood of a nation at war—or on the brink of war. The feeling that enveloped me seemed one of grimness, determination and an electrifying resolve to fight on to victory regardless of the cost.

## **At war again**

My somber purpose with this article is to place all of you, as seasoned soldiers of Jesus Christ, on alert. We are at war again. The battle I warn you about in this message is probably the toughest and most treacherous spiritual campaign you'll ever have to undertake. Scores of your fellow combatants have entered this military theater with poor defenses and low fire power and have perished in the battle.

The terrain of this battlefield is rugged, with millions of cavernous convolutions. Three main fissures cut the battleground into quadrants. The Fissure of Rolando, separating the frontal lobe from the parietal lobe, and the Fissure of Sylvius, separating the cerebrum from the cerebellum.

The battleground I refer to is the human mind, which we also refer to as the heart or spirit. Often the Bible uses the word *spirit* to signify disposition and motive. The gravity of this campaign we have seen illustrated in Proverbs 16:32: "He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit better than he who takes a city."

The verse does not talk about a small town like Big Sandy, Texas, or Snakes Navel, Idaho, but instead a large walled fortress with impenetrable walls.

A companion scripture in Proverbs 25:28 suggests that whoever has no rule over his own spirit is like a city broken down, without walls.

## Skilled enemy

We should find it frightening and sobering to learn that the archenemy, Satan the devil, has stolen the map of its terrain. This master terrorist has stolen the schematic diagram of our command-post computer and knows how to hot-wire us to blow our circuits.

Satan, skilled in sophisticated communication techniques, also has a military communication satellite with a high-intensity beam trained upon each one of us. He doesn't have to transmit any new diabolical ideas. All he has to do is amplify and intensify attitudes we already have in our hearts. In one very real sense we have satanic fellow travelers, or sympathizers, hiding within the recesses of our heart or mind, cooperating with the prince and Power of the Air. Jesus said in Matthew that it is not what goes into the mind that defiles us, but what goes out of a mind.

"For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are the things which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man" (Matthew 15:19-20).

The apostle Paul describes in Galatians 5:19-21 the contents of the natural, carnal human mind: "Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness and the like, will not inherit the Kingdom of God."

## Set in motion

Most of us, I trust, are familiar with James 1:14-15, describing the anatomy and progression of sin:

"But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death."

One of my former students composed an analogy essay in which he compared Satan to a microwave oven. The oven technically doesn't cook the meat. The waves simply set into motion the molecules already in the meat.

Likewise Satan's microwaves simply set into motion the lusts, hatred, anger, envy, selfish ambitions already extant within us. We simply cook ourselves to death. Whenever we allow our emotions to get out of control, sin rushes in to seize control.

"An angry man stirs up strife and a furious man abounds in transgression" (Proverbs 29:22).

## Capture enemy thoughts

God Almighty repeatedly warns us not to let our emotions get the best of us. In Genesis 4:4 God commands Cain to get a grip on his attitude:

"And the LORD respected Abel and his offering. But He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. So the Lord said to Cain, 'Why are you so angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at your door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it.' "

Simeon and Levi were denied a property inheritance because of their excessive anger and desire for revenge. "Cursed be their anger, says the LORD, and let them be divided and scattered in Israel" (Genesis 49:7).

Christ's own disciples had frequent difficulties controlling their vengeful feelings.

"But they did not receive him because his face was set for the journey to Jerusalem. And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, 'Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from Heaven and consume them as Elijah did?' But He turned and rebuked them, and said, 'You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. For the son of man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them' " (Luke 9:53-56).

To put it mildly, God doesn't want us to have childish temper tantrums. A spiritual battlefield is no place for children. God wants us to gain control over our emotions. To do so, we must begin to take prisoners of war, as Paul suggests in 2 Corinthians when he exhorts us to bring every thought into captivity.

The envious, angry, lustful thoughts need to be identified and interrogated. We might find it relatively easy to conceal our carnal thoughts from our brethren or the ministers, but it is pointless and futile to conceal them from ourselves and God.

### **Replace evil with good**

One way to make sure a thought stays in captivity is to be candid to ourselves and to God about our feelings. Once we have identified and captured the enemy, we then find it necessary to send an occupation force to the battle ground. We need to continually pray for reinforcements of God's Spirit.

"That He [Christ] would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might through his spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your heart through faith; that you being rooted and grounded in love" (Ephesians 3:16).

Paul mentions in 2 Timothy 1:7 about the Holy Spirit providing power, love and a sound mind.

Paul's describes the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23 as "love, joy, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, self-control. Against these there is no law."

Paul repeatedly urges us to be renewed in the Spirit of our mind. The renewing brings fresh reinforcements of the Holy Spirit. In addition to daily prayer for reinforcements of God's Spirit, we must daily absorb God's law as David did in Psalm 119 when he said: "Oh, how I love your law. It is my meditation day and night."

Paul admonished the Philippians to meditate upon pure and noble things. This would include God's Word.

Lastly, we must seek allies in our spiritual battle, preferably positive-minded brethren who are grounded in God's Word.

We have received warning in the Proverbs that if we make a friend with a person who can't control his emotions we will become just like him.

Likewise, when we spend time with brethren who exhibit godlike qualities, we find they are a positive influence on us.

At the conclusion of Paul's letter to the Romans (Romans 16:1-16), Paul lists some of the positive people in his life.

In verses 1 and 2 he mentions the servant Phoebe, who served Paul and many of the brethren. In verses 3 and 4 he noted Priscilla and Aquila, who "risked their own necks" for him.

Our logistical plan for winning the battle for the mind should include these strategies:

- Capture enemy thoughts.
- Displace them with an occupation force of God's Spirit.
- Absorb and digest a daily ration of God's law through His Word.
- Seek spiritual allies.

Remember that the battle is a matter of life and death.