

ETERNAL PERSPECTIVE



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The Battlefield of the Mind

As I sit down to begin writing this, we are embarking on the celebration of a day that is most likely not on most people's radar: *Armistice Day*. At the eleventh hour on the eleventh day of the eleventh month of 1918 – one hundred years ago – the Allied forces and Germany signed an agreement to end the hostilities known then as the Great War.

For disparate reasons, World War I has lost a lot of relevance compared to other major wars in history, especially in the 20th century.

The reality is that World War I was ferocious – “some of the most brutal forms of warfare ever known. Millions were sent to fight away from home for months, even years at a time, and underwent a series of terrible physical and emotional experiences. The new technologies available to First World War armies combined with the huge number of men mobilized made the battlefields of 1914-18 horrific, deadly and terrifying places.” (Vanda Wilcox, John Cabot University, Rome)

When thinking of WWI, the popular image that comes to most minds is “trench warfare;” armies digging in along muddy front lines until ordered “over the top” to engage the enemy – all the while having to deal with the myriad of technological advances first seen in modern warfare: Chemical warfare. Aeroplanes. The machine gun.

The battlefields of Europe are still crying out from the millions of mostly young men lost forever.

Did you know the battlefields of our minds are every bit as treacherous and deadly?

As Christians, we talk a lot about the heart and rightly so, the heart is the center of the spirit, the core of our being, where our affections lie, but it is the mind where the battles are waged - and either victories are won or we experience the agony of defeat.

Your mind is the battlefield where everything about who you are and whose you are is waged!

Trenches are dug. And the enemy of our soul is tireless in his multipronged assaults and doesn't fight fair.

We are coming up on another anniversary – on December 8, 1980, Mark David Chapman came up to John Lennon in front of his Manhattan apartment and shot him dead in cold blood. Why? Even though Lennon had greeted him earlier in the day and happily signed a copy of his new record for him (he was “incredible” according to Chapman), Chapman got it in his head – talking himself into it in his mind – that he had to do it.

He said he had been going through an internal “tug of war” of whether to go ahead with it. “I was too far in,” Chapman told his parole board recently. “There was no way I was just going to walk home.”

This man lost the battle in his mind.

What are you thinking on?

Better yet, what are you allowing to penetrate and influence how you think?

The Bible is full of passages that speak on the mind and the warfare over the mind (e.g. Isaiah 55:8-9, Romans 8:6-7, 1 Peter 1:13, Philippians 4:8). For the rest of this piece, let us look at Paul’s words to the church in Corinth:

“Though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh [in other words, we don’t fight with armor, we don’t fight with politics, we don’t fight with money, we don’t fight with all the humanistic ways]. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.” (2 Corinthians 10:3-5 ESV)

What the apostle Paul is writing is that the battlefield for who we are is in our mind!

The reality is that if we are *of the world* – unredeemed - we are powerless to fight against those fortifications, those “strongholds.”

Strongholds are those battlements and blockades that are built up and opposed against us – our thoughts, our meditations, how we view ourselves, the condemning words of others.

Rick Warren describes these strongholds as “mental blocks.” He continues, “It can be a worldview, such as materialism, hedonism, Darwinism, secularism, relativism, communism, atheism. All of the different -isms are mental strongholds that people set up against the knowledge of God.

A stronghold can also be a personal attitude. Worry can be a stronghold. Seeking the approval of other people can be a stronghold. Anything that you make an idol in your life can be a stronghold — fear, guilt, resentment, insecurity. All of these things can be strongholds in your mind. And the Bible says that we are to tear them down.”

If we are disciples of Christ, we have the ability, through the spirit of the Lord who lives within us redeeming us day by day, to tear those strongholds down. How do we tear them down? Paul writes we have to “take every thought captive to obey Christ.” This is how all strongholds are destroyed. By submitting our minds – captive and obedient - to our King.

The original Greek used for *taking captive* is the word *aichmalōtizō*. It means to “control, conquer, bring into submission.”

Furthermore, the present tense used by Paul here denotes we are to do it continually!

When we are tempted to think ill of someone, to be jealous of someone, to lord it over someone, to be cruel to someone, we are to submit those thoughts to the reshaping of Jesus.

When we hate – ask God to turn it into love. When we are filled with rage – ask God to bring his peace. When our mind wants to rebel with ungodly desires and strategies – and it will - ask God to bring it back in line. Every thought. Captive.

I can tell you from experience that when you do that, and you continue to do it day after day, one day very soon you will look back and realize that you are now walking around transformed, with the renewed mind of Christ (Romans 12:2)! Strongholds pulled down! Battles won.