

The Battle for the Mind

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Acknowledging the spiritual battle and its true nature

A. Fact of the battle and overview of its nature. There is a spiritual battle. Satan and his kingdom of darkness have been defeated by Jesus' death on the Cross in love, but we await its full realization as we labor with God for all men to enter into it. The battle always "belongs to the Lord" (2 Chr. 20:15), but we have the dignity of being able to choose freely to be on the Lord's side and fight with him (assent to his victory) against our personal fallen nature, the world system of our fallen nature, and the devil.

B. Dimensions of our spiritual battle. The spiritual battle always involves us in two dimensions of our being: as an individual person fighting to work out our own salvation (Phil. 2:12), and as a Body working for its sanctification and the salvation of unbelievers (Rev. 2 and 12, 1 Cor. 12, 1 Peter 5:9). The spiritual battle always involves us in two dimensions of our life and our will: our acting and our thinking. Our acting ("walking" Gal. 5:16-25) and thinking affect one another, however -- for good or for evil (Rom. 8:4-8). There is also the dimension of the battle of prayer, which is a specific dimension of the battle, yet is absolutely essential for the battle to bring both our acting and thinking in conformity with Christ Jesus (CCC 2745).

C. The battle for the mind specifically.

Our intelligence -- our ability to grasp truth, to judge, and to reason -- is a tremendous gift of dignity from the Trinity. By God's revelation and authority, we are each commanded and enabled to "love the Lord your God . . . with all your mind" (Mark 12:30). Since Satan wants to destroy this communion of our thoughts with God, he seeks to draw our thoughts toward error, wrong desires, suspicion against God -- in general, toward rebellion against and hatred of God. The mind is meant by God to govern our desires and will according to the revelation of God's thoughts to us through the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 2). However, our sin has darkened and blinded our minds. *For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, indeed it cannot* (Rom. 8:7). The scriptures often address the need for believers to have their minds further set free from this darkness. *Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind* (Rom. 12:2).

Offensive strategy

A. To confront what was formed by the world, the flesh, and the devil and to conform that area of thinking to the mind of Christ.

For though we live in the world we are not carrying on a worldly war, for the weapons of our warfare are not worldly but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle to the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ . . . (2 Cor. 10:3-5). For example, I may think that when I fail in some way, I forfeit God's love for me. This is a lie about the nature of God and my relationship with him as my Father. I can recognize this thought behind my discouragement

or avoidance of prayer and put on the mind of Jesus who knows his identity in the Father and trusts in his love.

We are assured of victory because Jesus has rendered sin impotent (Rom. 6) and has revealed the mystery of the Father (and the Trinity). Jesus has won grace for us "so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine . . . Now I affirm this and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds; they are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. . . . Put off your old nature . . . and be renewed in the spirit of your minds" (Eph. 4:7-24). Jesus is stronger than the devil and the sinful patterns of thinking in us. When Jesus was casting out a demon, he made this clear: *When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are in peace; but when one stronger than he assails him and overcomes him, he takes away his armor in which he trusted, and divides his spoil* (Luke 11:14-26). For example,

B. To increase our living contact with the truths of the Gospel.

Our greatest weapon is prayer, union with God. We can practice the presence of God continually even in this life (CCC 2743). "For we have not been commanded to work, to keep watch and to fast constantly, but it has been laid down that we are to pray without ceasing" (CCC 2742, quoting Evagrius Ponticus, also 2757 and 1 Thess. 5:17). CCC 2725-45 is devoted to "The Battle of Prayer" and discusses the temptations encountered and their remedies. We can set our thoughts (including conscious desires) on God. *Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things* (Phil. 4:6-8).

Defensive Strategy

A. To stand our ground in defending what we know is true from temptations against faith.

It is possible to lose ground that we have gained if we take it for granted because the enemies to our faith are still around us seeking to enter our thoughts again. Luke 11:24-26 *"When the unclean spirit has gone out of a man, he passes through waterless places seeking rest; and finding none he says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' . . . Then he goes and brings seven other spirits more evil than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first."* Paul urges us to press on, but also says, *"let us hold true to what we have attained"* (Phil. 3:16).

B. To stay alert to the fact of the battle.

We cannot be naive, even when engaged in spiritual activities. *Prayer presupposes an effort, a fight against ourselves and the wiles of the Tempter* (CCC 2752). We must be alert as to the nature of our enemies -- not other people but spiritual forces in the world and in us that are opposed to God. Also, we must remember that our engagement strengthens the whole Body.

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the equipment of the gospel of peace; besides all these, taking the shield of faith, with which you can quench all the flaming darts of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints (Eph. 6:10-20).

Discussion Questions

1. What are thoughts that typically challenge my trust in God the Father? How does the revelation of Jesus' relationship with the Father demolish these lies and bring healing and peace of mind again?
2. What helps me practice the presence of God during the day?
3. How have I seen Jesus' power to renew my mind in the past? Do I believe my need and in his power to continue renewing my mind now?