

Sanctification / Transformation

Pete: After a few years as a believer I really struggled over the question of God being totally righteous. I could see too many examples of where to me that just did not seem to the case. The big issue for me was over those to whom the grace of God had not been given so that they could have faith and believe and be saved. How come I had received that grace and others had not? Was it that in the plans of God some are destined for hell before they are even born and only those destined for heaven receive the grace of God? I was really tormented over this question. If that was true then what was the point of evangelism anyway and are we not then robots and free will is an illusion. This went on for weeks. I had no peace, just terrible fears that perhaps God was not who he said he was. I was calling out to God for answer but had no response. I turned to the book of Job. It seemed to be a book about someone who also was really struggling to understand God over the same issues. As I got to the end somewhat comforted that I was not the only one struggling in this, a passage seemed to leap off the page and enter my heart.

Job 40:8

'Would you condemn Me that you may be justified?'

Suddenly it was like God had pierced my mind with his word. He had not answered my particular theological questions but he had let me see my own heart. I believed that I was right in my assessment that God was unjust. I was condemning him so that I could be justified. He showed me my self-righteousness. I repented; the torment lifted and joy returned. I could now trust God in the things I could not understand. I say this to highlight that being sanctified, which means to be 'set apart,' is a process of transformation that so often involves struggle.

Transformation is a supernatural, relationship process

My struggle was in a one to one context, just me and God. At the point when I had exhausted my arguments he supernaturally engaged with me and brought deliverance. The verse below provides a good outline of the factors involved in transformation.

Romans 12:1-2

'Therefore I urge you brothers, on account of God's mercy to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God which is your spiritual service to God. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.'

- *'Therefore I urge you brothers...'*
Transformation happens through your free choice – God does not force you.
Read **John 14:21, Philippians 4:13, and Hebrews 4:16.**
- *'On account of God's mercy...'*
You do not deserve what God has to give – He gives it to you because he is merciful.

- *'Offer your bodies as living sacrifices holy and pleasing to God which is your spiritual service to God'.*
When God has your body then he has everything in it - your mind, will, emotions and your spirit.
- *'Do not be conformed to this world...'*
This is a clear decision not to behave or act as you used to before you were born again.
- *'But be transformed by the renewing of your mind...'*
This means learning to take every thought captive.
Read **2 Corinthians 10:4-5**
- *'Then you will be able to discern what is the good, pleasing and perfect will of God'*
This is the fruit of transformation.

Renewing Your Mind

Transformation comes as our minds are renewed and this will affect every aspect of our living.

1. The vision we pursue.
2. Our motives or reasons for pursuing vision.
3. The means that we use to achieve it.

The transformation process does not require anything else on our part except submission. The rest God will do supernaturally.

Zechariah 4:6

'Not by might, nor by power [not by natural strength], but by My Spirit,' says the Lord."

Strongholds of the mind

As you go forward in faith you will discover some thought patterns in you that resist change. The bible refers to these as strongholds. The following verse talks about this.

2 Corinthians 10:4-5

'The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.'

A stronghold in your mind could be defined as an entrenched pattern of thought which then shapes your emotions and directs your behaviour. Lying behind the culture of your upbringing will be strongholds of thought patterns, values and learned behaviour that direct your life. Many of these are ungodly. And many of these have been placed there by the devil and may be evident as beliefs in your family from generation after generation. The good news is that God has given every believer the power to come free from ungodly

strongholds. Not only that but these negative strongholds can be replaced by positive strongholds. God himself can become a stronghold of your mind.

Psalm 9:9 – *‘the Lord is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble.’*

Psalm 18:2 – *‘the Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer, my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge. He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.’*

Mankind lost God’s strong protection through the fall.

The bible begins with the book of Genesis which in part is about the first two people God created, Adam and Eve. They were placed in a paradise called Eden where God was the stronghold for Adam and Eve. When their desire for sin resulted in what is sometimes called the ‘fall’, (the events of **Genesis 3**) they were taken from the safety of their stronghold and became vulnerable to the demonic attack. This is the underlying theme of much of the Old Testament. When God’s people rejected him as their stronghold, their enemies plundered them subjecting them to ungodly strongholds. This applied to every level of their lives – moral, ideological, political, cultural and spiritual. Their enemy’s stronghold over them shaped their thinking and behaviour. But God did not give up – he sent prophets to warn them and sometimes his righteous anger came down until they saw their need for repentance. Repentance begins the process of demolishing strongholds.

We are to demolish strongholds.

Through disobedience we abandon God as our stronghold. Through repentance his stronghold over our lives can be restored - then we can fight for others to come free. This is called spiritual warfare.

Jesus implied this in **Luke 11:21-22**

‘When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are in peace. But when one stronger than he comes upon him and overcomes him, he takes from him all his armour in which he trusted, and divides his spoils.’

Paul addresses this in **2 Corinthians 10:4-5**

‘The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.’

The theme of Paul’s teaching in the verses above relate to the plundering of strongholds. Paul is saying that these divine weapons are able to destroy the strongholds of Satan as they have affected either individuals or groups.

Perhaps as a believer you may think you are the only one who struggles with strongholds in your life. You are not! We are all works in process. We have both experienced the love and power of God breaking strongholds in our lives and setting us free. The starting point is to take ownership of the areas of sinful patterns and learned behaviour when the Lord convicts you of them. Sometimes we need other’s prayerful support alongside us in the process. We

have seen many friends come free from strongholds as they have learnt to apply the cross into their lives - they believe and declare that the death of Jesus on the cross has destroyed the power of sin and the right of the enemy to any control in their lives and submit their lives to Jesus in the area he is revealing to them. Their testimony is of an increased love for the Lord and faith in his power to set us free. God is very good!

Renewing Your Mind / Taking thoughts Captive

The following is a testimony of how Pip had her mind renewed over a particular struggle:-

I was reading **Philippians 4:11** where Paul writes, '*In whatever state I am I have learned to be content*'. Paul had been shipwrecked, beaten, imprisoned, hungry, sleepless... As I pondered this passage I felt the nudge of the Holy Spirit within as to whether I wanted to know such contentment in my heart whatever the circumstances of life. At that time we were 10 years into a waiting period where our ministry had ceased and we were intentionally seeking God daily as to what his will and direction was for our lives. When all is stripped away the inner scream for significance can be deafening yet through my scream the Lord had been asking me, 'Am I enough?' My response was, 'NO ... but I want You to be.' So when I read this Philippians passage and sensed the Lord's invitation to go deeper I shook my head and thought, "I'm not even going there! This journey has been tough enough..." It seems that sometimes the Lord doesn't take no for an answer and over the following months he brought me into a deep reality that he is ENOUGH and that only he can satisfy my innermost desires.

Through the process, the Holy Spirit began to open my eyes to my covetousness; of others significance, position, finance etc. As I entertained those thoughts I became dissatisfied, jealous, despairing over our lives, full of unbelief, angry with God. Over time I learnt to recognise the subtle entry of these thoughts and I learnt to repent, to resist the enemy and to take these thoughts captive to Jesus rather than entertain them (2 Corinthians 10:5). I also learnt that the antidote to covetousness is thankfulness and blessing; thankfulness to God for what we have and for his faithfulness to us and blessing others in our difference. The stronghold began to break and was replaced by a deep contentment. I love the way the Lord speaks through his word and gently points out issues that he knows stunt our relationship with him and with others. Learning to be content in whatever state is a valuable principle I am learning to apply in my life.

Pip came through this particular battle because she understood the following principles for taking thoughts captive.

1. God knows what is going on in your mind and he wants to set you free.
Action - In prayer yield yourself to God and ask him to make clear to you the wrong thoughts and attitudes. Don't dig for them; let him highlight them to you.
2. Those wrong thoughts and attitudes have blocked your relationship with God.
Action – As clarity comes to you over specific wrong thoughts and attitudes; repent and ask God's forgiveness for allowing them to be there.

3. At times God speaks the truth directly into your mind. Most of the time he uses his written word to bring understanding. Remember nothing he puts into your mind will contradict his written word.

Action - Go to the bible and look for relevant passages that could speak into your struggle. Develop the habit of reading the bible daily.

4. Coming clearer as to what the truth is and what it is not, is a big breakthrough.

Action – Give time to read and re-read and meditate upon the relevant passage of his word.

5. Verbalising the truth is effective for clearing any demonic influence that may have gripped your mind.

Action – Verbally declare the truth you have understood or, by using the relevant scriptures, create and speak out a declaration. For example:-

“I speak to the devil in Jesus name and renounce and resist your works in my mind. And in Jesus name I tell to you go away from me. Jesus I welcome you and ask you to lead me in your word so that I might fill my mind with the truth.”

Much of this process is summed up in the following verse:-

James 4:6-7

‘God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble. Therefore submit to God, resist the devil and he will flee from you.’

This practice of taking thoughts captive and renewing your mind is a lifelong process as bit by bit we come free and grow in the knowledge of the truth. In the battle of it all, don't give up. God is always there to give strength, encouragement and most of all salvation from all that is negative. His strength comes through your fellowship with him. We will focus on this in the next session.

Suggested Further Study

Idolatry