

Every Thought Captive

Call to Worship: Ecclesiastes 12:9-14

1st Scripture: Genesis 18:1-21; 19:27-29

2nd Scripture: 2 Corinthians 10:1-6

Hymn Insert- *By Faith*

Hymn #451- *Teach Me O Lord*

Hymn #487- *Faith of Our Fathers*

Introduction:

The day after Abraham was visited by the Lord and two angels, he awoke early in the morning, and went out to the place where they had met, so as to discover the outcome of the angel's visit to Sodom and Gomorrah. He had certainly hoped that the cities would be spared, and he was assured that if, even "ten righteous," were found in the city, the Lord would not destroy them. And as he had come upon that place, atop Mount Hebron, where he could see the city from a distance, we were told in Genesis 19:28, "Then he looked toward Sodom and Gomorrah, and toward all the land of the plain; and he saw, and behold, the smoke of the land which went up like the smoke of a furnace." Entire nations of people were turned to ash, where not even ten righteous were found.

How did those nations get that way? How could they have become so evil, in the sight of God? Well, we are given a glimpse into the gradual demise, when Abraham spoke to the Lord, the day before. You see, what happened at Sodom and Gomorrah, was very timely for Abraham, indeed, quite providential. In fact, you might say, that it was an object lesson...not to indicate that the lives which were destroyed, were worthless...no, they got exactly what they deserved, but our God, who often accomplishes many things by any event, had an additional purpose in the timing of this great and unique destruction.

What was the main purpose of the Lord's visit to Abraham, the day before? In our first Scripture reading, Genesis 18:1-21, we read of this purpose. In verse 10, we were told, "And [the Lord] said, I will certainly return to you according to the time of life, and behold, Sarah your wife shall have a son." Indeed, the Lord came to Abraham to give him that most blessed news, namely, that the promise God had made to Abraham many years ago, was about to come to pass, at a time, when no one would naturally believe it. For, Sarah was 89, and well past the age of child bearing. But Ishmael was not to be the promised seed. Isaac was, and he would come through the womb of Sarah, a year after this visit.

But then, after giving this information to Abraham, something very significant and relevant takes place. Let us pick up the reading from verses 16-21. [Read Gen. 18:16-21]

What has happened here? After informing Abraham about the coming fulfillment of the blessed promise of Isaac, who would become a great nation, the Lord brings Abraham to the place where he can see Sodom and Gomorrah, and He tells them of His plans to destroy those wicked nations, if the outcry of their corruption is indeed accurate. And the key phrase for Abraham here is, "For I have known [Abraham], in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of The Lord, to do righteousness and justice, that the Lord may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him. You see, Abraham, who was about to father a great nation, was further prepared for this task, by beholding the great destruction of a nation. Unlike Abraham, Sodom and Gomorrah did not have the great privilege of knowing the Lord, and as a consequence of this, their regression into wickedness grew worse and worse, at each passing generation, and now judgment was coming upon them. Sodom and Gomorrah had regressed to a peak of hardness, corruption and wickedness.

And so, as Abraham viewed (from afar) the rising smoke of these destroyed cities, he was, no doubt, reminded of the great responsibility he had, in beginning a new generation of people, namely, to teach them the ways of the Lord, and to walk in the paths of justice and righteousness. He would always have the object lesson of Sodom and Gomorrah, resonating in the back of his mind, compelling him to be diligent in raising Isaac in the fear and admonition of the Lord, and urging him to do the same with his children, and so on. The torch would begin with Abraham, to be passed down to each successive generation, for the nation of Israel. Of course, we know that the torch was often dropped down the line, ultimately leading to multiple judgments and even exile into a foreign land, for the Israelites.

We have decided to dedicate this Lord's Day to addressing the important topic of "Christian Education," especially as a means of encouraging parents in the very difficult and often laborious task of educating our children. And, at the luncheon, which is to follow the Lord's Supper, we want to especially recognize our Homeschooling moms, and the staff of "Grace Christian Academy," who endeavor to educate our children in a way that is counter cultural to our pagan society, which has long since left God out of the equation, continuing to regress in the ways of Sodom and Gomorrah, helping to weaken a nation that is already overly

ripe for God's judgment. Oh, we don't have to look too far, to see how incomprehensibly patient, our God is, do we, brethren?

There are so many, many, many, things that can be said, under the general topic of "Christian Education," which I could never address in a single sermon. And so, I want to limit our focus this morning, on what I believe to be the most critical element; the central theme, which ought to govern and guide and direct the whole "Christian Education" package, as it were. Naturally, I will not be getting into all of the nuances of Academia (the Sciences and Grammar and mathematics...etc), all of which are important, but rather, I want to address the rudder that must run the whole ship, if we want to give our children what is most needed, as we prepare them (quite rapidly) for adulthood. You can, and will make mistakes on the academic side of things, and that should not ultimately destroy our children, but if we neglect that which is most needed, we will indeed do them great harm. And so, by the grace of God, standing on Mount Hebron with Abraham, for the duration of our time together; keeping the great billow of smoke and ash, from the burning of Sodom and Gomorrah, as a background this morning (though in front of us), let us consider our main text in 2 Corinthians, as a more detailed exposition of God's command to Abraham, calling us to diligently train our children in the ways of the Lord!

I. The Context

Now, before we jump into opening up a relevant principle from our main text, it is naturally important that we unfold a bit of the context. In fact, at first glance, one might say, "What in the world does this have to do with 'Christian Education' and child rearing?" Well, the context, will lead us into the general principle that I want to bring forth for us, this morning.

In a good portion of 2 Corinthians, the Apostle Paul is actually defending his apostleship and ministry, as there are some, self-proclaimed, "super apostles," as it were, who are questioning his authority, and influencing the Corinthians with their harmful accusations against Paul. Aside from 1 Corinthians, it seems to be clear that Paul has written at least another letter to the church at Corinth, and this letter was particularly severe in its tone. We don't have a copy of that letter today; obviously God has not given it to us as Scripture, but the content of 2 Corinthians would indicate that such a letter exists.

And so, one of the accusations that has come against Paul, is that he is somewhat of a two faced man, who operates out of a fleshly fear of man. When he is present with the Corinthians,

he seems to be reserved, very lowly and gentle, but when he writes his letters, suddenly he is fierce and strong. And the accusation then, that has come against Paul (which is particularly addressed in our main text for this morning), is that he is a weak man, only able to show any sense of authority and forcefulness, when he is not physically present; when he is writing from afar, as it were. This is hardly fitting for one who is supposed to be an Apostle, so the accusation goes. And so, the Apostle is defending himself, primarily against this particular accusation, in our text (and there are other accusations that he deals with, throughout the other chapters of the Book, as well---which we will not get into this morning).

He begins then in verses 1&2, "Now I, Paul, myself am pleading with you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ--who in presence am lowly before you, but being absent am bold toward you. But I beg you that when I am present I may not be bold with the confidence by which I intend to be bold against some, who think of us as if we walked according to the flesh."

There is a bit of sarcasm in Paul's tone here, and what he is saying is this, "Look, I Paul, the one who is accused of being bold when absent and lowly/weak when present, am actually striving to put on the meekness and gentleness of Christ, when I am with you. I could be bold; I could come across stronger, but I am attempting to be Christ-like, not weak, when I am among you. And I will be stronger and more bold against some, when I return. But the problem is not with me being weak. The problem is that you do not recognize that a true apostle of Christ, rather than coming across as forceful and aggressive, in order to press results according to the flesh, does not rest in his own strength or power. If my confidence were in my self, I could very easily be that way. Prior to my conversion, you would have found me that way. when I persecuted the church, as an insolent blasphemer. And so, what you see in me, when present, is not a man operating out of a fear of man and the flesh, but rather, it is a man, who constantly, though imperfectly, attempts to motivate you, by the meekness and lowliness of Christ, entrusting the ultimate power of persuasion to the Holy Spirit."

Verse 3, "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh." Though we still function and exist in physical bodies that are weak and awaiting perfection, we do not war; we do not contend with the opposition (which is ultimately spiritual--Ephesians 6:10ff) by use of physical means (brute physical force, loud voices, elaborate speech...etc). Rather, we use spiritual means, which alone can contend with the spiritual opposition that comes

against us. We can put on the meekness and gentleness of Christ, because the war is not based on outward appearance or outward show of power...our strength and power lie outside of us.

Verse 4, "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal ("of the flesh") but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds..."

The weapons we use are not of the flesh, but rather they are far more powerful weapons, which actually tear down strongholds. They tear down demonic fortresses and spiritual towers, which though invisible, exist in the spiritual realm, and are the real power behind anything visible, which contends with the visible church, in this world. We go after the real problem with real weapons. And how do we do this? What is the general substance of these weapons, which tear down spiritual strongholds, occupied by higher powers and demonic beings?

Verse 5, "...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!..."

There is a two-fold process attached to our warfare and the weapons which we use in the real battle. Here is how we contend with the real, spiritual opposition; that opposition which deceives the whole world and holds mankind under its terrible sway; here is how we contend with those enemies, behind the scenes, who have set up a stronghold in the hearts of fallen men, in this fallen world.

1) We cast down every argument and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God. By use of the truth; the Holy Spirit empowered truth, indeed the very power of God in the Gospel, we expose the lie; we invade the darkness, and destroy every argument and every high thing that contends with the knowledge of God. We have the truth! Christ is the truth! We humbly and meekly present the truth; that truth, which is a double-edged sword, and in doing so, by the power and grace of God, wicked strongholds are torn down! Christ's truth is infinitely more greater than any fleshly weapon of force, that we can conjure up, attempting to sway people over to our convictions *on any spiritual matter!*

2) We bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ! Having dismantled the lie, by exposing the lie, we lay hold of consciences not by physical brute force, but by replacing the lie with the truth! We destroy, only to rebuild! We cast down demonic strongholds only to bring those who were captive there, into a new captivity; a glorious and joyful one, namely, the captivity of obedience to Christ! We show them where they are standing; we bring in the conviction of God's Law and His reality, which exposes the lie, and then as the former

slave of sin recognizes his condition and frantically looks elsewhere for true rest and safety, we take them captive to Christ! We present them with His grace and His salvation, and we usher them toward obedience, to the God, whom they once denied and who once was their enemy!

And this is the case with all spiritual matters, for the unbeliever, as well as the believer. Although the believer is no longer a slave to sin, there are still remaining strongholds, which must be torn down, by grace. And so, the same Word is used to expose remaining sins, and the same goal of bringing every thought captive to Christ, is in focus. The machinery of *progressive* sanctification continues to operate on the machinery that brought us *immediate* justification. Until, we all come to the perfect man, in Christ!

Having his confidence fixed on God's means of warfare, and on the spiritual armor, which was his to access in Christ, Paul could clothe himself with the meekness and gentleness of Christ, when addressing the sins of the churches. That said, he would also have no problem getting fiercer with the false apostles, who were deceptively influencing the Corinthians.

Verse 6, "...and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled."

By way of excommunication and delivering over to satan, Paul would punish those who continued to contend with his apostleship, while trying to sway the church into their own deceptive grasp (perhaps also an "Ananias and Sapphira" like judgment?).

II. Every Thought Captive

What in the world does all of this have to do with "Christian Education?" Well brethren, I want us to grab hold of a critical principle, found here in the text, which is not limited to the realm and office of the apostle. While Paul is defending himself, and especially his apostolic authority, there is a principle here, which is universal, and which ought to undergird the entire structure of "Christian Education" and child rearing. And, here it is...

What is education, at the most general level of understanding? It is the means of preparing our children for adulthood, is it not? We are seeking to give them all of the tools that are necessary, to enable them to survive and succeed in this world. Well, I want to suggest to you this morning, that the great benefit of Christian Education; true, Biblically based, Christ centered, Christian education, is that, at the center of every aspect of their academic growth;

indeed, the very chord, which binds all of their academics together, and governs how they live and make use of the knowledge that is gained therein, is rooted in the pursuit of these spiritual weapons, which the Apostle Paul has just highlighted as his weapons of warfare. The world will look *only* to the very outward qualities and attributes, which Paul's opponents had considered lacking and missing in Paul. The world must force its way through this life by physical means alone. It cannot discern spiritual things. It has no access to, or even an understanding of, spiritual weapons or spiritual warfare (for that matter), because it is held under the power and deceptive sway of the devil. And so, the world, and therefore, the world's system of educating our children, is limited, indeed, crippled by the fact, that it can only provide a fleshly means through life, leaving every new generation with a distorted and godless view of life, which can do nothing to deliver the soul, from its true bondage to sin. All it can do, is bide time, by offering all manner of idols and temporary forms of relief; bandaids, until it drops you in the casket, and leaves you empty, naked and guilty before a holy God.

But the value of Christian education is priceless! Sure, the academic benefits are great, especially as they are recognized in a Christ exalting, God centered context, but opening the hidden door to the arsenal of spiritual weaponry that is available in Christ, is where the greatest value is found! Parents, we have a difficult and sobering responsibility, do we not? We are called to train our offspring, and not merely our offspring, but immortal, never dying souls, unto living life, not merely for worldly success, but unto accessing God, His grace, and His power in Christ, so that, they might, with Enoch, walk with Him through this life, having their hearts ultimately set on the greater glory to come! We have the difficult responsibility of encouraging them to hold back on their physical senses; to pull back on all that is beautiful and lovely in this world, so as to prepare them even more so, for a heavenly glory, where sin is absent and righteousness reigns; and where fellowship with our Creator is constant and fully realized at all times!

At the very basic level, Christian education seeks to bridge everything; every subject to its proper context in knowing and loving Christ. That, in itself, is a reward beyond all rewards. But it doesn't end with seeking to arrange the meeting with Christ, rather, it seeks to exhort our children to live in, by and through Christ; to walk by faith and not sight, in a world that cannot see beyond what is seen. We seek to train our children to live by faith, and by the Word of God, in the face of much (from within and without) that would steer them to follow the popular

notions of the world, and the natural feelings of our fallen and corrupt flesh. We want our children to face the world, as those who truly see, so that they too, might be able to tear down spiritual strongholds, to expose what is false, and to take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ! Such a constant and rigorous emphasis; indeed, a daily emphasis, will prove to do more for our children than all of the other academics combined, when done apart from Christ!

And friends, there is the desperate need for us to commit our hearts toward training our children unto these ends. Our culture is so anti-christian, that they will have to be ready to face ridicule of every kind, and perhaps persecution and even the loss of life, in the not too distant future, for clinging to such truths. The world stresses what you can see, and touch, and smell, and hear...etc. We stress, "trusting in The Lord with all of your heart, leaning not on your own understanding; acknowledging God in all of your ways, being confident that He will direct your paths." The Christo-centric emphasis, has to be what rules and runs the whole show, brethren! Don't let anything steal this primary focus, away from your parenting, and away from the type of education, your children will receive.

1) If your child/children attends GCA, be thankful that God has given you such an opportunity, but, at the same time, don't ever forfeit your parental responsibility of rearing your own child, in the process. GCA is a wonderful accompaniment and a great help to godly parents. But, they must see Christ in you, first and foremost, and at the center of your home! They must see it in your marriage, in your home life, in your priorities, in your churchmanship, in the way in which you honor the Lord's Day, in your responses to life's challenges and hardships, and in your evident desire to spend time at the feet of Christ.

2) If your children are homeschooled, you must prepare them, not to be hermits, nuns or monks, but rather, they must be prepared to tear down strongholds...to be in the world, but not of the world. They must be aware of the enemy. Entrench them in understanding the realities of our fallen culture. Don't hide them from it. Entrench them in every facet of evolution; let them see the so-called, "Science," for what it really is, and then, dismantle it before them. Get them to think, and more importantly, to see their desperate need to cling to Christ; to walk closely near Him, for the duration of their lives!

3) And for those of you who utilize the public school system; again, that is certainly not the ideal; there is a lot to undo, in the hours they spend there, but for some, there is hardly another option, and so, I would say, all the more, you must do double time in seeking to lead

them into the spiritual armory of God's Word. Interact with them daily; teach them to view their surroundings in the context of a world that is in rebellion against God, and train them unto an ever increasing confidence in Christ! Don't just leave them prey for the world! Bring Christ right into their context, and into the daily challenges they face from within and without.

Brethren, we stand alongside of Abraham, as it were, on Mount Hebron, and the reality of Sodom and Gomorrah's destruction is ever before us. There is a world of temptation there; right there in the world, but we know the end, don't we!? "Train your children in the way that they should go, and they will not depart from it!"

[Close with Ephesians 6:10-20, if time]

Amen!!!

The Lord's Supper!