

**LANDMINES: Biblical Answers to Explosive Topics**

**Navigating the Mine Fields —**

**2 Corinthians 10:3–5**

**Tim Badal | April 28, 2019**

Over the next six weeks we’re going to look at a topical series we’ve entitled “Landmines.” We’re going to talk about some issues we as a church don’t often address, things that matter to our walk with God and our involvement in the world. While we won’t exhaust all the elements of these topics, my prayer is that this will spark conversations and questions, motivating us to lean into God and His Word to discover how we should respond and act as followers of Jesus Christ in our very difficult culture.

This morning I’m going to introduce you to this series. This can be tricky, because I don’t want to blow the whole series in one sermon, but I also want to give you something to take with you today. So my approach will be to consider what it means to navigate the cultural mine fields in our world, looking at the specific landmines around us. I’ll use as my text 2 Corinthians 10:3–5, which we’ll discuss more when we come to the application part of this sermon.

3 For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. 4 For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. 5 We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.

At the end of World War II, the United States had zero desire to get into another armed conflict. They had spent the last five years fighting the Nazis of Germany and the Japanese empire. With those two surrendering in 1945, it seemed as if the war days were over. But sadly, because of the rise of Communism, just four short years later the United States found itself in another armed conflict on the other side of the world—this time on the peninsula of Korea.

In 1950, the United States fought a four-year war pushing communism off the peninsula of Korea. As a result, thousands more lives were lost. When we got involved, the North Korean communists had advanced to the 38th parallel which became the point of stalemate. For almost five years, we fought, losing thousands of men, only to find ourselves at exactly the same place at the end of the war. But the war never really stopped. In fact, it’s the longest active war in United States history, going on now for 70 years. You might ask, “How can that be?” It’s because there was never a treaty signed. We have a ceasefire right now with North Korea, and what has kept North and South Korea from continuing the fight—even though they remain in a posture of war—is what’s called the DMZ, the Demilitarized Zone.

You can see this zone on maps. It’s about three miles wide—two kilometers on the north of the 38th parallel and two kilometers on the south side—spanning the width of the Korean peninsula. That line essentially marks where people cannot cross. But what can a line do to enforce this rule and prevent two armies from invading each other? In that space, there are two million landmines. On one side, the North Koreans have placed roughly 1.2 million landmines guarding against the South Koreans. On the other side, the United States and the South Korean government have 800,000 landmines in that small space.

How many of you would take the gamble to walk the Demilitarized Zone? No way. You know that landmines are viewed by most countries as brutal forms of warfare. In fact, in 1980, 130 countries made a treaty that landmines would no longer be used in the act of war. The nations that didn’t sign that treaty include the United States and North and South Korea. I think it’s because they just don’t want to clean up after themselves.

What these landmines have done is keep these two warring nations inside their respective boundaries. That has brought a level of “peace.” But as recently as October 2018, the North and South Korean governments have been in talks about dismantling these landmines. Thousands of landmines were picked up and deactivated in October and there’s talk of doing more, but it will take years at that rate for the two million landmines to be removed.

You see, we would be foolish to think we could walk on that land and not hurt ourselves. We would want to learn everything we could about landmines: where they’re placed, how they go off, and anything else that would minimize the chance that we would be harmed by them. If you step on a landmine, it’s lights out. You lose limbs, if not life itself. It’s dangerous to walk through a mine field, and wise people stay clear of them. Only a foolish person would consider it a walk in the park.

We need to realize that you and I walk in mine fields every day. We walk along paths where there are landmines ready to destroy our lives and our way of thinking. Some of these are even set by us, while others are set by society, and some are set by the devil himself. He longs to use these landmines to wreak havoc in our lives. This is no walk in the park. We need to be very careful as we walk through life, realizing that if we take a wrong step, we could encounter great pain and sorrow.

**Navigating landmines involves defining them clearly.**

To be able to understand the concept of these landmines, we need to define what they are. What are we talking about? I’m not talking about physical, metal landmines that are explosive. Just so you know, the FBI might be calling me later this week. I looked on the internet, because I wanted to buy a landmine. I thought it would be really cool to bring a deactivated one in to church. I checked Amazon and some other places and I’m not sure how the government feels about pastors whose families are from Iraq looking for landmines. So if I’m not here next week, you’ll know that you can visit me in jail, because this sermon illustration went really, really wrong.

So I’m not talking about physical landmines, as dangerous as those are. What am I talking about? **Landmines are subjects or situations in our world today that tend to be explosive in nature. When they explode, they often create chaos and cause pain. Therefore, disarming them requires a steady heart and a sound mind.**

Let’s understand exactly what I am talking about. These landmines might include world views or societal opinions about social norms and practices—things like racism, sexuality, abortion, gender issues, even money. These are areas where society has collectively said, “This is normal and right, so if you don’t affirm this, you are out of the mainstream. You’re being intolerant or bigoted.” That’s a landmine.

Landmines can also include situations that are more personal, like things that have caused you great pain. It might be taboo subjects that are off limits from the world’s perspective. We just don’t talk about these things. They’re too hard, like anxiety, addiction, abuse. They can also include events that have recently made headlines, things that have the media in an uproar. There are landmines going off in our country all the time. There are the issues of immigration, the refugee movement, politics, what we are to do with terrorism, plus the issues of white privilege and classism. These are topics being debated in the public square and opinions are strong on both sides as talking heads seek to convince you and me of their views.

Landmines matter to us, not only because there is so much talk going on, but each of these things impacts how we ourselves think and live, what we consider to be acceptable or not. Our dilemma as Christians is that we know God has spoken regarding these matters and we need to decide whether we’ll follow the mind of God or the mind of the culture. Will we go His way or our way? If we’re not careful, we will find ourselves in the middle of explosion after explosion in our lives and in the lives of those we love because we’re not consciously making the right choices.

**Navigating landmines involves defending against the damage they cause.**

Remember what I told you about Korea. There are two million landmines in a relatively small land area and there are stories of people—even children—who have wandered into the DMZ and have died because they didn’t know where they were.

Yet from another view, a landmine only impacts a small area around itself. You won’t tiptoe through our parking lot today because of those landmines in Korea. A person has to be very close before a landmine presents any danger. With our landmines as well, they only hurt when close to home. What kind of damage, then, can they cause?

Let’s use the subject we’re dealing with next week as an example: the issue of sexuality. This wasn’t supposed to be a landmine. When God created sexuality, He gave it to man and woman as a gift to be experienced in the confines of marriage. It was intended to bring enjoyment, demonstrate love and as the means to be fruitful and multiply, filling the earth. It was designed to be a great good. Yet the devil and world have taken God's good gift—that for which we should be thankful—and have opened it to all kinds of distortions. Today, if a person believes and lives according to God’s clear directives in Scripture, they’re called bigoted, intolerant, and misguided from the world’s perspective. This results in three things.

**Landmines bring confusion to the individual.**

First, when we encounter two different opinions on a particular subject, it brings confusion. On one side we hear what God says on the subject of sexuality, and He has very clearly articulated what He considers to be in bounds and what is out of bounds. But Hollywood, the media, our friends, and even our families tell us, “If you enjoy it, if it feels good, if that’s how you feel God has created you, then it’s all good.”

Now we’ve got a problem. We have two opinions, both of which we might respect, but one has to win out. We have to ask ourselves, “Which argument wins?” Regarding the issue of sexuality, we have people—and my heart breaks for them—who are utterly confused about what true sexuality looks like. They’re missing out on the good God designed it to bring to men and women. Every study shows that young people especially are more confused about real sexuality than ever before. Up means down. Left means right. Everything has been turned on its head these days and it brings confusion. God did not write His Word so we would be confused about it. He clearly described an order which His creation was designed to follow.

**Landmines bring conflict with others.**

Here’s the problem. It doesn’t just stop with confusion on the individual level; it also moves to conflict with others. Let’s say you’re an individual who agrees with God’s standards and teaching on the issue of sexuality. There will be people in your world, people close to you—maybe people within your own family—who will have a differing opinion on that matter. Some might say ignorantly, “Let’s just let everybody do their own thing. Whatever you want to do in your house, that’s fine. I’ll do what I want to in my house.” Here’s the problem—we all share a very small planet. What I believe and do will contribute to the kinds of laws that are made and the social norms that will be established. It impacts how we educate our children. It even affects how we define certain things. In essence there are now two groups of people who are waging war against one another. Landmines destroy friendships, they destroy families and ultimately, they can destroy society.

Can I be honest? If you’ve got a normal family, there are no doubt certain subjects that might come up on birthdays or holidays that you just don’t discuss. For some it might be politics; for others, it’s religion. For others it might be Uncle Bob. It could be anything. But these become landmines in your family.

**Landmines bring culture wars to society.**

Landmines bring confusion to the individual and conflict with others. But because we live in a connected society, landmines also result in culture wars. We see this happening in the media, whether it’s on television, radio, in newsprint, or on the internet. The biggest organizations in our world today are the media. I don’t mean this to sound like Chicken Little crying, “The sky is falling!” But if you think these major companies don’t have an agenda, you’re wrong. There’s an agenda to everything we do. The church has an agenda. We all have things we want to promote, that we want to see others embrace. But the divide in our culture is becoming larger and larger, as if we were building camps for ourselves based on our beliefs. If you turn to certain TV channels, they’ll agree with your position. But you can turn to other channels and on the same topic they’ll be saying the exact opposite. The same is true in the publications we read and the websites we visit. There is an all-out culture war going on, and some of us have lost sight of the reality that this isn’t the war we’re supposed to be fighting.

Sadly, some of us spend more time listening to the pundits and the commentators than we do to God and His Word. You’ve tuned in to your radio, your television, to hours of debate, either affirming what you believe or refuting it. But have you ever asked, “Should I turn to God and His Word? What does God have to say about it? Who cares what that commentator has to say?”

**Navigating landmines involves determining their area of control.**

We need to ask ourselves, “Where do these landmines find their greatest area of control?” The problem isn’t radio or television. The problem isn’t liberals or conservatives. Listen to me carefully. Our problem with landmines is the issue of the mind. It’s not someone else’s problem; it’s your problem. It’s my problem. It’s how we think. There is a war being waged 24 hours a day.

In fact, in 1965—the olden days, when everything was great—Pastor Donald Gray Barnhouse wrote a book called *The Invisible War*. Here’s what he said: “There’s a battle going on for your mind and that battle is vicious. It’s intense. It’s unrelenting. It’s unfair, because Satan never plays fair. The reason why it’s so intense is that the greatest asset God has given you is your mind.”

Remember this: whatever gets your mind gets you. The devil is going to do everything in his power to bombard you with messages, ideas, thoughts, speculations, opinions that he wants you to buy into, things that the world is buying into. We need to learn how to guard against that, how to strengthen and renew our minds.

That’s why Paul wrote in Romans 12:2, *“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed.”*  Let’s stop there. Paul, back in the first century and Donald Gray Barnhouse in the 1960s—both of whom lived before the internet and much of our other technology—realized there was a battle going on for the mind in their day, and they warned us to be careful. The world wants to squeeze you into its mold. It wants you to think as it thinks. It wants you to become like it. On the other hand, God has called us to be countercultural, to see things differently from the world.

How do we do this? Did Paul say, “Do not conform yourself to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by doing more ministry”? No. Did he say, “Transform yourself by giving more to the church?” No. “Transform yourself by being in church every Sunday.” Nope. All those things are good and they have their place. But what Paul wrote was this: “*Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.”*

We need to make a mindset change. We need to look at life and the issues it brings differently. How are we to do this? Let’s go to our primary passage, 2 Corinthians 10:3: *“For though we walk in the flesh…”*—that is, we live in bodies and interact with other people who have bodies— *“…we are not waging war according to the flesh.”* This battle is not against flesh and blood; it’s a battle of the mind.

Paul mentioned “strongholds,” which are formed opinions about things. He also spoke of “arguments” and “lofty opinions.” Is there anything wrong with a good stronghold? Is there anything wrong with a good argument or opinion? No. What we’re fighting against are opinions, strongholds, and arguments that go *“against the knowledge of God.”*

The war taking place is a war between God and His ideas of how the world should be run, how people ought to live privately and publicly, and the world’s ideas about these things. Christian, you and I stand smack dab in the middle of this battle, and we can find ourselves vacillating from one opinion to another. We want to believe in the wisdom of God, but we see the wisdom of the world as something altogether pleasurable and worth pursuing. So what do we do with our minds? What does the Bible say we should do with the world’s arguments? We should destroy them. That doesn’t sound very Christ-like, does it? We’re not being asked to destroy people; we’re being told to destroy the arguments. If we don’t, those arguments will blow up in and around us and harm us, because they are against God and His Word.

Instead of being led by these arguments—or worse, binging on them—we need to knock them down and destroy them. How do we do that? We do that in our minds. The problem is that our minds are fickle. The Bible has a lot to say about our minds and not much of it is very positive, especially when it’s referring to the natural and unredeemed man.

In fact, the area we most need to get under control is the very area that can be the most out of control. The Bible tells us the mind is confused, anxious, closed, evil, and restless. It’s rash and deluded; it’s troubled and depraved. The mind is sinful, dull, blinded, and corrupt. When we hear two opinions, one from God and one from the devil and the world, we think we can use our minds to discern which way we should go. But when we go to that, well, it’s pretty dirty. We then wonder why we struggle, vacillating between the two thoughts or opinions. It’s because our minds are messed up.

This is why Paul said in Romans 7:15–25, “The things I want to do, I can’t—or I won’t. And the things I don’t want to do, I do.” The great Apostle Paul was referring to the vacillation of turning to the left and to the right. His conclusion regarding this kind of existence was this: “What a wretched man I am. I’m messed up.” We are broken people who are preconditioned to misunderstand both the things of God and the schemes of the devil. We find ourselves struggling to know which way is up. The Bible says the mind and heart of man is desperately sick and no one can understand it (Jeremiah 17:9). So what are we to do?

We’re to turn to Christ. We’re to make a decision to say, “God, even though my body doesn’t feel like it, even though the rest of my family says I’m looney for going this way, even though it seems as though Your ways are old-fashioned and out of place, I am going to choose You and Your ways over those of the world.”

**Navigating landmines involves disarming them carefully.**

Paul is essentially telling us that the way to deal with these landmines is to disarm them. But you can’t just approach a bomb and start pulling wires. You have to be careful or you won’t last long as a bomb technician. In the same way, we have to navigate the mine fields of our culture very carefully.

**We disarm landmines by taking every thought captive.**

Verse five says, *“We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.”* I’m given two opinions that cause me to go back and forth. The solution is that if I want to obey Christ, I have to literally take these other opinions captive, literally making them my prisoner. This requires both vigilance and diligence—every thought captive. That means every day we live with a battle mindset. There’s no time to take breaks. There are no little bitty thoughts that don’t need to be taken prisoner. Literally, the Greek word means to conquer, to control, to bring into submission. Paul is saying that if we’re going to disarm the landmines around us, it involves every thought that goes through our minds.

That means every message your mind is receiving and interacting with on a daily basis has to be brought into submission to Christ. When you watch the news, you do so by taking every thought captive to Christ. When your favorite singer sings a song, you take every thought captive under Christ. When you go with the billions of others to see Avengers, you take every thought captive. When your friends say something, you take every thought captive. When your body says something, you take every thought captive. You say, “Well, that’s a tiring thing.” Listen, would you rather be a little tired by taking every thought captive or would you rather lose half of your body to the shrapnel of a landmine? We need to take every thought captive.

How do we do that? We bring it into submission to Christ. One writer put it this way: “There’s no other place than the cross of Christ where you can see Christ more clearly or love Him more dearly. It is here that your thinking will be most deeply purified and the worth of God will be most fully magnified.”

Taking every thought captive is to submit every thought at the foot of the cross, saying, “Jesus, do You give Your approval to this? Is this right and good?” Let me tell you that when I do that, I’m amazed at the number of programs I cannot watch anymore. I’m not perfect at it. This is a struggle, because quite frankly, Hollywood makes awesome movies. But there are a lot of things in those movies that are not being taken captive in my own mind. This is just me doing business with myself, but the things I would never do in real life I find incredibly entertaining when it’s on a screen. The things I pray against for my children and for my wife are the things that get my blood boiling when I watch it take place on a screen. There’s a lot of discernment required regarding what movies we should watch, and I’m not trying to make legalistic statements. I know I’ll fail any standard I create.

But can we not agree that we’re not taking every thought captive? Can we not agree that we’re not even taking the majority of our thoughts captive? Can we not simply agree that we’ve gone through another week and rarely asked what Jesus has to say about our interactions with other people or about the media we’re ingesting?

**We disarm landmines by guarding our minds from garbage.**

Guarding against garbage comes on the heels of taking every thought captive. There’s an old adage that says, “You are what you eat.” Let me change that to, “You are what you think.” It’s going to be hard for you to see something as an affront to God when you see it as something funny on a sitcom. You can’t do that. You cannot separate your mind from your body. You cannot separate your thinking from your behavior. What you find entertaining will no doubt lead you. You will find yourself, as the Bible says, a foolish man who is double-minded and unstable in all his ways (James 1:5–8). If what you watch or listen to tomorrow or what you engage in tomorrow is different from what you engage in today, God doesn’t say, “Hey, thumbs up. You were great on Sunday, but you were lousy on Monday through Saturday.” He says, “You’re a fool. Why are you wasting your time on Sunday if you’ve already sold yourself in your heart and mind to the things of this world? You’ve not destroyed the strongholds around you.”

This is such hard stuff. It’s easy to teach, but hard to live out. The New Living Translation puts Proverbs 15:14 in an awesome way:: *“A wise person is hungry for knowledge, but the fool feeds on trash.”* Let me ask you this morning: what are you feeding on? David, a man after God’s own heart—while he didn’t live perfectly—said, “I meditate on the law of the Lord day and night” (Psalm 1:1–3). How does a young man keep his way pure and keep himself from sin? By meditating on, memorizing and knowing the perfect Word of God.

Let me give you some applications. Thoughts, ideas, and arguments are going to come. They’ll come from celebrities, commentators, movies, and the internet. As soon as you leave this place, you’re going to be bombarded with all kinds of opinions. If you don’t know how to respond, I want you to filter every thought through Philippians 4:7–9:

7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. 8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. 9 What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

Notice the connection: what you think, you’ll inevitably do. So let me ask what you have binged on this week. Does it fit what is true? What is honorable? What is just, pure, lovely and commendable? Has it been worthy of praise? You say, “Well, it’s not that bad.” But I didn’t ask that. I asked, “Is it worthy of praise?” If not, we need to start dismantling some of those arguments and getting rid of some of those things that are keeping us from the peace of God. That’s what He wants for us. He’s created us to live at peace with Him, not at odds with Him. The greatest blessing we can have is to be at peace with God. We have to get rid of the garbage. You are what you think.

**We disarm landmines by never letting up on learning.**

On the more positive side, we must never let up on learning. As evangelical Christians, we are big in our churches when it comes to feelings. That’s okay and that’s good. We are people of emotion. Many of the songs we sing are expressive in nature. We want to feel something from God. As we sing, we want to feel His embrace. These thoughts are warm and good. But that’s not all God wants for us. He’s not just a God of feelings; He’s a rational God. He’s a propositional God; a God of truth. We need to love our God with more than just our hearts and souls. That’s why the Great Commandment says we are to love the Lord our God with all our hearts, souls and strength (Mark 12:28–34).

For evangelicals, that’s the trifecta: heart, soul and strength. “I’m going to experience love, I’m going to experience His goodness, then I’m going to take that warm feeling and serve Jesus because I love Him. I’m going to honor Him with my gifts and my giving.” That’s good, but it’s incomplete. God also says, “I want you to love Me with all your heart, soul, mind and strength.” Quite frankly, many people stopped learning after that cap and gown were put on their bodies. They stopped reading. They stopped investigating the claims of Christ and the truths of God’s Word. Because of that, they have a problem in our evangelical world.

Mark Noll, who graduated from Wheaton College and then went on to be a professor of history at Notre Dame, wrote a book some years ago entitled *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*. I love the opening line of this awesome book, which I recommend you read. He wrote, “The scandal of the evangelical mind is that there is no evangelical mind.” He’s absolutely right. We leave our brains at the door. We’ve stopped learning. We’re mad that people have different opinions from us, but the only thing we can conjure up from our feeble thinking is, “Na na na na boo boo. You’re a sinner and I’m not.” Then we wonder why the world says we’re simple minded when all we have is simple, lack-luster arguments to any of these landmines.

Dennis Prager, a political commentator who loves evangelicals and is of Jewish background says this:

One thing I’ve noticed about evangelicals is that they do not read. They do not read the Bible. They do not read great Christian thinkers. They have never heard of Aquinas. If they’re Presbyterian, they’ve never read the founders of Presbyterianism to know what they believe or why they believe it. I don’t understand that. As a Jew, that’s confusing to me. The commandment of study is so deep in Judaism that we immerse ourselves in study. God gave us a brain. Aren’t we to use it for His service?

When I walk into an evangelical Christian’s home and see a total of 30 books, most of them best-sellers, I don’t understand. I have bookcases of Christian books—and I’m a Jew. Why do I have more Christian books than 98% of the Christians in America? That is so bizarre to me. You say you love Jesus. Are you reading about Him? You say you love Jesus. Are you pondering the truth of what that Jesus did?

Quite frankly, if we were to really be honest with ourselves, we spend way more time on Netflix, Facebook, Twitter, or every other social media platform than we do on God and what He’s doing in the world—whether through His Word or through the writing of men and women who love Him—because we don’t read. We’ve given up on learning.

Landmines are all around us, my friends. God has called us to engage them without losing life and limb. God has given us everything we need. We don’t have to be blown up by these landmines that come our way, but we have to trust Him. We have to submit our thinking to His and allow Him to transform our lives each and every day, each and every thought, framing our thinking through Christ and the cross.

Let me close with a quote from John Piper who says, “I pray that you will love God with all your mind, that you will engage your thinking as fully as possible for the sake of knowing God as fully as possible, for the sake of treasuring God as fully as possible.” God is a deep well. How much are you drinking Him in? How much are you taking in the truth of your God, what He means to you and what He’s done for you? Or is it simply good enough to have a childlike faith and say, “I don’t need to move on.”

The people in the book of Hebrews did that and the writer told them, “You need to move on from the milk and move to the meat of the Word” (Hebrews 5:11–14). Let us be thinkers. Stealing the title from Ravi Zacharias’ ministry, “Let My people think.” When we do, these landmines will be seen way before we ever step on them and they destroy our lives.

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