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## **CONTROLLING OUR MINDS**

God the Father and Jesus Christ established a plan to create a family, the Family of God. So They created us human beings and then set in motion the process that leads to salvation for us human beings. We human beings have to go through a period of testing before God will grant us immortal life.

One question that arises here is: in all of the testing to which God exposes us, **what exactly is God looking for?** What is God hoping to find in us, the people who have been called by God?

To answer that question, let's start by looking at Isaiah 66.

Thus says the LORD, The heaven *is* my throne, and the earth *is* my footstool: where *is* the house that you build unto me? and where *is* the place of my rest? (Isaiah 66:1)

The context here is about **the greatness of God**. Can we imagine the power of a God who views the present earth like "His footstool"? So God says: what could you human beings possibly do for Me? Do you really understand what I want from you? Do you think that I am looking for a house or a resting place? Everything you could possibly give to Me is something that I Myself created in the first place, says God.

For all those *things* has my hand made, and all those *things* have been, says the LORD: but **to this man will I look**, *even to him that is poor* and of a **contrite** spirit, and **trembles** at my word. (Isaiah 66:2)

God's point is that **there is nothing physical that God wants from us**, when everything was created by God in the first place. Trying to give tangible things to God would amount to giving to God the things God already owns anyway. God owns everything, so there is nothing that we could give to God that would somehow impress God.

But there is something that God does desire to see. Since that "something" cannot be any physical object which God has created for our present environment, it follows that God is looking for something intangible, something that cannot be seen with the eye.

God is looking for human beings who have **a very specific but rare frame of mind**. God is looking for men and women whose minds employ a very specific way of thinking. That very specific rare way of using the human mind is here identified by God with three words: poor ... contrite ... trembles.

**"Poor"** refers to "poor in spirit". Here the word "poor" does not refer to people who are financially poor. The word refers to **a humble attitude**, the complete opposite of a mind that is haughty, proud and arrogant. The attitude God is looking for is identified as being "poor in spirit".

Blessed *are the poor in spirit*: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:3)

Now consider this: Here in Matthew 5:3 Jesus Christ mentioned just one single attribute, and that one attribute is sufficient for those individuals to be resurrected by God at the time of the first resurrection. Don't the people in the first resurrection also need to have other attributes? **Is "poor in spirit" all that is needed?**

Here is the point we need to grasp:

When any person really does have a "poor in spirit" character, then he will also **automatically** have all the other required attributes (i.e. faith, boldness, etc.), because if he lacked any of those essential attributes (e.g. if he was fearful and unbelieving, etc.) then he could not possibly also be "poor in spirit".

## **UNDERSTANDING CHARACTER**

There are just two types of character in existence. They are: **God's character** and **Satan's character**. There is no in-between type of character. All character is either the one type or the other.

I am here not speaking about our early years in God's Church, when our character is still rather flexible, with the possibility of going either way. I am here referring to the same time in a person's life that Jesus Christ had in mind in His "blessed are the poor in spirit" statement.

Jesus Christ was referring to people being "poor in spirit" **at the end of their lives**. That's when it counts! Thus, for example, Solomon was most assuredly "poor in spirit" when he was a teenager and when he became king. But at the end of his life he was no longer "poor in spirit", and at that time he compromised in major ways with paganism, due to pressure from his pagan wives. So the promise of the kingdom of heaven in Matthew 5:3, which promise applied to Solomon in his early life, no longer applied to Solomon at the end of his life. The only attributes that count are **those we possess when we cross the finish line**. Once we have the right attributes, then we need to hold onto those and endure unto the end, and never give up under any kind of pressure.

It is from this same perspective as Jesus Christ's statement in Matthew 5:3, of the character attributes we have at the end of lives, that I refer to just two types of character.

Character really represents **a collection of attributes**, or a package of characteristics.

Consider what Jesus Christ said:

If **you** then, **being evil**, know how to **give good gifts unto your children**, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him? (Matthew 7:11)

Let's understand this.

By itself the ability to give good gifts and to do good things does not change a person's status before God. Unrepentant individuals are still called "evil" by Jesus Christ, even when those unrepentant people do some good things. So it is not a case of saying that unrepentant people can't do some good things. But as long as those people continue to be unrepentant, the good things they have done do not change their character.

**It is not that good actions somehow produce good character!**

Rather, it is the human mind that has to change **first** (i.e. the person has to repent), so that then the good actions can have beneficial effects on the development of godly character.

Notice what the Apostle Paul said about unconverted people:

As it is written, **There is none righteous, no, not one**: (Romans 3:10)

They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; **there is none that does good, no, not one.** (Romans 3:12)

Now you surely know some unconverted people (perhaps family or close friends or upstanding people in the community, etc.) about whom you would say that they have done some good. Perhaps those people helped us in very unselfish ways. Perhaps they were genuinely kind and generous to us. We appreciated the help or kindness they extended to us. And we should freely express our gratitude for their kindness or generosity.

So how does Romans 3:10-12 apply to such people?

These verses apply from the same perspective that Jesus Christ was presenting in Matthew 7:11. By themselves good deeds never change bad character traits.

Righteousness (Romans 3:10) has to do with applying the spiritual intent of all of God's laws in our daily lives. But unconverted minds cannot possibly live by the spiritual intent of all of God's laws. And a self-righteous mind can never please God. As Paul said a little later:

So then **they that are in the flesh cannot please God.** (Romans 8:8)

Yes, "they that are in the flesh" cannot build any characteristic of godly character.

Doing good (Romans 3:12) has to do with the motivation for doing good. We can do "good deeds" with a totally self-righteous attitude, and we can do "good deeds" with a repentant and humble attitude.

Notice what God said next in Isaiah 66:

**He that kills (i.e. sacrifices) an ox is as if he slew a man; he that sacrifices a lamb, as if he cut off a dog's neck; he that offers an oblation, as if he offered swine's blood; he that burns incense, as if he blessed an idol. Yes, they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delights in their abominations. (Isaiah 66:3)**

God here lists a whole range of "good deeds" that are directed towards God: bringing sacrifices and free will offerings and praying to God (i.e. "burning incense"). Everybody in Israel would have looked upon those things as exemplary conduct towards God. But in certain specific circumstances God looks upon all of these "noble deeds" in the worst possible way. Can you see that?

God compares sacrificing an ox to **murder**. God compares sacrificing a lamb to killing **a dog as a sacrifice**. God compares a generous free will oblation to offering **the blood of a pig** in sacrifice. And God compares their prayers to blatant **idolatry**.

The reason God gives for this utter rejection of all these "good deeds" is that the people doing these things are totally unrepentant; i.e. "they have chosen their own ways". They don't have the attitude God described in the previous verse. So the point is this:

When good deeds, whatever they may be, are not the product of **a humble mind** (i.e. "poor in spirit"), which is also **a repentant mind** (i.e. "a contrite spirit"), and which is also based on the correct **fear of God** (i.e. "trembles at My Word"), then those good deeds do not have any value before God.

Understand the principle here, which is: **God will never accept an offering from Satan**, no matter how valuable that offering might be. It is not "what" is offered that is important. What is important is "what sort of mind" is bringing the offering ... a repentant mind or an unrepentant mind?

So as I said a moment ago, character is a package of characteristics. Character always involves more than one attribute.

Now our character "packages" can never be mix-and-match packages. By that I mean that **one set of characteristics** identifies God's character, and **another set of characteristics** identifies Satan's character. And it is impossible for anyone to have some of God's characteristics and at the same time also have some of Satan's characteristics. That is just not possible. When a person has one or more of Satan's character traits, then none of God's character traits will remain in that person; they cannot coexist.

Please note! **I am not saying** that people who don't have any attributes of God's character cannot do "good deeds". Isaiah 66:3 lists a whole range of "good deeds" that some people can perform without having any attribute of God's character. **I am saying** that when unconverted people do "good deeds", then those "good deeds" are not capable of producing any traits of godly character. The mind must change first (i.e. repent first) before those "good deeds" can promote the development of godly character.

We need to have the horse before the cart.

So when a person definitely has one characteristic of a godly character (e.g. the person is poor in spirit), then it is assured that the person will also have all the other traits of godly character, and therefore it can be predicted that the individual will be in the kingdom of God.

Likewise, when a person definitely has one characteristic of Satan's character, an attribute like lying, cheating, hypocrisy, etc., then it is assured that the person will also have all the other traits of Satan's character. That is the way character works!

The Apostle James explained it this way:

### **Does a fountain send forth at the same place sweet *water* and bitter? (James 3:11)**

Put another way, does a fountain at the same place send forth attributes of God's character and also attributes of Satan's character? The answer is no! It is either the one type of water (or character) or the other, but it cannot simultaneously be a mixture of both. That is the point for us to grasp, that someone cannot simultaneously have some of God's character attributes and also some of Satan's character attributes.

Some things are simply not compatible, and they cannot co-exist in the same person. **No unconverted person has any attributes of God's character.** And **no attribute of God's character can exist in Satan.** And so when someone is definitely "poor in spirit" at the end of his or her life, then that person will also have the other godly character traits, and therefore Jesus Christ can state dogmatically that such a person will be in God's kingdom.

This is something that we need to understand in our interactions with all the people around us, wherever we may come into contact with them. **People who have one attribute of Satan's character will also have some other traits of Satan's character**, even when those other traits are not apparent to us. Most of us are unfortunately easily deceived by such people.

Traits that are not apparent to us are frequently only brought out into the open by unusual circumstances. For example, those who join Satan at the end of the millennium will have had the wrong character traits all along, but **those traits will always remain hidden**, until Satan will be let loose after 1000 years to influence people's minds. Then those hidden character traits will finally come out into the

open, and those people will join Satan in his rebellion virtually "at the drop of a hat".

Let's now continue with Isaiah 66:2.

### **A CONTRITE SPIRIT**

When God says that He is looking for people with "a contrite spirit", then this is a reference to a **repentant spirit**. This refers to a mind that sees the true self, one that can identify with what Job said.

Behold, **I am vile**; what shall I answer You? ... (Job 40:4)

Wherefore **I abhor myself, and repent** in dust and ashes. (Job 42:6)

And it is a mind that can also identify with the Apostle Paul.

**O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? (Romans 7:24)**

This is the type of mind God is looking for. It is the type of mind that God can work with for future eternity. This is a contrite spirit. It is the type of mind that is willing to change in order to please God. That's what repentance refers to, **the willingness of the human mind to change** to a different way of thinking and reasoning, if for no other reason than just to please God.

### **A MIND THAT TREMBLES AT GOD'S WORD**

This is the third attribute that God mentions in Isaiah 66:2. This expression refers to someone who has immense respect for God's word and for God's whole way of life. It refers to someone who has the fear of God. With **this intensity of respect** for God's wishes this type of mind very eagerly seeks to please God; it very eagerly seeks to understand God's mind and God's way of thinking, and God's intentions for every law and for every instruction that God has given.

These three things, **genuine humility, real repentance** and **the fear of God**, are one way of expressing what God expects from us human beings.

People who have these particular attributes will **also** have the other attributes that God is looking for. For example, God tells us through the Prophet Micah:

He has showed you, O man, what *is* good; and what does the LORD require of you, but to **do justly**, and to **love mercy**, and to **walk humbly** with your God? (Micah 6:8)

Again three specific attributes are mentioned. Anyone who has the three attributes of Micah 6:8 will also have the three attributes of Isaiah 66:2. And it is impossible for a person to walk with God and to have a single character trait that belongs to Satan.

The six attribute statements we have seen thus far are:

- to be poor in spirit (humble),
- to be of a contrite spirit (repentant),

- to tremble at God's word (respect),
- to do justly (live by all of God's laws),
- to love mercy (compassion for others),
- to walk humbly (start and end with humility).

All of the things mentioned in these six statements are **attributes that we ourselves must bring to the table**, if we desire to establish a relationship with God. All of these attributes are under the full control of our own minds, and they all require conscious active decisions on our part. None of these attributes are intuitive or spontaneous; they all require us to choose to think in those particular ways. But they are not really six different attributes.

All of these six statements really represent **one particular mindset**. It is the mindset that describes godly character. They all go together.

And that is the one mindset God is looking for in us human beings.

Let's look at a few other Scriptures that also show us what God is looking for. But understand that it always comes back to the one mindset God is looking for. That is because someone who has these attributes entrenched in his or her life will also have the additional attributes which are mentioned in other Scriptures.

**It can never be the case that someone is really repentant, but the person is simply not humble. Or that someone is really humble but at the same time has no respect for God. Or that someone lives faithfully by the spirit of all of God's laws but has an utter lack of mercy and compassion for the sufferings of other people.**

You follow?

Anyone who genuinely has one of the characteristics in this list will also have the other traits mentioned in this list. All of the godly character traits come in a package, even as all of Satan's characteristics also come in a package.

Let's now look at some additional Scriptures.

And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but **to fear** the LORD your God, **to walk** in all his ways, and **to love** him, and **to serve** the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, **To keep** the commandments of the LORD, and his statutes, which I command you this day for your good? (Deuteronomy 10:12-13)

Here the list is presented in the form of five verbs: to fear ... to walk ... to love ... to serve ... to keep. These five verbs in essence refer to the same characteristics we have seen in the other two lists. This is a description of the various attributes of the one mindset that represents godly character.

This mindset is also presented in the following way.

But this thing commanded I them, saying, **Obey my voice**, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people: and **walk you in all the ways** that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you. (Jeremiah 7:23)

Here the instructions are: "obey ... and walk ...". And as David said:

The sacrifices of God *are* **a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart**, O God, You will not despise. (Psalm 51:17)

What needs to be "broken" is our spirit of pride and vanity and conceit and spontaneous hostility towards anything that represents God. That is what it takes to produce a repentant heart, a changed heart, which is here called "a contrite heart".

So now we can expand our earlier list of six statements regarding what God is looking for by including the things we have seen in these additional Scriptures. Omitting some of the duplicating statements, our list of the things God is looking for in us human beings now looks like this:

- to be poor in spirit,
- to be of a contrite spirit,
- to tremble at God's word,
- to do justly,
- to love mercy,
- to walk humbly,
- to fear God,
- to love God,
- to serve God,
- to keep the commandments,
- to obey God's voice,
- to have a broken spirit.

While this is now a list of 12 points, it is really **a description of one particular character that incorporates all of these traits**. Anyone who has one of these characteristics will also have all the others. All of the points in this list are simply slightly different ways in which that one particular character will express itself in different situations.

And if we can understand the things all of these points actually refer to, and how they will express themselves in practical day-to-day living, then we should have a pretty good picture regarding what God is looking for in us, the people who have been called by God.

Right, so we know what God is looking for in us. And we also understand that these are all things that are under the full control of our own free minds. **We ourselves must voluntarily**, and not of compulsion, **choose** to fear God, choose to walk humbly, choose to love mercy, choose to obey God, choose to do justly, choose to repent, and choose to tremble at God's word. We have the free will to decide to use our minds to practice all these things in our daily lives.

Now in order to do these things, we must also recognize that there is a colossal onslaught on our minds, and therefore we must resolutely control our minds. There is always the pressure to accept Satan's attitude and attributes and ways of thinking selfishly.

**So we need to firmly control our minds!**

## **THE MAIN PURPOSE FOR OBEDIENCE**

We understand that God requires us to obey His laws. But many people in God's Church may not understand **why** God requires obedience. Yes, certainly, God's laws, if obeyed from the heart, make it possible to live in peace and in harmony with all other people. And that is very good. But there is also another purpose.

One of the main purposes for requiring us to obey those laws of God that require specific actions or conduct from us (Sabbath-keeping, tithing, Holy Day observance, delecting our homes, etc.) is **to train our minds**. Our minds are conditioned by doing repetitive tasks, like keeping the Sabbath every week. In a sense, Sabbath keeping and Holy Day observance are like a drill. As the Sabbath approaches, so we know what we will be doing. The same goes for observances like the Passover, the Days of Unleavened Bread, the Day of Atonement, etc. ... we know in advance how we will be observing those occasions.

**The purpose of a drill is to enable people to respond to pre-determined triggers in desirable ways without having to think. By "desirable ways" I mean desirable from the point of view of those who have instituted the drill. By "a drill" I am referring to frequent repetitions of some specific actions.**

Now **a drill can be good** and **a drill can be bad**. God uses drills to teach us good things, to train our minds in godly ways; and Satan has developed drills to entice people to do bad things.

**Good drills: These include skills that train us to respond correctly in emergency situations. And they include learning skills that are beneficial and enjoyable. Once mastered, we can perform certain activities almost by reflex, because the drills have helped us to develop new neurological pathways in our brains. So we can perform those activities without having to think too much about what we are doing. The developed reflexes readily take over when the predetermined triggers are present.**

For example, in our modern society the ability to drive a car is a good skill to have. And if people are drilled in how to respond in emergency situations, like dealing with unexpected driving conditions, then they become even more skillful. And many years of driving experience also enhance the person's driving skills.

Most sports have drills that are aimed at enhancing the player's performance abilities. Similarly, working with certain tools for many years will sharpen the person's skills in using those tools. Having many years experience in a specific job or trade makes someone a more valuable worker. And then there are drills to train people to quickly respond in the best possible ways in emergency situations ... what to do when there is a fire or a flood or a hurricane, etc.

So there is without question a right place for drills. And that is where God's laws that require us to do certain things come into the picture. **God's laws train our minds to respond correctly** in a range of different circumstances. The frequent repetitions of the right actions (Sabbath keeping, etc.) have the



same positive effects on the mind as a drill for any other positive activity.

But not all drills are good.

**Bad Drills: These drills are aimed at overcoming the qualms of a conscience. They are aimed at training people to do things which a thinking mind would normally not want to do.**

That is a major reason why military training is based on drills. Soldiers have to be trained to kill the enemy. While some few people might do this very easily and very willingly, there will be very many other people who would have serious conscience problems if they had to kill people. So **they have to be trained through repetition.**

In training they just shoot at cardboard targets, and that can even appear to be challenging and interesting for some people. They are eager to improve their accuracy in hitting their targets. And their minds are being conditioned to some degree.

And then comes the battlefield. And when they are then exposed to the horrors of war, the drills they had done may help them to respond without having to do too much thinking in extremely difficult circumstances. And many people will cope as a result of the drills they had practiced.

But a considerable numbers of those who return from active combat duty also end up having various mental and emotional problems, with a relatively large number of war veterans even committing suicide. So for these people the drills and the training they had received before going into combat hadn't been completely successful in equipping them to maintain their emotional equilibrium.

Another area of bad drills is **when people get away with certain crimes**, or when they get away with just plain immoral conduct. People who steal and get away with it are tempted to steal again. Thus criminals frequently commit more crimes. And pretty soon this "drill" has trained them to the point where stealing doesn't bother their conscience.

That's the point Solomon referred to in Ecclesiastes 8:11.

Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore **the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.** (Ecclesiastes 8:11)

Their heart is "fully set" when their conscience no longer bothers them in any way. Similarly, people who repeatedly get away with lying and with committing adultery also learn to train their consciences to not bother them when they engage in such immoral conduct.

**Repeatedly doing anything that is wrong before God acts like a drill, and the conscience can become conditioned to no longer bother the person.**

Now the Spirit speaks expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to **seducing spirits**, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; **having their conscience seared with a hot iron;** (1 Timothy 4:1-2)

Here we see the problem that confronts us today. There are countless "seducing spirits" out there, who are directing their attacks at the people of God. Temptations are presented to us in hundreds of different ways and circumstances. **If we have not performed "the drill"** of without question keeping the Sabbath and all of God's annual days, and also "the drills" of rejecting temptations to lie and to steal and to covet and to commit adultery, etc., **then it will be harder to resist** those temptations. Oh yes, even then we can still resist temptations; but resisting temptations does become easier after we have done the drills for

controlling our minds for a number of years.

Let's take a closer look at the mind.

## **HOW SATAN SEEKS TO INFLUENCE US**

How we use our minds will determine whether or not we will be in the Kingdom of God. This is something Satan knows very well. And therefore all of Satan's attacks against us are focused on influencing our minds, focused on influencing how we will think.

Some of the ways that Satan tries to influence our minds include:

1) **Trying to get us to be receptive to outside impulses**, trying to get us to respond to those outside impulses in ways that are wrong before God; i.e. having us take the bait and we then give in to those temptations and sin.

Wherein in time past you walked according to the course of this world, according to **the prince of the power of the air**, the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience: (Ephesians 2:2)

Satan doesn't rule over the wind and the weather. What Satan rules over is **the ability to reach human minds** with thoughts and with impulses. The ability to send his attitudes and moods through the air to human brains is his "power of the air".

In plain language: Satan has the ability to reach our minds with thoughts and with impulses.

This is where we need mind control! The next point is closely tied to this one.

2) **Having us be oblivious to what enters our minds** and where those things came from. Satan wants us to believe that the perverse thoughts with which he bombarded our minds are supposedly our own thoughts.

But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom **the god of this world has blinded the minds of them which believe not**, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. (2 Corinthians 4:3-4)

Satan does not want us to recognize that the perverse thoughts that enter our minds have actually come from Satan. He wants us to be ignorant of this fact.

It doesn't lessen our responsibility for the thoughts we entertain, if those thoughts were in fact presented to our minds by Satan, as opposed to those thoughts having originated in our own minds. **We are responsible for all the thoughts we entertain**, irrespective of where those thoughts originated. But we should also be aware of from where our thoughts have actually come.

So the point is this: whether or not we had some wrong thoughts is not the problem. The real question is: **what did we do with the wrong thoughts that did enter our consciousness?** Did we entertain them and develop them further? Or did we reject them and cast them out?

Now if we accept thoughts Satan has presented to our minds as our own thoughts, then our guard is down! We don't realize that we have been targeted by Satan for a major onslaught on our minds.

And if our guard is down, then we are also more likely to give in to the thoughts and attitudes Satan managed to plant in our minds. We need to correctly identify the wrong thoughts Satan puts into our minds, and then we must firmly reject them. This is the principle of: know your enemy.

3) **Trying to get us to relinquish control over our minds.** This is a total onslaught, where Satan's goal is to have the person become demon possessed. There are no subtleties here. People in this type of attack have in some way opened their minds to demon possession, and Satan then launches an all-out attack.

These are the occasions when we most certainly need to apply the instruction from the Apostle James.

Submit yourselves therefore to God. **Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.** (James 4:7)

When our minds are being bombarded by Satan's thoughts and moods and impulses, then that is especially the time when we must "resist the devil". **It is our minds that Satan seeks to influence**, and it is our minds that must resist Satan.

But before we can resist Satan we must first recognize **how** Satan is trying to influence us.

So let's look at some of Satan's attempts to influence us.

1) It is Satan who tempts us **to take offense** when people treat us a certain way, or when they say certain mean things to us.

2) It is Satan, himself the arch-rebel, who tries to inspire us **to rebel** when we don't like something.

3) It is Satan who wants us **to get angry** when people say or do certain things.

4) It is Satan who seeks to inspire us **to become proud** because of some or other achievement.

5) It is Satan who inspires small children **to be disobedient** to their parents.

6) It is Satan who seeks to have us behave in ways that are **devious and deceitful**.

7) It is Satan who seeks to persuade us **to lose our temper**.

8) When things don't go our way, it is Satan who seeks to inspire us **to become resentful**.

9) It is Satan who seeks to influence us **to become lustful**.

10) It is Satan who attempts to influence us **to become hypocritical**.

11) When we don't get our way, it is Satan who inspires **moodiness** in us.

12) It is Satan who seeks to influence us **to become vain**. etc., etc.

You get the idea?

**In this present age every wrong thought, wrong feeling or wrong emotion that enters our conscious awareness has come from "the prince of the power of the air". We need to recognize that, and we must then respond accordingly by resisting and rejecting those wrong thoughts and feelings.**

I do not mean to imply that our human minds are not capable of generating wrong thoughts, feelings and emotions on their own, without any input from Satan. The human mind is assuredly capable of generating these things on its own. That is quite clear from the example of the people of Gog, Meshech and Tubal (see Ezekiel 38:2) during the millennium, at a time when Satan is bound and not able to influence a single person, having evil thoughts. As God tells us:

Thus says the Lord GOD; It shall also come to pass, *that* at the same time **shall things come into your mind, and you shall think an evil thought:** (Ezekiel 38:10)

So it is not a matter of the human mind not being capable of independently thinking evil thoughts. It is really a case of: **at this present time** Satan has flooded and totally saturated the entire human sphere of existence with evil and selfish thoughts to such a degree, that he has already provided for every possible evil thought any person may have.

This point is also illustrated in the Day of Atonement ritual. The Azazel goat represented Satan. And Aaron was to place on Satan's head "**all** the iniquities and **all** the transgressions in **all** their sins" (Leviticus 16:21). This instruction applies to this present age of man.

Every single sin that any human beings in this present age commits or has committed has in some way been influenced by Satan. Think of Satan providing "the free software package" which all human beings utilize to think evil thoughts.

We are responsible for all the sins we commit, yes, but our responsibility for our conduct in no way lessens Satan's responsibility for those same sins.

Let's keep Ephesians 6:12 in mind.

For **we wrestle** not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, **against the rulers of the darkness of this world** (Greek = **age**), against spiritual wickedness in high *places*. (Ephesians 6:12)

We need to recognize where all negative feelings, moods and emotions come from. We need to recognize that Satan is actively putting thoughts into our minds. And having recognized the origin of those thoughts, we then need to control our minds, **refusing to think in those ways** (i.e. refusing to become angry, proud, disobedient, hateful, resentful, vain, etc.). We need to **refuse to see ourselves as the victims**. We need to refuse to feel sorry for ourselves, because when we do feel sorry for ourselves, then we are entertaining Satan's thoughts and Satan's feelings.

## **SMALL CHILDREN**

Now the clearest examples of seeing Satan's influence in action are seen in small children, say ages 18 months to 3 years. I have used the example of children before. We need to understand that **Satan is the one who picks on small children**.

We all know Ephesians 2:2 without even having to turn there, right?

... the prince of the power of the air, **the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience:** (Ephesians 2:2)

Do you know **why** Satan "picks on" small children? What is it that attracts Satan especially to small

children? What do small children have to offer Satan that adults don't have to offer to the same degree?

The thing about small children that is particularly attractive to Satan is that **small children do not yet have any restraints to outside impulses reaching their brains**, at least not initially.

When an impulse to shout, scream, hit, sulk, kick, rebel, get angry, cry, pout, run away, etc. reaches the mind of a small child, then that small child will very commonly respond by acting on that thought or impulse ... that is, unless that small child has actually been taught and trained by the parents to not act on such spontaneous bad impulses.

The small child has no automatic restraints to the impulses with which Satan will bombard his or her mind. The child does not even identify the fact that the thought or impulse to act in these unacceptable ways actually came from an unseen evil spirit being.

And if we ask the child "**why** are you behaving like this?", a frequent and in many cases truthful answer is "**I don't know**". And the child really does not comprehend that a thought was put into his or her young mind, without the child himself or herself having generated that thought. And then the child just acted on that thought or impulse.

Watch small children in a supermarket or in a restaurant or in a playground. This certainly does not apply to all small children, but watch when a young child is denied something that he or she wants. In many cases you can observe the **spontaneous anger and resentment** against the parent or other person who has denied what the child wants. In those cases you're watching "the prince of the power of the air" in action from a front-row seat.

Now since small children have no automatic restraints against incoming impulses, therefore **the parents must provide some incentives** to the child, to motivate the child to begin developing some resistance to all the negative impulses that come to the child's consciousness. It is not enough to tell little Joey: when you have the thought to hit another child, then you must not do that, and you must put that thought out of your mind. The child must be given an incentive to resist such wrong thoughts.

Every child is different, and different children respond to different incentives. So it is up to the parents to figure out what will be the best incentives in teaching their own children. And this is not an article about child rearing.

However, one basic point is this: **we**, adults and children alike, **do not develop restraints without correction**. That is quite clear from the way God deals with us.

And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks unto you as unto children, My son, despise not you the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when you are rebuked of him: For **whom the Lord loves he chastens, and scourges** every son whom he receives. If you endure **chastening**, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chastens not? (Hebrews 12:5-7)

Put another way, we don't learn to control our minds without God "chastening, rebuking and scourging" us. **That's what it takes for us who are converted Christians to develop mind control**. Those are some of the incentives God uses to teach us to control our minds.

The most important aspect of this process is for us to look beyond this process itself. The most important aspect of this process is for us to focus on the results this process will produce.

Now no chastening for the present seems to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless **afterwards it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness** unto them who are exercised thereby. (Hebrews 12:11)

## **DEVELOPING MIND CONTROL**

We all started our lives as tiny babies. We should be able to understand how very easily Satan, the prince of the power of the air, influences small children, who have no restraints to fend off impulses placed in their minds by Satan. We should be able to understand **how very easily Satan influenced us when we were very young**.

So the point to understand is that developing control over our minds should really **start in early childhood**. But that is something that no small child is capable of initiating by himself. Starting to develop control over our minds is something that **must be initiated by the parents of that child**.

This is in fact one of the highest duties and responsibilities that God places on parents:

To set in motion within the minds of their very young children the process of learning to control their minds, learning to rule over the impulses to respond in wrong selfish ways, impulses that come into their young minds seemingly out of nowhere.

This is something that we ourselves could not initiate when we were only one or two years old. This process has to be initiated by the parents.

Now as we grow older, the battle remains exactly the same, that Satan always tries to influence our minds in negative ways, in ways that are anti-God. And Satan's goal is always to get so much influence over our thought processes that ultimately a person totally relinquishes all control to Satan, as seen when someone becomes demon-possessed.

But as we grow into adulthood there are no parents who can help us to install restraints to wrong impulses into our minds and into our characters. No, as we grow so we ourselves become totally responsible for what we do with our minds. Whether we build restraints to evil impulses or whether we are unrestrained will be our own doing.

As adults we ourselves assume full responsibility for any wrong impulses we give in to and which we then act on. As adults we are responsible for our own character, whether our parents helped us in early childhood to develop restraints to wrong thoughts or not. We ourselves are responsible.

We are responsible to exert full control over our own minds.

## **RECOGNIZING THE PROCESS**

Think back to examples of small children spontaneously responding to Satan's impulses to shout, scream, hit, sulk, kick, rebel, get angry, cry, pout, run away, etc. As we observe small children in these sort of circumstances, we should be able to recognize the precise times when such small children respond to such unseen impulses placed in their minds. The facial expressions of small children reveal the precise moments when Satan's impulses reached their young minds.

If we can recognize this process in small children, then we need to understand that **exactly the same processes happen to us**; they are just a little more sophisticated. And of course, we do have more resistance to outside impulses than little children.

But we should be able to realize that **every new thought** we have has had to come from somewhere! And some of our new thoughts we ourselves originate. But when those new thoughts are negative (e.g. thoughts of anger, worry, resentment, jealousy, hatred, coveting, etc.), then we should ask ourselves: **did I myself actually originate this negative thought?** Or was that thought placed in front of my mind from some outside source? Where did this negative thought come from? Understand that thoughts do not come out of nowhere; **thoughts always have a source**, an origin. Some are the result of our own thought processes, and others were presented to us from outside sources.

So we ask ourselves: is some outside mind actually suggesting to me that I should now become angry or envious or resentful? Or did I myself originate this thought? We need to ask ourselves questions like this. And then we need to learn to identify negative thoughts that "spontaneously popped into our minds" for what they are: they are spontaneous temptations to sin, by encouraging us to entertain wrong anti-God thoughts.

This is where the Apostle Paul's instructions apply.

(For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal, but mighty through God to **the pulling down of strong holds**;) **Casting down** imaginations, and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and **bringing into captivity** every thought to the obedience of Christ; (2 Corinthians 10:4-5)

"The pulling down of strong holds" refers to **demolishing a castle** or a fortress. Now exactly what is that "castle" in our minds that needs to be torn down and demolished? You should know that by now.

That strong hold or castle or fortress represents Satan's **entrenched** ability to influence, and in many cases control, our thinking. We are so readily on Satan's wavelength, as far as our thought processes are concerned, that **nothing short of total demolition will set us free of Satan's influence**.

But we can only use the weapons of God to do this if we first of all correctly identify Satan's influence in our lives. **We can't pull down that fortress if it is invisible to us**. We have to recognize Satan's influence.

"Casting down imaginations" refers to **destroying thoughts** that had entered our minds. And it means destroying thoughts that had come into our minds from the outside, thoughts that Satan had sent to us by way of "fiery darts" (see Ephesians 6:16). They are "grown-up versions" of the same type of thoughts that Satan sends to the minds of little children. We need to recognize them and then cast them out of our minds.

"Bringing into captivity every thought" refers to the ultimate in mind control. That's the goal ... 100% control over all our thoughts and moods and impulses. I assume that I am not the only one who falls short in this regard, right? But falling short should never detract us from striving for 100% success. We must never lose sight of the goal.

These are the things we need to do in order to be in control of our minds.

Now let's just briefly consider the fear of God.

## **THE FEAR OF GOD**

Recall that one of the things God is looking for is to see if we fear God. Why does God want us to fear Him?

Consider the following two situations:

### **Situation #1:**

The 16-year-old from next door is upset with you for some reason. In his anger he says to you: "You are just a filthy disgusting fat old slob and I don't need to listen to you". What is your response? Why, you are furious and you are about ready to physically attack that kid. Your anger is almost out of control and you are in danger of bursting a blood vessel in your brain.

### **Situation #2:**

Armed burglars have entered your isolated farmhouse, and they haven't found your hidden money. So one of the burglars points his gun right at your head and says: "I am going to kill you, you filthy disgusting fat old slob". This is the identical insult. But now you respond much more rationally, because there is a gun that is pointed at your head. And instead of threatening the burglar, as you might threaten that 16-year-old kid from next door, you try to reason with him, in spite of the insult he hurled at you.

The difference in these two situations of identical insults is that in the second situation you have a certain degree of fear. So where in the first situation you responded spontaneously without having to think things through, in the second situation **the fear you experience causes you to do some serious thinking** regarding how to get out of this situation alive.

If we have the fear of God, then we respond to every situation in life with the attitude we have in "situation #2", meaning that we use our minds before we say or do anything, being very conscious of someone else having enormous power over us (the burglar with the gun, and likewise God).

So the message for us is this:

### **Fear provides us with an incentive to use our minds!**

We are all lazy, mentally speaking. And in many situations we are too lazy to think through the consequences of the things we are about to say or do. We just say it or do it, without thinking. The fear of God, **if we have it(!)**, forces us to think first, and only then act.

We do very many things in our daily lives without actively thinking about what we are doing. We have conditioned reflexes to respond in predictable ways to various things and situations. And that is very helpful when those conditioned reflexes cause us to do things that are good and beneficial. We have already discussed the benefits of good drills.

But we also do other things as conditioned reflexes, without thinking, and that is not good (e.g. crass and vulgar speech, impulsive actions, etc.). That happens without us in many cases even using our minds in this process. **We didn't even think before saying or doing something that is wrong.** It was spontaneous and done without thinking.

If we have the fear of God, then we will do some serious thinking before we allow any conditioned reflexes to lead us into doing things that are wrong. Fear can block any negative conditioned reflexes, because fear will help us to see bad consequences for ourselves, if we carry out those negative conditioned reflexes. Fear will motivate, and in many cases almost force us to use our minds before we respond to anything.

When we are dealing with God, then God is not impressed if we respond to God with mindless conditioned reflexes, even when those responses are on the surface acceptable.



## **God does not ever want mindless obedience from anyone!**

The entire purpose of a Christian life is to train our minds to always respond positively to God. So when we practice God's way of life, and when we approach God in prayer, **we must always use our minds**. Our minds must always be involved, because if our minds are not involved, then our minds are also not being trained.

So God requires us to have the fear of God, to ensure that we will respond to all Christian living situations with our minds actively involved. That must be the case even when we have done "the drills" of keeping God's laws. The fear of God will trigger our consciences to move into high gear whenever we are confronted with unexpected circumstances. This means that our consciences will examine every situation from the perspective of: what would God like me to do in this particular situation?

For example:

1) Does our conscience bother us if we leave the house in the morning without having spent time on our knees in prayer before God? Or can we walk out the door without so much as a twinge of conscience because today we didn't pray before walking out? If our consciences don't bother us in this situation, **then we lack the fear of God!**

2) Does it bother our consciences if we go to sleep at night without first spending time on our knees in prayer before God? Or can we go to bed and sleep like a baby without having prayed? If we can do that, **then once again we lack the fear of God!**

3) If we don't have enough gas in the car on a Saturday morning to drive to church services and back, does it bother our consciences that we have to fill up the tank on the Sabbath just to get to church services? Does it cause us to think: **why didn't I think of** filling up the tank yesterday? Or do we just cheerfully fill up the tank because, after all, we must get to church, and our conscience continues to slumber peacefully? If this situation does not cause us to think "why didn't I ...?" **then we lack the fear of God.**

4) We are trying to sell our house and a prospective buyer phones us on Saturday morning. Will we discuss the price and the features of our house, and get into a lengthy discussion with this prospective buyer? Or would that bother our conscience? Or would we cut any conversation short by saying: yes, my house is for sale, but today is God's Sabbath, and therefore I cannot discuss any details with you today. If you call back tomorrow or on Monday, I'll be happy to discuss this matter with you. Good-bye. If we are willing to discuss the sale of our house, or the sale of anything else on the Sabbath, **then we surely lack the fear of God.**

5) We need to have people do some work on our house. It could be plumbing or electrical work, or yard work, or repairs on the house or the roof, or regular inspections for termites or checking the air conditioner, etc. And then these people unexpectedly show up on a Saturday morning or afternoon, wanting to do the work. Does it bother our conscience for them to come on a Saturday? Do we tell them: I am sorry, but today is God's Sabbath and I cannot allow you to work on my house or yard today. Please come back on a different day. Or do we calmly let them do whatever they are contracted to do, while our consciences continue to sleep? If we are not uncomfortable, and therefore take action to avoid this, when people want to come and work for us on the Sabbath, **then we lack the fear of God.**

You get the idea?

**We fear to disobey God. Therefore we pro-actively on our own initiative ask penetrating questions about every single situation in life. We don't wait for God to tell us: don't do that. We**

**in advance ask ourselves questions like "how would God like me to handle the situation if the following ever occurs?"**

**It is the fear of God that motivates us to look ahead and to then take evasive actions, to avoid any potential conflicts with any laws of God. For example, we are mentally prepared to deal with unexpected situations that would infringe on God's Sabbath.**

If, for example, an elderly frail relative could die soon and family who are not in God's Church will be organizing the funeral, then we approach those relatives in advance, while the frail relative is still alive, and tell them: when "relative X" dies, please do not plan for the funeral to be on a Saturday, because then I will not be able to attend. You've got six other days in the week to choose from, so please don't choose the Sabbath for the funeral. Or do we just let the situation sneak up on us and we are then confronted with the situation: the funeral will be on Saturday and nothing can change that?

The fear of God will motivate us to anticipate potential problems, and to take evasive action to avoid those potential problems. We need to anticipate that **the carnal mind will readily and frequently present challenges to the observance of God's Sabbath.**

So yes, we have all gone through "the drill" of keeping God's Sabbath for many years. But we still have to always use our minds when it comes to Sabbath-keeping. We can never keep the Sabbath without our minds being involved in that observance.

When driving a car with a manual gearbox we can sometimes change gears without thinking about it, so that a few moments afterwards we might not even recall that we had actually changed from third gear to fourth gear. But that can never happen with Sabbath-keeping.

We can never keep the Sabbath without knowing what day we are observing. Our minds know that it is the Sabbath. It is not as if the conditioned response starts us keeping the Sabbath in the correct manner, and a few hours later we suddenly realize: hey, it's the Sabbath. That can never happen.

So conditioned responses to observing God's laws always remain under the control of the mind. With these conditioned responses the mind always knows what it is doing, and why it is doing it.

I mention this to point out that as far as observance of God's laws is concerned, there is no conflict between a conditioned response and also always having the mind involved in that response.

The fear of God provides the incentive to use our minds in everything that affects our relationship with God. The fear of God ensures that our minds will be consciously involved.

**When people do not have the fear of God, their obedience becomes mechanical**, where they do some of the right things without their minds being involved in the process. With mechanical obedience regular daily praying to God is one of the first things to fall by the wayside. Mechanical obedience does not discern that certain activities are simply not appropriate for God's Sabbath day. Mechanical obedience always lacks discernment of God's intentions for all the laws God has given.

And mechanical obedience is worthless before God. Obedience without active and conscious involvement of the mind is of no value, because such obedience has no training effect on the uninvolved mind.

Our minds must always be involved in all our obedience to God and in all our interactions with God. And to ensure that our minds will always be involved, therefore God requires us to fear Him.

So in conclusion, when we consider the list of 12 attributes, concerning the things God is looking for in us human beings, that we compiled earlier, they all come down to mind-control. We must control our minds to respond to God in such a way that these 12 attributes will become a part of our character.

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