

December 2021

Greetings Brethren:

Here we are, already a couple months after a spiritually-energizing Feast. It was another example of God's blessing to those holding on to His revealed Truth. While we had an enjoyable time and look forward to next year's Feast, we must not take for granted the purpose of the Feast and the strength we derive from it in order to withstand our daily battle of conversion. We are solidly into our normal routines and focus on daily life. However, we know that our primary focus needs to be on something larger than the ordinary tasks and achievements in life. We must focus on the reason for our lives: the potential to become members of the God Family. For that to happen, we must understand, control, and master our carnal minds. We must not reject spiritual principles and live according to the natural impulses and desires of our minds.

You hear that message virtually every week through sermons. If you are serious about your conversion and developing what God defines as righteous character, what else do you need to hear? What do you need to know so that your spiritual work is not hindered or corrupted in a way that may cause you to lose salvation? You may be called, but you are not immune to the influence of demons. In fact, demonic influence may arise more frequently than you think. We are not addressing demonic possession, where people lose control over themselves, just demonic influence in general. These are the instigations of mind that assist us in deviating from God's will.

Satan tried to destroy Jesus Christ by urging Him to act on, or respond to, typical carnal desires contrary to God's will. The attempt failed. Unfortunately, Satan has been successful in destroying some. The simple fact is that he is trying to destroy you, too.

And Jesus being full of the Holy [Spirit] returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, Being forty days tempted of the devil. And in those days he did eat nothing: and when they were ended, he afterward hungered (Luke 4:1-2).

You know this verse and hear it repeatedly. Is it real to you in your daily life, or do you simply remember Christ's encounter historically? Are you able to detect similar demonic instigations in your thoughts? Or, do you believe that since you are called and striving to be faithful to the Faith Once Delivered that this kind of influence cannot happen to you? If that is your thinking, then you are a prime target for such demonic influence. We all need to be

ever mindful of this sinister tactic Satan employs. It is one reason why the Apostle James was inspired to write this instruction:

Resist the devil, and he will flee from you (James 4:7).

James is confirming that Satan and his cohort of demons will attempt to influence us and that we must resist him. There would be no need to tell us to resist Satan if he was not actively attacking us. Resistance takes effort; it does not automatically happen. You very likely will not resist what you do not recognize as coming from him.

### **Spiritual Wickedness**

Before we address personal influence, do you see the influence he has on the world? If you look at society, across all nations, can you see the output of increased demonic influence by the increase in violence, hatred, and irrational behavior? Can you see the destruction of Judeo-Christian values and the breakdown of morals in society? The wickedness of carnal minds can be a cause of all these things. But often, carnal minds are given a boost and encouragement to follow this path by demonic influence. Once a mind is evilly influenced, it will do Satan's nasty work as if on autopilot. The leaders of business, entertainment, technology, education and politics are subject to it. Some receive direct inspiration. Others receive it indirectly by subscribing to a Satan-inspired system that they think will fix the wrongs of society, or simply provide their personal desires.

Either way, the foundational source is Satan as he attempts to thwart God's plan and destroy humankind. Society is designed to tempt you and subtly to cause you to become indifferent to, or even accept, abominations. It is designed to make you think some of God's ways are old-fashioned, out of step with modern society, or just not necessary to follow in order to be in good standing with God. Ministerial admonitions concerning appearance, personal conduct, sources of entertainment, diet, or even administrative rulings, may seem trivial, nit-picky, or irrelevant. If you have thought these things, you may be agreeing with this corrupted way and not even recognize it. If you persist in rationalizing and rejecting the cautions, the extra incentive to do so could be the power of spiritual influence over the carnal mind. It is that subtle and devious.

For we are not fighting against people made of flesh and blood, but against persons without bodies—the evil rulers of the unseen world, those mighty satanic beings and great evil princes of darkness who rule this world; and against huge numbers of wicked spirits in the spirit world (Ephesians 6:12, *The Living Bible*).

This evil influence is designed to trickle down to an individual level. Not just to the deceived people of the world, but to you. The reason is that once called, you become a primary target of Satan. He wants nothing more than to see you fail and will continue his efforts to make that happen. He does not care how or why you depart from the Truth, just that it happens. When we resist the influences of Satan, he will flee from us. That means God has provided knowledge and tools so that we can, and are expected to, resist.

### **How Demons Can Influence You**

We very easily can reject the thought of being influenced by Satan because we just do not like to think that can happen to us. A primary method of Satan's attacks is through manipulating, or enhancing, thoughts and emotions. One significant way is by instilling doubt about the Truth in one's mind. Often, thoughts of doubt naturally occur to us. But sometimes they are our thoughts that Satan enhances with additional messages of self-justification, personal desire, or encouragement to doubt and question the Truth. If he can make some people hear voices, he surely has the ability to manipulate, or enhance, thoughts and emotions.

"Do we have all the Truth needed for salvation?" "Was Mr. Armstrong the only end-time servant to whom foundational truths were revealed?" "Why are there so few people in our fellowship?" "Why did God allow this person to die?" "If this is God's church, why is He allowing so many severe trials and difficulties in people's lives?" "Is this ministry really being inspired by Jesus Christ?" These are the kinds of questions we have heard over the years and continue to hear today. Asking with the intent to better understand God's will and our personal responsibility can help us to grow closer to Him and strengthen our resolve to remain faithful. But, asking with underlying thoughts of doubt regarding the Truth can have very serious consequences. If you have had these kinds of thoughts, what was your motive for asking? What answers, or justifications, were you really after or hoping to find?

Our thoughts can easily be enhanced by Satan, and we never suspect he is involved. Let us recall the disciple Simon Peter. Christ was explaining to the disciples that He would be killed and raised again the third day. Simon Peter did not want that to happen and said so. What was Christ's response? Did He initially say, "No, let me teach you why this must be"?

But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men (Matthew 16:23).

Simon Peter was not trying to be rebellious. He was expressing genuinely his desire for Christ to live. How could that be wrong? In this instance his personal desire was contrary to God's will. Christ teaches us that Peter's desire was enhanced by Satan. Was he weaker than you, or not as aware of demonic influences? Do not make that assumption. This illustrates how easy it can be for a thought to be placed into your mind, or to have an existing thought enhanced. That is sobering and a reminder of the need to control these carnal minds in order to stay close to God spiritually.

The ability to resist Satan may depend on your love for the Truth. Jesus Christ gave the parable of the sower that addresses this, and how a spirit of doubt can be deadly.

But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended (Matthew 13:20–21).

Recall how marvelous God's calling was and how inspirational it was to understand those things hidden from the masses of humanity. It was a thrill, and you probably felt confident in the Truth and of your calling. That foundation is very significant to remember. How convinced were you of the plan of salvation? How convinced were you of the Faith Once Delivered being revealed through one end-time servant? How convinced were you of the continuation of those spiritually-revealed truths? If you believed then, and still do now with all your heart and all your soul, you can resist negative influences. You should be able to avoid the trap of a questioning spirit or an evil spirit of doubt. If someone doubts the Truth and states those reservations, you should not be swayed by their reasons. If a strange thought pops into your mind that there is more truth needed for completeness, you should be able to quickly reject it and not let it take hold in your mind. And why did that thought pop into your mind in the first place? Possibly because Satan was attacking you, searching for your weak points, and trying to make you question foundational truths. That is an example of Satan's work on your mind and shows the necessity to resist him. A spirit of doubt and a questioning spirit are illustrated by thoughts that the foundational truths taught were incomplete, and that one should explore "new" truths and grow closer to God with this "new" knowledge. Some may even claim that they have not departed from Christ or the Truth. They may say: "I have left a physical organization, but I have not left Christ." This is simply a justification for rejecting Christ.

Unfortunately, brethren, we have not only seen this occur in the past, but we see it happening today. Please do not let it take hold of you. Many called by God received that knowledge with joy and happiness and endured for a while, but, at some point in time became offended by the Word. They were not offended by feeling hurt, angry, or upset by

something said or done, but offended by the Word which is causing difficulty or discomfort through the need to reign in the carnal mind and not to allow a spirit of doubt or a questioning spirit to influence. Many beloved brethren have begun to doubt the foundational Truth. Many have questioned the completeness of doctrine. Many simply wanted doctrines to be different in some way. Why else would one who believed and practiced this Way of Life be tempted to consider new doctrines, to modify doctrines, or want to fellowship with organizations teaching heresy? Possibly because they forgot that the basis of any organization preaching foundational doctrines different than what was revealed to an end-time servant, Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong, involves demonism, and they did not resist the allure of it.

One reason this happened may be that they were influenced either by a spirit of doubt or a questioning spirit. It was Satanic. By not resisting, the result was a rejection of divinely-revealed Truth. Maybe some never really believed and are simply moving on. For those that did believe, this illustrates how Satan works. Did he forcibly make them leave and join another organization? No. Did he forcibly make them believe false doctrine, or altogether to reject doctrines? No. But he may have influenced and encouraged them to keep doubting and questioning the completeness of revealed Truth. By not resisting, these thoughts and doubts increased in importance, logic, and intensity until they became firmly established in mind. Once that occurred, the constant push to justify further exploration of "new truth" became easier. The result, as we have seen, can be a rejection of divinely-revealed Truth. We pray that as God gives them time and space for repentance they will once again practice what they believed and lived. But if not, their end might be to be thrown into the lake of fire.

### **But You Are Not Questioning**

A questioning spirit, and a spirit of doubt, is not of God. But, even if this does not affect you, are you free from dangerous and negative influences? Hardly. A second significant way Satan influences the called is by encouraging them to let the carnal mind dominate, or to encourage personal desires that are contrary to God's will. It does not have to be in all areas of life, but minimally in areas of mind or in areas of weakness that we want to keep. When we let those areas dominate our thinking and emotions, we may fail to do enough of the real work of overcoming carnal weaknesses because we are distracted and focused on the wrong things. The goal is to take us out from the inside while we are members of a physical Body. That, by the way, is another sinister tactic used by Satan.

This is not to say that there will not be failures and struggles with weaknesses. There will be, and a lot of them. The root of the issue, and the real danger, is not wanting to, or not being willing to, let go of certain aspects of our minds and fully submit to God. Why would this happen?

And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold (Matthew 20:12).

So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth (Revelation 3:16).

God commands that we love Him with all our hearts and all our souls. If we do not, how can Satan take advantage of us? He will do so by encouraging us to allow distractions to become too much of a priority in our lives, so that we do not focus enough on our spiritual growth. He will do so by enhancing thoughts that we are doing a sufficient job with personal mastery, while in reality, we do not want to work harder. He will encourage us to focus on the physical at the expense of the spiritual. He will encourage us to think that there is more truth that needs to be discovered, as we devote precious time to search for it. He will do so by distracting us from doing the necessary work of conversion that we were told to do. Satan is hard at work. For us to succeed, we must be at least as committed to personal mastery as Satan is to destroying us.

In some of the areas to follow, we may be our own worst enemies and distract ourselves enough without the need of Satan's influence. If we are lukewarm, or the love of God's Truth is dimming, by nature we will be enticed by something else of interest. Like a moth to a flame. Satan will search for that *something else*, make it seem very appealing or needed, and try to cause it to dominate our thinking. If he can encourage our desires to grow out of balance and impede our spiritual growth, he will try. It is imperative that we recognize how he will try to distract us so that we can resist him.

### **The Physical Mistake**

There is no question that physical obedience to doctrines is required, but it cannot be at the expense of spiritual obedience. Any one of us can make sacrifices and follow the physical rules extremely well, and for decades, but still not qualify. Physical obedience alone does not develop the righteous character God requires. If anyone begins to evaluate his level of conversion predominantly by his length of time in the church, or by his physical obedience, then he may become a target for Satan's influence. This is especially true if there is not enough desire to control and change the mind. Satan's influence is effected by embedding thoughts that you are doing enough, and that you are in good standing with your conversion because you faithfully follow the rules. Yes, occasionally you will work on your mind and emotions, but not consistently. It is not done with your best effort. Yes, you will be serious in examining yourself before Passover, but that examination fades away quickly afterward.

The problem here may be that you are avoiding the real work of conversion, and Satan will encourage you to keep avoiding it by helping you justify the thoughts that you are just fine in your efforts. Why not? You attend Sabbath services every week. You attend the Feast of Tabernacles only at designated places. You avoid unclean foods. You agree with the Faith Once Delivered, in concept. You try to be nice to people. You avoid surgeries and chemical drugs. You read the Bible and listen to sermons frequently. You have done this for years, or maybe even decades. What more do you need to do? Satan will instill thoughts in your mind that there is nothing more to do. He will encourage you to keep doing what you are doing so that you think that you are on track for a successful conversion. Why can he influence you this way? Maybe because that is all that you want to do, and why his encouragement of self-justification seems so right. Notice what is missing from the statements above? Personal mastery. Satan will encourage you to avoid the hard work of personal mastery by giving you confidence that your physical obedience to doctrines is sufficient for qualifying. He will encourage thoughts that your physical obedience proves to God that you love His way. But if you are not applying into your thinking the spiritual lessons learned, all it does is justify denying Christ. That is subtle, devious, and potentially deadly. It is a tactic to *take you out* from the inside.

### **Strong Negative Emotions**

The most powerful emotions can be negative emotions. God designed it that way. He created the human mind opposite to His mind and requires those He calls to master and overcome the negative impulses of mind. He requires the called to be like Him, and that is hard work. He requires that we live by the fruits of the Holy Spirit in love, joy and peace. Do you? Or are you embroiled in conflict, doubt, and frustration? It is through negative emotions that Satan can influence the called with the intent of destruction. One trait that we have seen become deadly for many is complaining to the extent that it clouds and inhibits spiritual growth. The mind becomes focused on complaints, and not thankfulness to God. It focuses on what it does not have, as opposed to what it does have. It focuses on what is wrong with things, as opposed to what is right with things. Priorities become out of balance as the mind focuses on myriad complaints, rather than personal mastery.

If we start with this understanding, we should be better prepared to fight this battle. Complaints are a form of human arrogance, and not an acceptable trait for inheriting eternal life. This is an example of understanding given by Mr. Raymond Cole decades ago, and for which we are thankful because it helps us to mature spiritually. Why cannot we learn to accept what God allows, or wills, and thank Him for the experience involved? If we really believed the promises of God, we would not complain or worry about anything physical that

we might encounter. We should be growing closer to God. And is that not a difficult one to do!

Why would one complain excessively? Simple. Because of not having what is wanted and being upset about it. This can take shape in two ways: First, by always complaining about things to no end. Day after day after day. Second, by having a major desire become the one thing needed to achieve happiness, and obsess about it. "Why can't I have that, others do?" "I have this affliction and it is not being removed. I have no peace of mind." "If others would only do this, or not do that, then I could be happy." The list could go on endlessly.

Satan's influence promotes and enhances our negative emotions with the intent of causing us to consume our time. The more we focus on the negative, the less we focus on personal mastery. Analyze your mind. Where is it most often? With his influence on our emotions, it is easier to continue a path of negative thinking because that is what the carnal mind is designed to do. Situations will arise that we do not like. Things will happen to us that we do not like or feel we deserve. We will see things with which we disagree, or that we do not like. But, if we recognize these things, and accept them as fact, then we can constructively focus on personal mastery and continue to use our time on what God told us to do for developing righteous character.

Here is the problem: That does not always happen. It is easy to let strong, carnal emotions dominate. But the goal of conversion is to master these emotions. That is the whole point! We are told that we must be willing to give up everything in this life, chief among them being our negative, carnal emotions. If we, as the called of God, are unwilling to make that total sacrifice, Christ says plainly that we are not worthy of Him.

### **I Never Knew You**

We know that things apply directly to us from our Bible study. But have you thought how these words can apply to you?

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. . . . And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity (Matthew 7:21, 23).

We may initially think that this applies to those who believe and practice false doctrines. And it can apply to them. However, if you believe in the Faith Once Delivered and profess a desire to develop righteous character, you need to know how this can apply to

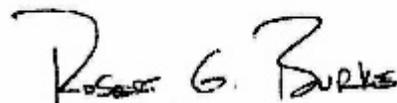
you. This addresses those who have a desire to enter the Kingdom of Heaven, those to whom God has revealed His Truth. The desire is there, or at least it is claimed, but the will of the Father is not being done properly. The will of the Father is for each to work on personal mastery. When we avoid personal mastery because we are primarily focused only on physical obedience, we can be that worker of iniquity. When we allow our minds to focus on the wrong things, we can be that worker of iniquity. That is because in both scenarios, the work of controlling the carnal mind and developing righteous character was not sufficiently done. Perhaps some simply did not want to do the work that was required. Perhaps some were influenced by Satan through various forms of deceit, self-justification, or encouragement. Again, this is an example of Satan's attempt to take you out from the inside by encouraging you to focus on the wrong things and to avoid personal mastery.

### **A True Blessing**

By experiencing various trials and difficulties periodically, we should be better prepared for the times of real stress. That is a reason God allows us to encounter the hatefulness and deceptiveness of Satan and his demons. If we never experienced the deceptiveness of Satan at work, how could we ever know how we would respond to such trials? In love, God is proving and refining each of us. He is allowing circumstances in our lives and watching how we respond. Will any circumstance we face cause us to increase our faith and love toward God? Or, will it cause us to focus on the things we want, at the expense of the things God wants for us?

Brethren, do not allow your carnal minds to dominate. Do not allow Satan's influence to cause you to avoid the hard work of personal mastery. God wants you in His Kingdom and has provided everything needed for success.

Your friend in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert G. Burke". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'R' at the beginning.

Robert G. Burke