

Our Part In The Sanctification Process (Part Ten): Cultivating The Fruit Of Self Control

Re-orienting the heart's desires through yielding to God's Holy Spirit

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We will turn to several related scriptures upon which I intend to weave a theme for this message. Most scriptural references will be taken either from the Lockman Foundation's *Amplified Bible* or the Lockman Foundation's *New American Standard Bible* or the *New American Standard Bible E-Prime*. (All three of these versions are available in electronic format on the Church of the Great God website.)

In Deuteronomy 5:29, Moses records God's appraisal of our forebears' ability to keep His holy law which He had just given them, sadly realizing they possessed hostile, carnal minds and deceitful hearts at enmity with His commandments (referencing Romans 8:6 and Jeremiah 17:9). The Lord wistfully proclaims:

Deuteronomy 5:29 (NASB) Oh that they had such a heart in them, to fear Me and keep all My commandments always, so that it would go well with them and with their sons forever!

We learn from this passage that eternal well-being is inextricably related to eternal law keeping.

In Psalm 119:44-45, David proclaims, "I will keep your law continually, forever and ever. And I will walk at liberty, for I seek Your precepts." Notice that liberty is a result of keeping God's law. We should never ever desire liberty or freedom *from* law, but rather freedom from sin and the curse of the law. Last month, someone from God's church posted an insightful piece on Facebook, which reads:

You are only under the curse of the law when you break it.

You are only under grace when you repent.

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You only repent when you turn from transgressing the law.

Psalms 119:151-152 (NASB) You are near, O Lord, and all Your commandments are truth. Of old I have known from your testimonies that You have founded them forever.

Psalms 119:160 (NASB) The sum of Your word is truth, and every one of Your righteous ordinances is everlasting.

Please turn back to what is rapidly becoming my third favorite verse in the Bible.

Psalms 37:4-5 (NASB) Delight yourself in the LORD; and He will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in Him, and He will do it.

Please turn over to John 15, a passage we will be reading again in about two weeks.

John 15:10 (NASB) “If you keep My commandments, you will remain in My love; just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and remain in His love.”

Please turn over to Matthew 22, beginning with verse 36, when a Pharisee tried to surreptitiously put Jesus to a test, saying,

Matthew 22:36-40 (AMP) “Teacher, which kind of commandment is great and important (the principal kind) in the Law?” [Some commandments are light—but some commandments are heavy?] And Jesus replied to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with your mind (intellect). This is the great (most important, principal) and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as [you do] yourself. These two commandments sum up and upon them depend on all the Law and the Prophets.”

I John 5:3 (AMP) For the [true] love of God is this that we do His commands [keep His ordinances and are mindful of His precepts and teaching]. And these orders are not irksome (burdensome, oppressive, or grievous).

Sadly, many wolves in sheep's clothing in our previous fellowship tried to bifurcate or separate law from love, law from grace, law from faith, or law from righteousness, claiming falsely that righteousness can be attained apart from the law (carelessly taking Romans 3:21 out of context) much the way Protestant theologians tried to install false dichotomies between law and mercy, law and grace, and faith and works, as Richard explained last week in his sermon on Abraham's righteousness by faith.

We remember that the apostle Peter warned us that some antinomian false teachers have taken advantage of some of the apostle Paul's difficult turns of phrase he used in his epistles, referring to "things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also to the rest of the Scriptures to their own destruction" (II Peter 3:16). Examples of these antinomian distortions include the phrase "For Christ is the end of the law" (Romans 10:4) implying that after Christ sacrificed His life, God's holy law was no longer necessary. Some have glommed onto Galatians 3:24 that "the law was our tutor or guardian leading us to Christ," implying that once we established a relationship with Christ, we were free of that oppressive yoke of bondage to the law.

Some have been confused by the multi-ordinality or different levels of abstraction defining law such as the immutable laws of physical science authored by the Eternal, such as the eternal holy and spiritual law of God which is indeed the very core of His character and personality and will ultimately be the core of our inner being as well, but also applying the term to the ritualistic law of sacrifices, washings, and ceremony—which Richard mentioned last week in connection with God desiring *chesed* (loyalty or faithfulness) to God's covenant over ritual sacrificial laws and added Judaistic traditions.

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In Romans 7:23, Paul refers to a law of sin warring against the law of his mind bringing him into captivity. As I said in a previous message, if this is the law the Protestants would want to nail to the cross, I would gladly join them in their antinomianism, but sadly, their hatred is directed against God's holy law in much the same way as one major political party in the United States has totally renounced God Almighty and His holy laws, elevating Big Government as the new idolatrous deity while embracing Gaya or earth worship by levying the horrendous confiscatory climate change legislation, the one of the greatest abominations since the Israelites elevated the Golden Calf in the Sinai Peninsula.

Please turn over to my favorite verse in the Bible, Hebrews 8:10 (a reprise of Jeremiah 31:33).

Hebrews 8:10 (AMP) For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will imprint My laws upon their minds, even upon their innermost thoughts and understanding, and engrave them upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

If God wanted to eventually put aside the training wheels of His law or free His chosen ones from its onerous grip, why did He choose to make it an integral or indeed the core part of our personality or character forever? One minister in our previous fellowship had the temerity to declare that neither God the Father nor Jesus Christ is bound by any law. He evidently ignored two pivotal scriptures, Hebrews 6:18, declaring that “by two unchangeable things [His promise and His oath] in which it is impossible for God ever to lie, prove false or deceive us” or in Habakkuk 1:13, describing God's eyes as too pure to look upon evil—unlike some of us who may not consider it such a big deal. When Our Lord and Savior took on Himself our sins, God the Father was compelled to look the other way. Let us be crystal clear. Even in our glorified spiritual bodies 950 billion years from now, we will never outgrow our need or desire for God's holy and spiritual law.

Returning to the conditional promise in Psalm 37:4, “Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He will give you the desires and secret petitions of your heart,” He is not talking about the carnal, deceitful, treacherous heart described in

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Jeremiah 17:9, but instead the transplanted heart described in Jeremiah 31:33 and Hebrews 8:10. Robin Webber used to state repeatedly that God's church was primarily a heart transplant clinic, replacing the diseased, sinful, fleshly, carnal deceitful hearts with spiritual, righteous hearts.

My specific purpose in this tenth and concluding segment of "Our Part in the Sanctification Process" is to demonstrate that we cannot cultivate self-control until we, with the motivation of God's Holy Spirit, reprogram our desires, appetites, and cravings of our hearts from self-centered, self-destructive carnal nature with its deadly downward pulls to the life-sustaining upward pulls of God's Holy Spirit, realizing that only in God's presence is fullness of joy and at His right hand there are pleasures for evermore (Psalm 16:11). The subtitle of this message is "Cultivating the Fruit of Self-Control."

Gary Petty, in his sermon/article on the "Fruits of the Spirit: Self Control," reminds us that ever since our original Mom and Dad partook of the fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, we have been pre-programmed with a predilection or fatal attraction for sin, and all sin is initially gratifying, pleasurable, habit-forming, and highly addictive. Gary Petty emphasizes, "All sin is addictive. *ALL* sin is addictive. We get to where we like it. Our brain gets wired into it and we actually like it. That is the problem. Unfortunately, morally and mentally and emotionally we get into habits. And we, over a period of time, program ourselves."

Sadly, breaking those programs is exceedingly difficult because we have corrupt, carnal human nature which continually generates habitual corrosive sin. In Hebrews 11:25, sin is described as giving pleasure for a season, implying that it is temporary and has a tragic ending. Jesus' half-brother James graphically describes the initial desirability or fatal attractiveness of sin as well as the horrendous fatal consequences of sin in the following metaphor:

James 1:14-15 (AMP) But every person is tempted when he is drawn away, enticed, and bated by his own evil desire (lust, passions). Then the evil desire, when it has conceived, gives birth to sin, and sin, when it is fully matured, brings forth death.

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Consequently, we realize that sin can taste sweet to our flesh for a season, but God's Word somberly promises that the wages of sin is death (Romans 6: 23). Sin is anything that goes against God's will, God's purpose, and His holy laws. Sadly, the lust to sin dwells securely in our carnal nature like a hungry termite or cockroach, hostile and antagonistic to God's law (Romans 8:7). Gary Petty claims that self-control is the least appreciated trait in our society because too many of Jacob's offspring have bought into the Veruca Salt malignant narcissism obsession, "I want what I want, and I want it NOW, and I have the right to what I want now!" (as Mark Schindler described in his July 13, 2019 message, "Whatever Your Heart Desires.")

Don Bailey in his sermon/article "Cultivating Self-Control," suggests that the current zeitgeist promotes lack of restraint, as is exemplified by Nike's thirty-year-old iconic slogan: "Just do it." Everything, it seems, in modern Israel is based on immediate self-gratification especially among the millennial and post-millennial segments of the population. Because self-control is seen as keeping us from what we want/what we deserve/what is our right, we adamantly resist the concept of self-control. Because we reject self-control, we become pitiful slaves to habits, thoughts, and irrational emotions-in short, according to the apostle Paul, we become bondslaves of sin or unrighteousness (Romans 6:17 and John 8: 34). In II Timothy 3, Paul reveals to Timothy how the people in the end-time society will conduct themselves:

II Timothy 3:2-4 For people will be lovers of self [narcissistic, self-focused], lovers of money [impelled by greed], boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, and profane, [and they will be] unloving [devoid of natural human affection, calloused and inhumane], irreconcilable, malicious gossips, devoid of self-control [intemperate, immoral], brutal, haters of good, traitors, reckless, conceited, lovers of [sensual] pleasure rather than lovers of God.

He is obviously describing basic carnal human nature on steroids.

What gives God's called-out ones an advantage over everyone else in society is that little dab of Holy Spirit received at baptism, described alternately as a "seal," "deposit," "earnest payment," "guarantee," "pledge," or a "security

deposit promising that more will follow”—namely a glorified spiritual body given at the resurrection, following the completion of a rigorous sanctification process.

II Corinthians 1:22 (AMP) [He has also appropriated and acknowledged us as His by] putting His seal in our hearts as the security deposit and guarantee [of the fulfillment of His promise]. To amplify or nail down that concept, let us now turn over to Ephesians 1:14.

Ephesians 1:14 (AMP) That [Spirit] is the guarantee of our inheritance [the firstfruits, the pledge and foretaste, the down payment on our heritage], in anticipation of its full redemption and our acquiring [complete] possession of it—to the praise of His glory.

Furthermore, Paul has made it abundantly clear that “we are not living the life of the flesh, we are living the life of the Spirit, if the [Holy] Spirit of God [which Herbert W. Armstrong invariably and accurately described as God’s law in action] [really] dwells within us and controls us. But if anyone does not possess the [Holy] Spirit of Christ, he is none of His [he does not belong to Christ, is not truly a child of God (Romans 8:9)].

It is instructive that before Jesus Christ established the New Covenant, He deliberately magnified the law, making it more rigorous, setting the bar much, much higher—expanding its inclusiveness from the motor behaviors of the letter of the law into the much harder-to-achieve self-control of the mind and thoughts—emphasizing the Spirit of the law. We must, in essence, progress from playing the piece mechanically by note to playing it passionately by heart, loving God with all of our hearts and minds and our neighbor as ourselves.

Not only must we overcome our motor behaviors, deeds, and words, but we must overcome our thoughts as well. Jesus, in the Beatitudes, stated that if we harbor hatred in our hearts, we are already guilty of murder and if we harbor lust in our hearts, we are already guilty of fornication and adultery (Matthew 5:21, 28). In Matthew 18:7, we read Christ’s stern warning about yielding to temptation.

Matthew 18:7-9 (AMP) Woe to the world for such temptations to sin and influences to do wrong! It is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the person on whose account or by whom the temptation comes! And if your hand or your foot causes you to stumble and sin, cut it off and throw it away from you; it is better (more profitable and wholesome) for you to enter life maimed or lame than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into everlasting fire. [Tragically, I know of one member of God's church who took this passage literally, and to her lifelong detriment, actually did sever one of her limbs.] And if your eye causes you to stumble and sin, pluck it out and throw it away from you; it is better (more profitable and wholesome) for you to enter life with only one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the hell (Gehenna) of fire.

Let us examine the more complex implications of this passage carefully. An eye, an ear, a nose, a tongue, or a hand does not commit a sin independently, any more than a firearm has a mind of its own. All of these sensory organs are governed by the brain, often referred to as the heart or mind in Scripture, as when Jesus replied to the Pharisee, that one must love God with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his strength and with all his mind (Luke 10:27). God promises in the New Covenant that He will place His holy laws in our hearts, performing, in essence, a heart transplant procedure, transforming or replacing our fleshly carnal hearts which impulsively hates God's laws to a converted, spiritual heart which enthusiastically embraces God's holy laws and His purposes for us.

As Richard explained to us last week, father Abraham and mother Sarah were justified by faith when they believed that God would provide them an heir, but Abraham passed the final exam of his sanctification process by his willingness to sacrifice his son after 50 or more years of God's continual testing. Likewise, all of God's called-out ones have had righteousness imputed to them by believing Christ, repenting of their sinful past lives, undergoing baptism (symbolic of a watery grave), and receiving the earnest, deposit, or down payment of God's Holy Spirit for a glorified spirit body awarded after the resurrection.

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But after this initial step, the hard work really begins as we, like our father Abraham, are allotted approximately 50 or more years (as Richard has hypothesized, symbolic of the 50-day count to Pentecost) for an intense period of rigorous testing, with perhaps the hardest trials coming near the close of our lives. Having been baptized on April 4, 1966, I have been granted five additional years for which I am grateful considering some of those earlier years I carelessly frittered away some important overcoming opportunities, desperately needing this borrowed time to make up for the hopelessly botched-up past opportunities to overcome.

The Scriptures instruct us to be holy and to go on to perfection. The apostle Peter in I Peter 1:16 gives a reprise of Leviticus 11:44 which reads, “For I am the Lord your God; so consecrate yourselves” [The King James version renders this sanctify yourselves] and be holy, for I am holy,” and Leviticus 19:1-2, which reads, “Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Say to all the congregation of the children of Israel,’ ‘You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.’”

The apostle Paul (or the author of Hebrews) introduces the concept of perfection as he states in Hebrews 6:1, “Therefore let us get past the elementary stage in the teachings about the Christ, advancing on to maturity and perfection and spiritual completeness [doing this] without laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and faith toward God.” James Beaubelle, in his message “Wrong Ideas,” delivered on February 27th, stressed that while the end-state of a saint is perfection, God’s people must not become discouraged at their current lack of perfection but must “go on to perfection” by learning from Christ how to be mature. God the Father, as a loving, compassionate parent, knows our fragile frame (Psalm 103:14) and promises to pick us up when we have fallen.

Psalm 37:22-24 (AMP) For such as our blessed of God [His called-out saints] shall [in the end] inherit the earth, but they are cursed of Him shall be cut off. The steps of a [good] man are directed and established by the Lord when He delights in his way [and He busies Himself with his every step]. Though he falls, he shall not be utterly cast down, for the Lord grasps his hand in support and uphold him.

David's son Solomon amplifies this concept in Proverbs 24:16, declaring that a righteous man falls seven times and rises again, but the wicked are overthrown by calamity. God absolutely knew when He called each and every one of us that we were severely damaged goods, tainted by sin, needing repair and rehabilitation. Consider how Paul had to bring some of the smug, self-righteous Corinthians to their senses.

I Corinthians 6:9-11 (AMP) Do you not know that the unrighteousness and the wrongdoers will not inherit or have any share in the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived (misled): neither the impure and immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor those who participate in homosexuality, nor cheats (swindlers and thieves), nor greedy graspers, nor drunkards, nor foulmouthed revilers, and slanderers, or extortioners and robbers will inherit or have any share in the kingdom of God. And such some of you were [once]. [Notice how he puts this in the past tense.] But you were washed clean (purified by a complete atonement for sin and made free from the guilt of sin, and you were consecrated (set apart, hallowed), and you were justified [pronounced righteous, by trusting in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the [shaping power] of the [Holy] Spirit of our God.

The late Dr. Herman Hoeh used to warn that the evil practiced in the world is sadly also practiced by members of God's church. The description of our calling in I Corinthians 1:26-29 as the foolish, base, weak, deplorable, and contemptible—or as one minister once referred to as the cream of the crud—was deliberately done by God Almighty in order to puncture the conceit of the pompous and arrogant in order that no mortal man could ever boast in the presence of God. Mark Schindler has been giving an insightful, sobering series of messages, "Grace, Mercy, and Favor," in which he cautions that God's people should adopt the attitude of the beaten Publican, not forgetting their past sinful lives, regardless of the privileges they have received from God, modeling their attitudes toward those uncalled on God's own trait of patient longsuffering.

God wants His people also to understand that although they may have been called in a weak, foolish, base, contemptible, or deplorable state, that,

nevertheless, through His rigorous sanctification process, they were certainly not supposed to remain that way. Reviewing that lengthy list of disgusting, immoral behaviors Paul listed in I Corinthians 1:9-11, including many addictive behaviors from alcoholism to gluttony to anger to fornication to homosexuality, after which he says, “And such some of you were [once]” we can extrapolate that each and every one of us in the greater church of God has battled and is in varying degrees still battling an addictive sinful habit or temptation. We remember that the apostle Paul, after many years in the conversion process, still finds himself overwhelmed by sinful thoughts and behaviors which threaten to up-end him (Romans 7:15-23) which Paul attributes to the law of sin and death in his flesh warring against the holy and spiritual law of God.

But, in the next chapter, the apostle Paul gives all of God’s saints, soldiers of Jesus Christ, marching orders to wage a continual day by day battle against the carnal pulls, stating,

Romans 8:13 (AMP) For if you live according to [the dictates of] the flesh, you will surely die. But if through the power of the [Holy] Spirit you are [habitually] putting to death (making extinct, deadening) the [evil] deeds prompted by the body, you shall [really and genuinely] live forever.

In I Corinthians 15, Paul declares that, as a soldier of Jesus Christ, in his mortal combat with the flesh, he indeed dies daily. Please turn over to II Corinthians 10:3-5.

II Corinthians 10:3-5 (AMP) For though we walk (live) in the flesh, we are not carrying on our warfare according to the flesh and using mere human weapons. For the weapons of our warfare are not physical [weapons of flesh and blood] but they are mighty before God for the overthrow and destruction of strongholds, [inasmuch as we] refute arguments and theories and reasonings and every proud and lofty thing that sets itself against the [true] knowledge of God; and we lead every thought and purpose away captive into the obedience of Christ (the Messiah, the Anointed One).

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In his article, “How Do I Take Every Thought Captive?” Steve Lenk asserts that “taking every thought into captivity implies that we have a choice—a chance to do something about all thoughts not pleasing to God before they enter our hearts and become a part of us! In II Peter 3:6, we learn His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness, but that we need to add to faith, goodness, knowledge, and self-control.”

In his sermon/article “The Fruits of the Spirit, Part 11: Self-Control,” Greg Ebie asserts that “the Spirit of God has given us everything we need. With God’s power at work in us we lack nothing. However, Peter didn’t stop there; he says because we have everything we need we are to work at it with all our strength; we don’t give up but continue to work at our faith to grow and mature more and more. God gives us what we need, but we must apply it! Having God’s holy spirit and using God’s holy spirit are two entirely different things.” Greg Ebie insists that “If we are going to have self-control, it will require discipline and effort our part. Self-control is not automatic; we have to work at it!”

Some may think it contradictory that if self-control is the fruit of the Spirit that *hard work and discipline* should be required. In this respect, God’s Holy Spirit could be likened to an athletic appliance like free weights or resistance bands. If they are not used, one could expect muscles to atrophy or lose strength.

The apostle Paul evidently needed to coax Timothy to move his supply of Holy Spirit out of a kind of dormancy or idling mode, as we read in II Timothy 1:6-7 where in the King James version, Paul instructs Timothy to stir up the gift of God, which if we believed in the doctrine of the Trinity would imply that the third person of the Trinity is a kind of spiritual Rip Van Winkle. The Amplified Bible uses a different metaphor.

II Timothy 1:6-7 (AMP) That is why I would remind you to stir up (rekindle the embers of, fan the flame of, and keep burning) the [gracious] gift of God, [the inner fire] that is in you by means of the laying on of my hands [with those of the elders at your ordination]. For God did not give us a spirit of timidity (of cowardice, of craven

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and cringing and fawning fear), but [He has given us a spirit] of power and of love and of calm and well- balanced mind and discipline and self-control.

In short, everything we could ask for to aid us in overcoming and mortifying our carnal nature.

Paul warns that it is possible to quench or extinguish the gift of the Holy Spirit, as he states in I Thessalonians 5:19, “Do not quench (suppress or subdue) the Holy Spirit”; again reminding us that if we adhered to the doctrine of the Trinity, the third person of the Godhead seems to be quite fragile and easily intimidated. Realistically, however, God removes His power or mind from anyone who does not want it, turning him over to a reprobate mind.”

Gary Petty makes the compelling case that without God’s Holy Spirit, we are all insane (perhaps not bad enough to be confined—which in California is no longer an issue) but we are not smart enough to figure that out.

So, God gives His mind so that we can listen to His thoughts (through Scripture, meditation, study, and preaching) so that we can start to listen to those thoughts, and say, “Yes, those are the thoughts I want. I want those thoughts to be my thoughts.”

Many of us in our later lives have looked back, realizing that what we thought were the true desires of our heart were not really the desires of our heart. Jeremiah 10:23 affirms, “O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps.” He implies that, without God, man’s plans always end in failure and ruin.

Many individuals have come to realize this important lesson. A Swedish composer once told conductor Herbert Blomstedt, “I have learned over the years sometimes to have more gratitude for the things that did not come my way. Often the reason they do not come our way is because something better is around the corner.” A former dean of faculty at a Midwestern university once stated, “Every experience, good or bad, when properly evaluated, can become the starting point for greater growth.”

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In my April 25, 2015 message, “Never Again: God’s Purpose for Bad Memories,” I emphasized that after God has forgiven our sins, He has, nevertheless, allowed residual memories of these transgressions to remain in our memory banks, evidently to aid us in the overcoming and sanctification process. Three major purposes God may have for our retaining the trace memories of our former sins are 1.) we learn to love God’s holy law by experiencing the painful consequences and disastrous effects of lawlessness, developing a hatred or abhorrence for sin, in order that we purpose to never again repeat that experience; 2.) the sins serve as a thorn in our flesh to keep us humble and far away from pride; and 3.) We experience the ache of these trace memories in order to help others now, or in the Millennium, who suffer from the same weaknesses as we have experienced throughout our lives.

Whatever Satan has intended for bad God has purposed for good. Throughout God’s church are people who are suffering from afflictions and weaknesses, and likewise people who are valiantly struggling with success to overcome.

Several months ago, I contacted a member of the Phoenix congregation, Debbie, who was on the prayer list struggling with insulin resistance or high blood sugar problems (Type 2 Diabetes), which had threatened the vision of her one good eye. Though our situations were not identical, they were highly parallel and required similar steps to combat dire threats. I have been battling Type 2 diabetes since 2010, escaping the label diabetic for four years—before that, by carefully watching my p’s and q’s on diet, but then getting careless and succumbing to the diagnosis by two consecutive blood tests in which the A1C or blood sugar levels were too high.

When I moved to California in 2013, my physician, who is my daughter-in-law’s cousin (my protective niece-in law), decided to monitor my blood sugar every two months detecting ups and downs and dutifully prescribing increasing doses of metformin. In January of this year, about the same time I discovered the work of nephrologist turned fasting consultant Dr. Jason Fung of Toronto, my doctor gave me my regular bi-monthly A1C test, this time warning me if I could not get those numbers down, she would put me on insulin, which despite the assurances of the medical community, has proven to be a deadly pancreas and a liver killer, actually exacerbating the gravity of Type 2 Diabetes. Because Debbie had previously faced a similar crisis and

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had contacted a doctor who put her on a strict Keto diet, we began comparing notes, and I decided to combine a modified Keto diet with a regimen of intermittent fasting with three 36-hour fasts per week.

At the follow up in February for the A1C (blood test) one month later, my doctor said, “Whatever you are doing, keep doing it.” Last week, Julie and I traveled to Arizona where we had the opportunity to compare notes with each Debbie regarding our medical progress, learning we both celebrated similar success in terms of a significant lowering of blood sugar and weight loss with our respective physicians. For me, Debbie has served as an inspiration of rigorous overcoming and character-building skills, the kind desperately needed at this time throughout the greater church of God.

I find it intriguing that Jesus’ brother James, in the same context of praying for healing, includes a focus on confessing faults in a sense quite different from the notion of confessing embarrassing peccadillos in a confined booth with a priest. In James 5:16 we read, “Confess to one another therefore your faults (your slips, false steps, your sins) and pray [also] for one another, that you may be healed and restored [to a spiritual tone of mind and heart]. The earnest (heartfelt, continued) prayer of a righteous man makes tremendous power available [dynamic in its working]. George Clark, in his article “Stir up the Gift of God” described prayer as the paddle we use to stir up the gift of God’s Holy Spirit.

In this statement on confession and healing, James seems to be referring to the welcome encouragement one suffering member of God’s Family can share with another member to aid in bolstering motivation to overcome a shared common problem, affliction, or trial. There is an old Yiddish proverb which is translated “The only whole heart is a broken heart.” David, in his psalm of repentance says,

Psalm 51:16-17 (AMP) For You delight not in sacrifice, or else I would give it; You find no pleasure in burnt offering, my sacrifice [the sacrifice acceptable] to God is a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart [broken down with sorrow for sin and humbly and thoroughly penitent], such God, You will not despise.

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John Ritenbaugh, in his December 1998 Personal, “The Fruit of Self-Control.” asserts that surrender and self-control are inseparable companions in the command to present our bodies a living sacrifice and renew the spirit of our mind. The first step to attaining self-control is to confess to Almighty God that we absolutely cannot overcome on our own, but desperately need His Spirit to keep His holy law. Greg Ebie maintains that self-control or temperance is not an inner strength or a stoical mastery of self; self-control is the strength of the Spirit working in and through our lives.

Milenko Van der Staal, in his insightful, somewhat provocative article, “Is It Even Possible to Keep My Thoughts Pure?” writes, “The problem is, we can’t always control what turns up in our thoughts. Feelings, pictures, and words flash up without prior notice. These thoughts can be good or bad, positive, negative, constructive, or destructive. Sometimes we can be amazed, even shocked at what turns up. Where do these thoughts have their source? What does God think about them; does He judge me based on these involuntary impulses? Being tempted,” he continues,” is not the same as committing sin, but for it to stay that way we have to take up a battle against the lusts that can become visible. The entire Bible is a call to action to resist the enemy, which in the New Covenant is the sin that dwells in our flesh.”

In about two weeks we will be keeping the Passover, reading about Jesus’ promise to send the Parakletos (the Comforter, Counselor, Advocate, Intercessor, Strengtheners, Standby) or the Holy Spirit—the spirit of truth and the mind of Christ—to convict sin and steer us to righteousness (uprightness of heart and right standing with God and about judgment) (John 16:7-8 and I Corinthians 2: 16). With the help and guidance of God’s Spirit, we get strength, not only to endure temptation, but also to mortify the carnal flesh, defeating the enemy (Romans 8:13).

As long as we continue to fight, we have not sinned! We live our entire lives as overcomers and soldiers of Jesus Christ. There is no condemnation for those involuntary thoughts which all of God’s people experience. The apostle Paul, in Romans 7, describes a kind of three-way stand-off between God, the flesh, and the mind impregnated with a dab of Holy Spirit, but vacillating between a life sustaining spiritual choice and a mortal fleshly choice leading to death. Let us take a look at that conflict.

Romans 7:14-16 (AMP) We know that the Law is spiritual; but I am a creature of the flesh [carnal, unspiritual], having been sold into slavery under [the control of] sin. For I do not understand my own actions [I am baffled, bewildered]. I do not practice or accomplish what I wish, but I do the very thing I loathe [which my moral instinct condemns]. Now if I do [habitually] which is contrary to my desire, [that means that] I acknowledge and agree that the law is good (morally excellent) and that I take sides with it.

Milenko Van der Staal explains that temptation morphs into sin when the “I” of the mind agrees with the “I” of the flesh and rejects God’s call. As Jesus’ brother James clarifies in James 1:14-16, the desire must conceive to give birth to sin. The conception occurs, according to Van Der Staal, when the mind agrees with the flesh. The two “I’s” (the compromised mind) and the fleshly desires, and the thought that started out as an involuntary impulse—a temptation—becomes a sin often followed up by words and deeds.

When we consider the apostle Paul’s dilemma in Romans between the “me” that is, my mind, or the will to serve God, then we as God’s called-out ones can ask: who is the real “me” or who is the “real” me? We face the same choice as our original Mom and Dad—to choose to consume fruit from the Tree of Life or from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil—good mixed with evil, like ice cream and Sani-Flush, is deadly. As our forebears on the Sinai were offered a choice of good or evil, life or death, we have been given the same choice every minute of our lives.

Deuteronomy 30:15-16 (AMP) See, I have set before you this day life and good, and death and evil. [If you obey the commandments of the Lord which] I command you today to love your God, to keep His commandments and His statutes and His ordinances, then you shall live and multiply, and the Lord Your God will bless you in the land into which you go to possess.

With God’s Holy Spirit, it is possible to grow in spiritual strength and deaden the carnal impulses incrementally if we are willing to apply the effort, realizing that God will be doing the lion’s share of the lifting.

Our Part in the Sanctification Process (Part Ten): Cultivating the Fruit of Self Control by David F. Maas (<https://www.cgg.org>)

To conclude, please turn to Hebrews 4:15, describing the achievements of our Trailblazer:

Hebrews 4:15 (AMP) For we do not have a High Priest Who is unable to understand and sympathize and have a shared feeling with our weaknesses and infirmities and liability to the assaults of temptation, but One Who has been tempted in every respect as we are, yet without sinning.