

# **THE RENEWED MIND:**

## Words and Images

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## THE RENEWED MIND: WORDS AND IMAGES

The humorist Jeanne Robertson has entertained her audiences with her stories about her late husband, whom she lovingly called “Left Brain.” He was logical and analytical but often clueless about what was going on. She draws much laughter by describing how differently she and her husband thought. Jeanne tells a story about the difference between how she as a “right-brained” person and her husband LB (Left Brain) hang a picture. He meticulously gets out his tape measure and measures from the ceiling, the floor, the surrounding pictures, and then gets his pencil and makes a mark. Next he pulls out his level to make sure the picture is straight once he hangs it. When he gets ready to put the nail in the wall, he can’t find the mark he has made. So he repeats the process.

She is frustrated by how long this takes. As a “right-brained person,” she just looks at the picture and when it looks right says, “Hang it there.” If it still doesn’t seem right after he hangs it, she tells him to either raise it or lower it. Of course, this lack of precision frustrates her “left-brained” husband.

The common belief that people are either “right-brained” or “left-brained” came about after a neuropsychologist and two neurophysiologists shared the Nobel Prize in 1981 for their “brain lateralization” research. It was widely thought that those who are “right-brained” primarily utilize the side of the brain controlling intuition, imagination, emotions and that which is artistic and musical, while “left-brained” individuals primarily utilize the half of the brain controlling logical, systematic and analytical thinking, numbers, mathematics and language. Since that time, studies have indicated that left versus right brain dichotomy is not correct and that all individuals utilize the entire brain. In a recent article on the Harvard Health Blog under the title “Right-brain/left-brain, right?” Robert Shmerling MD, a senior faculty editor at Harvard Publishing makes this observation:

...the evidence discounting the left/right brain concept is accumulating. According to a 2013 study from the University of Utah, brain scans demonstrate that activity is similar on both sides of the brain regardless of one’s personality.

They looked at the brain scans of more than 1,000 young people between the ages of 7 and 29 and divided different areas of the brain into 7,000 regions to determine whether one side of the brain was more active or connected than the other side. No evidence of “sidedness” was found. The authors concluded that the notion of some people being more left-brained or right-brained is more a figure of speech than an anatomically accurate description.

Of course, a person who accepts the dichotomy between “left-brained” and “right-brained” and is convinced that they are “right-brained” may think that these “left-brained” studies were done just to deny the obvious. They could look at the so-called scientific evidence and just consider it a typical “left-brained” way of thinking.

For many years it was commonly accepted that the brain was static. There was one part of the brain that controlled speech, another for movement, another for spatial recognition of objects, etc. If the part of the brain controlling a particular function was damaged, an individual would

simply lose that function. Nothing could be done. However, a relatively new field of brain research called “neuroplasticity” has demonstrated the brain to be much more adaptable than previously believed. This marvelous workmanship of God is so much greater than anyone could have imagined. When one part of the brain is damaged, other parts of the brain can take over the function that has been lost. Brain scientists and doctors are learning how to reprogram the brain to compensate for the damaged area.

The idea of left-brained versus right-brained came about because of the realization that there are different distinct ways of thinking. While these ways of thinking are not confined to one hemisphere of the brain, it is important that we understand that both words (commonly attributed to the left side of the brain) and images (commonly attributed to the right side of the brain) are powerful aspects of our thinking. Rather than working independently of each other, these two function together.

## THE HEBREW WORD FOR “MIND”

The prophet Isaiah wrote about the stayed or steadfast mind.

Isaiah 26:3:

Thou wilt keep *him* in perfect peace, *whose mind is stayed on thee*: because he trusteth in thee.

This word “mind” is translated from the Hebrew *yetsar*, derived from the verb *yatsar*, meaning “to form or fashion.” The first two occurrences of the verb are used of God forming the body of man out of the dust of the ground.

Genesis 2:7 and 8:

And the LORD God formed [*yatsar*] man *of* the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

And the LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed [*yatsar*].

The same chemical elements in the dirt of the earth are found in mankind. The noun is also used of the body of man.

Psalms 103:14:

For he knoweth our frame [*yetsar*]; he remembereth that we *are* dust.

That part of man that is dust is the body. The verb *yatsar* is also used of the forming of the bodies of the animals from the dust of the ground. God has given different types of bodies to human beings and also to animals, but all are formed out of the ground.

Genesis 2:19:

And out of the ground the LORD God formed [*yatsar*] every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought *them* unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that *was* the name thereof.

The words *yatsar* and *yetsar* are also used of a potter forming a pot.

Isaiah 45:9:

Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker! *Let* the potsherd *strive* with the potsherds of the earth. Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth [*yatsar*] it, What makest thou? or thy work, He hath no hands?

In this instance, the word *yatsar* is used to describe a potter fashioning or molding clay into a pot. The potter decides the size and shape of the pot he desires to form just as God decided the type of body He would form of the dust of the ground.

Isaiah 29:16:

Surely your turning of things upside down shall be esteemed as the potter's clay: for shall the work say of him that made it, He made me not? or shall the thing framed [*yetsar*] say of him that framed [*yatsar*] it, He had no understanding?

The New International Version renders this verse: "You turn things upside down, as if the potter were thought to be like the clay! Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, 'He did not make me'? Can the pot say of the potter, 'He knows nothing'?"

These words are also used in a third way—of a craftsman forming an idol out of clay, wood, stone or metal.

Habakkuk 2:18:

What profiteth the graven image that the maker thereof hath graven it; the molten image, and a teacher of lies, that the maker [*yatsar*] of his work [*yetsar*] trusteth therein, to make dumb idols?

The expression "maker of his work" is translated in the center margin of the King James Version as "the fashioner of his fashion." The New Revised Standard Version renders this verse: "What use is an idol once its maker has shaped it—a cast image, a teacher of lies? For its maker trusts in what has been made, though the product is only an idol that cannot speak!" Note that the one who forms the idol puts his trust in what he himself has formed.

Isaiah 44:9–12:

They that make [*yatsar*] a graven image *are* all of them vanity; and their delectable things shall not profit; and they *are* their own witnesses; they see not, nor know; that they may be ashamed.

Who hath formed [*yatsar*] a god, or molten a graven image *that* is profitable for nothing?

Behold, all his fellows shall be ashamed: and the workmen, they *are* of men: let them all be gathered together, let them stand up; *yet* they shall fear, *and* they shall be ashamed together.

The smith with the tongs both worketh in the coals, and fashioneth [*yatsar*] it with hammers, and worketh it with the strength of his arms: yea, he is hungry, and his strength faileth: he drinketh no water, and is faint.

This man, who is forming an idol out of metal, is committed to his work even though it has no real profit. He doesn't take time to eat and drink but pushes himself to the point of exhaustion.

Verses 13–20:

The carpenter stretcheth out *his* rule; he marketh it out with a line; he fitteth it with planes, and he marketh it out with the compass, and maketh it after the figure of a man, according to the beauty of a man; that it may remain in the house.

He heweth him down cedars, and taketh the cypress and the oak, which he strengtheneth for himself among the trees of the forest: he planteth an ash, and the rain doth nourish *it*.

Then shall it be for a man to burn: for he will take thereof, and warm himself; yea, he kindleth *it*, and baketh bread; yea, he maketh a god, and worshippeth *it*; he maketh it a graven image, and falleth down thereto.

He burneth part thereof in the fire; with part thereof he eateth flesh; he roasteth roast, and is satisfied: yea, he warmeth *himself*, and saith, Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire:

And the residue thereof he maketh a god, *even* his graven image: he falleth down unto it, and worshippeth *it*, and prayeth unto it, and saith, Deliver me; for thou *art* my god.

They have not known nor understood: for he hath shut their eyes, that they cannot see; *and* their hearts, that they cannot understand.

And none considereth in his heart, neither *is there* knowledge nor understanding to say, I have burned part of it in the fire; yea, also I have baken bread upon the coals thereof; I have roasted flesh, and eaten *it*: and shall I make the residue thereof an abomination? shall I fall down to the stock of a tree?

He feedeth on ashes: a deceived heart hath turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, *Is there* not a lie in my right hand?

These verses expose the folly of idolatry. This “left-brained” carpenter meticulously measures the wood from which he will frame his idol. Yet he fails to realize the absurdity of what he is doing. Some of the wood from the same tree used to make an idol is burned in the fire to warm the idolater and to roast his food. God sets the record straight as to who formed whom. Man didn't form God, but God formed man. Therefore all idolatry is a lie. What man fashions or forms are not really gods.

Verses 21 and 24:

Remember these, O Jacob and Israel; for thou *art* my servant: I have formed [*yatsar*] thee; thou *art* my servant: O Israel, thou shalt not be forgotten of me.

Thus saith the LORD, thy redeemer, and he that formed [*yatsar*] thee from the womb, I *am* the LORD that maketh all *things*; that stretcheth forth the heavens alone; that spreadeth abroad the earth by myself.

Thus far we've seen the words *yatsar* and *yetser* used of God forming the body of man, a potter fashioning a clay pot, and a smith framing an idol out of wood, stone or metal. These words are also used in a fourth way that is most pertinent to our study—of man fashioning

thoughts in his mind. In Isaiah 26:3 *yetser* is rendered “mind.” When applied to the mind, this word means “thoughts, intents, imaginations, plans or purposes.” It is used of all that which is formed in the mind. The mind thinks in both words and images. Don’t these images of a potter fashioning a pot out of clay and a man fashioning an idol vividly illustrate how we form thoughts in our minds?

Genesis 6:5:

And GOD saw that the wickedness of man *was* great in the earth, and *that* every imagination [*yetser*] of the thoughts of his heart *was* only evil continually.

Genesis 8:21:

And the LORD smelled a sweet savour; and the LORD said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man’s sake; for the imagination [*yetser*] of man’s heart *is* evil from his youth...

The word “imagination” here simply means “the framing or forming of thoughts.” Just as God chose the particular body He would form out of the dust of the ground, the potter decides what type of pot he wants to form and an idol-maker determines what his idol will look like, so we choose what we put into our minds. We are responsible for what we think. Man is continually framing the thoughts—both words and images—he believes and acts upon. In these verses the framing of the thoughts of man’s heart was only evil because God wasn’t central in his thinking.

Psalms 10:4:

The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek *after God*: God *is* not in all his thoughts.

The New English Bible translates this verse, “Arrogant as he is, he scorns the Lord and leaves no place for God in all his schemes.” Man turns from the true God and fashions idolatrous thoughts in his heart.

Ezekiel 14:3:

Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their heart, and put the stumblingblock of their iniquity before their face: should I be inquired of at all by them?

Note that the true place where the idols were set up was not upon hills, on an altar or in temples, but in their hearts. Man’s religions normally begin with the worship of idols and then over time develop into philosophy and metaphysics. Images are replaced with intellect. The Greek philosophers, for instance, claimed that they merely intellectualized the idols that had existed in Egypt and Babylon, and then found their way into Greece. In *The History of Christianity*, Edward Gibbon writes: “...the three archival or original principles were represented in the Platonic system as three gods, united with each other by a mysterious and ineffable generation.” This would later have a profound influence on the formulation of the doctrine of the trinity in Christianity.

Thus man not only forms idols of wood, clay, stone or metal but also fashions his own thoughts.

Deuteronomy 31:19–21:

Now therefore write ye this song for you, and teach it the children of Israel: put it in their mouths, that this song may be a witness for me against the children of Israel.

For when I shall have brought them into the land which I sware unto their fathers, that floweth with milk and honey; and they shall have eaten and filled themselves, and waxen fat; then will they turn unto other gods, and serve them, and provoke me, and break my covenant.

And it shall come to pass, when many evils and troubles are befallen them, that this song shall testify against them as a witness; for it shall not be forgotten out of the mouths of their seed: for I know their imagination [*yetser*] which they go about, even now, before I have brought them into the land which I sware.

God foretold that when the children of Israel would come into the land and enjoy its great abundance they would forget about the true God who had brought them into the land and instead turn to other gods. Moses had warned the people of the danger of thinking that they themselves were responsible for this abundance.

Deuteronomy 8:7–18:

For the LORD thy God bringeth thee into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills;

A land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig trees, and pomegranates; a land of oil olive, and honey;

A land wherein thou shalt eat bread without scarceness, thou shalt not lack any *thing* in it; a land whose stones *are* iron, and out of whose hills thou mayest dig brass.

When thou hast eaten and art full, then thou shalt bless the LORD thy God for the good land which he hath given thee.

Beware that thou forget not the LORD thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes, which I command thee this day:

Lest *when* thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt *therein*;

And *when* thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied;

Then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the LORD thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage;

Who led thee through that great and terrible wilderness, *wherein were* fiery serpents, and scorpions, and drought, where *there was* no water; who brought thee forth water out of the rock of flint;

Who fed thee in the wilderness with manna, which thy fathers knew not, that he might humble thee, and that he might prove thee, to do thee good at thy latter end; And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of *mine* hand hath gotten me this wealth.

But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for *it is* he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as *it is* this day.



People have to be extremely watchful that prosperity doesn't degenerate into extravagance, luxury and slothfulness that turn their heart away from God. The vast majority of people do not recognize God as the source of their sufficiency. Many who live with great abundance have forgotten where their wealth comes from. They may claim it is the result of their hard work. Some think that the source of their income is their job, others believe it is their investments, still others believe that the government is their source. Let's, however, consider David's attitude toward material things. We will read a prayer he made to God.

I Chronicles 29:10–18:

Wherefore David blessed the Lord before all the congregation: and David said, Blessed *be* thou, LORD God of Israel our father, for ever and ever.

Thine, O Lord, *is* the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all *that is* in the heaven and in the earth *is thine*; *thine is* the kingdom, O LORD, and thou art exalted as head above all.

Both riches and honour *come* of thee, and thou reignest over all; and in thine hand *is* power and might; and in thine hand *it is* to make great, and to give strength unto all.

Now therefore, our God, we thank thee, and praise thy glorious name.

But who *am* I, and what *is* my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things *come* of thee, and of thine own have we given thee.

For we *are* strangers before thee, and sojourners, as *were* all our fathers: our days on the earth *are* as a shadow, and *there is* none abiding.

O LORD our God, all this store that we have prepared to build thee an house for thine holy name *cometh* of thine hand, and *is* all thine own.

I know also, my God, that thou triest the heart, and hast pleasure in uprightness. As for me, in the uprightness of mine heart I have willingly offered all these things: and now have I seen with joy thy people, which are present here, to offer willingly unto thee.

O LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, our fathers, keep this for ever in the imagination [*yets'er*] of the thoughts of the heart of thy people, and prepare their heart unto thee.

David acknowledges that everything he and the people had given toward the building of the temple had come from God and belonged to Him. He recognized that there was not a single thing they gave that God has not first given to them. His prayer was that God would keep this attitude of humility in “the imagination [*yets'er*] of the thoughts of the heart of thy people.” David prayed that as the people fashioned the thoughts of their heart they would remember that it was God who had provided everything for them and that He was the One to be praised. The heart is the innermost part of the mind. David's desire was not that these thoughts would be formed but then would be easily forgotten, but that they would be built in the depth of the people's lives.

David himself gave an enormous amount of his own wealth and inspired the people of Israel to also give abundantly so that Solomon, the son of David, could build a magnificent temple for the Lord God. Let's read something Solomon wrote many years later.

Proverbs 4:23:

Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it *are* the issues of life.

The heart as the innermost part of the mind includes our character, will, emotions, and desires. The New Living Translation renders this verse: “Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life.” We guard our hearts by choosing what thoughts are framed in our minds. Thus the New Century Version translates the verse: “Be careful what you think, because your thoughts run your life.”

We read in Isaiah about the craftsman who didn’t take the time to eat or drink because he was focused on forming an idol. Shouldn’t we be focused on the thoughts we are framing in our minds? Where our heart is today is the result of what we have chosen to fashion or frame in our minds.

Isaiah 26:3:

Thou wilt keep *him* in perfect peace, *whose* mind [*yetsar*] is stayed on *thee*: because he trusteth in thee.

From a study of the words *yatsar* and *yetsar*, and in the context here, the word “mind” refers to the thoughts—words and images—that a man forms or fashions in his mind, one thought at a time, which build the whole mind. The mind that is stayed or steadfast is one which trusts in God rather than what man makes or does. Such a mind does not waver from one thing to another, but it stays focused on God.

## THE GREEK WORDS FOR “MIND”

The foundational verse for our study on the renewed mind is found in the Book of Romans.

Romans 12:2:

And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what *is* that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

The Greek word for “mind” in this verse is *nous*. It refers to “the mind, comprising alike the faculties of perceiving and understanding and those of feeling, judging, determining.” (*Enhanced Strong’s Lexicon*). Walter J. Cummins observes: “The *nous* is the organ of mental perception which receives information either from the five senses or from the spirit. The *nous* is that part of man which collects data and, through the reasoning processes, makes decisions.”

Another Greek word sometimes rendered “mind” is *phronēma*.

Philippians 2:5:

Let this mind [*phronēma*] be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.

The *Enhanced Strong’s Lexicon* defines *phronēma* as “what one has in the mind, the thoughts and purposes.” Walter Cummins notes: “The word *phronēma* is used of the thoughts, feelings, and desires of the mind (*nous*).”

Romans 8:6 and 7:

For to be carnally minded [*phronēma*] is death; but to be spiritually minded [*phronēma*] is life and peace.

Because the carnal mind [*phronēma*] is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.

The New Revised Standard Version translates verse 6: “To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.” We have a choice. What we fashion or frame in our minds can either be according to the flesh or according to the spirit. The thoughts of the flesh bring death and are enmity against God, while the thoughts of the spirit bring life and peace. We are thus choosing death or life by our decisions of what we will hold in our minds. Let’s remember Moses’ warning to the children of Israel.

Deuteronomy 30:19:

I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, *that* I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live.

As born-again ones we have passed from death unto life. So we have already chosen spiritual life. The word “death” in Romans 8:6 is not referring to spiritual death but to the misery of a lifestyle of sin. *Thayer’s Greek Lexicon* notes about the Greek word translated “death”: “In the widest sense, death comprises all the miseries arising from sin.” It carries the same meaning as when the father said of his son in the parable of the forgiving father, “For this my son was dead, and is alive again” (Luke 15:24). Although he was not physically dead, living in hog country apart from his father was truly death. So we choose life by choosing to think thoughts of the spirit rather than the flesh.

Walter Cummins translates Romans 8:6 and 7: “So the thinking of the flesh is death, but the thinking of the spirit is life and peace, because the thinking of the flesh is hostility against God, for it is not in subjection to the law of God, nor can it be.” Here we have a similar truth to what we read earlier in Genesis 6:5: “...every imagination [*yetser*] of the thoughts of his heart *was* only evil continually.”

## A SPIRITUAL METAMORPHOSIS

Let’s return to the verse from the Book of Romans.

Romans 12:2:

And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what *is* that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

The word “conformed” means “to be shaped by” or “to be patterned after.” The Greek verb *suschēmatisō* (we get the English word “scheme” from the root of this word) could be either in the passive or middle voice, and this is reflected in different translations. If passive, in which the subject (“you”) is being acted upon, it would read as it does in the King James translation. Another translation that communicates this is the Phillips: “Don’t let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould.”

If the word is understood as being in the middle voice, in which the subject (“you”) is acting on or for itself, it would read “don’t conform yourself.” The Message translation renders it as a

middle voice: “Don’t become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking.” Goodspeed reads: “You must not adopt the customs of this world...”

Since the particular form of the word in Greek doesn’t let us know whether it should be translated as a passive or middle, we must consider how that word is used in the verse to determine which is a better translation. Here either translating it as passive or as middle voice would both be equally valid ways of understanding the verse. The same Greek word occurs one other time in the New Testament.

I Peter 1:14:

As obedient children, not fashioning [*suschēmatisō*] yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance.

Again it can be passive or middle. Being conformed or conforming ourselves to this world is the same as fashioning ourselves or being fashioned according to our former lusts.

Ephesians 2:2 and 3:

Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience:

Among whom also we all had our conversation [manner of life] in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.

The ruler of the power of the air is always scheming against us to fashion us so that we will live by the ways of the world and fulfill the lusts of the flesh and mind. In verse 3 we find a third Greek word translated “mind.” This word *dianoia* comes from *nous*. It refers to “the psychological faculty of understanding, reasoning, thinking, and deciding” (Louw-Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*). People may pride themselves on their intellectual brilliance, but God has an entirely different perspective.

Ephesians 4:17:

This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind [*nous*].

The International Standard Version reads: “Therefore, I tell you and insist on in the Lord not to live any longer like the Gentiles live, thinking worthless thoughts.” We read that the idol formed by a craftsman was profitable for nothing. So are the thoughts people fashion in their minds apart from God. They are worthless. This is true of all our thoughts independent of God.

Verse 18:

Having the understanding [*dianoia*] darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart.

The word “blindness” in this verse should be rendered “hardness.” Their hearts are hardened so that they cannot receive the things of God. The New Living Translation reads: “Their minds

are full of darkness; they wander far from the life God gives because they have closed their minds and hardened their hearts against him.”

Instead of being conformed to the world, we are to be transformed. The word “transformed” in this verse is a rendering of the Greek verb *metamorphoō*. We get the English word “metamorphosis” from this Greek word. Normally, when we used this word, we are speaking of the biological change of an insect, such as a caterpillar into a butterfly, or an amphibian, such as a tadpole into a frog. We look upon caterpillars as disgusting little pests that damage plants we are growing in our gardens, but butterflies are viewed as beautiful, graceful creatures. We would never consider them as caterpillars with wings, for in the process of metamorphosis something magnificent occurs.

The English word “metamorphosis” has a second meaning. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, it can mean “a change of the form or nature of a thing or person into a completely different one, by natural or supernatural means.” This meaning corresponds to how the verb *metamorphoō* is used in the Greek New Testament. It occurs twice in the Gospels of Jesus’ outward appearance being changed.

Matthew 17:2:

And was transfigured [*metamorphoō*] before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light.

Mark 9:2:

And after six days Jesus taketh *with him* Peter, and James, and John, and leadeth them up into a high mountain apart by themselves: and he was transfigured [*metamorphoō*] before them.

This verb is always used in New Testament in the passive voice. The one being transformed or transfigured is acted upon by someone or something else. In the case of Jesus, his outward appearance was changed by God. In this instance, the word *metamorphoō* is in the aorist tense indicating something that was done once. It was not an ongoing process. There is another Gospel record of this event. Luke describes the same event without using the word *metamorphoō*.

Luke 9:28 and 29:

And it came to pass about an eight days after these sayings, he took Peter and John and James, and went up into a mountain to pray.

And as he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment *was* white *and* glistering.

Even though Jesus was transfigured by God, who caused his face to shine and made his raiment dazzling white, this was a result of an action Jesus chose to take—praying to God.

In Romans 12:2 *metamorphoō* in the passive voice indicates that we are not the ones transforming ourselves. The verb is in the present tense, meaning that it is an ongoing process. We are continuously being transformed by God, but this is not independent of what we do.

This transformation takes place by the renewing of our minds. *Strong’s Enhanced Lexicon* defines the Greek word *anakainōsis*, rendered here “renewing” as a “complete change for the better” Some Bible teachers understand this to mean that God transforms us by renewing our minds for us, while others teach that we are the ones who renew our own minds. The suffix

“-sis” indicates action (A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament*), but who is doing the action? Since the Greek word translated “renewing” is a noun (not having active, middle or passive voice), the grammar doesn’t enable us to determine who is doing the renewing. The corresponding verb form of this same word, however, is passive in its two occurrences in the Greek New Testament.

II Corinthians 4:16:

For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward *man* is renewed [*anakainoō*] day by day.

We are not renewing the inward man. It is being renewed.

Colossians 3:9 and 10:

Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds;  
And have put on the new *man*, which is renewed [*anakainoō*] in knowledge after the image of him that created him.

Since *anakainoō* is in the passive voice, the indication is that the one putting on the new man is not doing the renewing himself.

## PUTTING OFF AND PUTTING ON

The Greek words rendered “put off” and “put on” in these verses are in the middle voice, which indicates that the subject (“you”) did the putting off and putting on. In this verse, the putting on is something we have already done. Let’s read Colossians 3:9 and 10 in the International Standard Version: “Do not lie to one another, for you have stripped off the old man with its practices and have clothed yourselves with the new man, which is being renewed into full knowledge according to the image of the one who created it.”

Let’s also consider other verses referring to this putting off and putting on.

Colossians 2:11:

In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ.

When Christ was crucified and died for us, we were circumcised with his circumcision. We put off the body of the flesh (the Greek omits “of the sins”). Part of our complete identification with him is that our old man was crucified with him (Romans 6:6). This putting off was done once and for all.

Galatians 3:27:

For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

The International Standard Version renders this verse: “Indeed, all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.” Our baptism into Christ happened when we were born again. We made a decision to believe in Jesus Christ and at that time clothed ourselves with Christ. We received all Christ is in us. We discarded the old man and put on the

new man. We will never get any more spiritually. The Scriptures, however, tell us that there are things we must put off and things we put on.

Colossians 3:8:

But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth.

Since the Greek word for “put off” is in the imperative mood, we are commanded to do these things. But why are we commanded to do this when we have already put off the old man? As we continue our study, we will understand that there is no contradiction between Colossians 3:8 and 9. Our choice is whether we will be obedient to this command. We can choose to be angry or to speak evil of someone else, or we can choose neither to be angry nor to speak evil.

James 1:21:

Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.

I Peter 2:1 and 2:

Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings,  
As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.

The words “lay aside” in James 1:21 and “laying aside” in I Peter 2:1 are translations of the same Greek word rendered “put off” in Colossians 2:18.

Ephesians 4:22–24:

That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts;  
And be renewed in the spirit of your mind;  
And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

In Colossians 3: 9 and 10, Paul wrote that we have put off the old man and that we have put on the new man. Here he instructs born-again ones to put off the old man and to put on the new man. How can we put off something we have already put off? How can we put on something we have already put on? The putting off and putting on in Colossians refers to what we did when we were born again. The moment one is born again he is no longer identified with Adam but with Jesus Christ. He receives the fullness of Christ, but in his thinking and behavior he is to grow up and become mature. A mature believer is not one who has spent many years attending a church or fellowship. He is not even one who has diligently studied the Scriptures. He is one who has brought his thoughts into alignment with who he is in Christ. The putting off and putting on in Ephesians refers to those thoughts and behaviors that pertain to either the old man or the new man. We choose what thoughts we will hold in our minds. The question we should constantly be asking ourselves is whether a thought belongs to the old man (which we have put off) or to the new man (which we have put on). For instance, if I am really worried about something, is that

new man thinking or old man thinking? It must be old man thinking since we are instructed to be worried for nothing (Philippians 4:6).

II Corinthians 10:3–5:

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh:

(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 exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.

The word “imaginations” here is *logismos*, referring to calculations, deliberations and conclusions arrived at by reasoning. It is to think about something in a detailed and logical manner (what is commonly but erroneously called “left-brained”). In the context of this verse, that reasoning is false and contrary to God’s word. Such reasoning exalts itself against the true knowledge of God, so we cast it down. All human reasoning contrary to revelation from God must be discarded. Just because something seems reasonable to the senses mind does not make it true. Furthermore, revelation from God that seems unreasonable to our human way of thinking is not false. We are to bring each thought to the obedience of Christ. We should ask, “Is this thought in agreement with Christ? Does it fit with all he did on my behalf? Is it in alignment with my complete identification in him?” If it is not, let us cast it down.

When a skilled bricklayer is building a wall, he must inspect each brick to make sure it is not cracked. Otherwise the wall will be weak. He then carefully lays each brick one at a time. This may seem like painstaking work, but it is necessary. How much more needful is it to build our mind one thought at a time. Wrong thoughts weaken our minds and will cause problems in our lives. We inspect each thought to make sure it is sound. Is it in obedience to Christ?

Proverbs 21:22:

A wise *man* scaeth the city of the mighty, and casteth down the strength of the confidence thereof.

The “strength of the confidence” means “the stronghold in which he is confident.” In the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the same word for “stronghold” is used as in II Corinthians 10:4. Brenton’s English translation of the Septuagint is: “A wise man assaults strong cities, and demolishes the fortress in which the ungodly trusted.” The strongholds we demolish are not strong cities but rebellious thoughts we’ve exalted above the word of God in any area of our lives. These rebellious thoughts are false reasoning. Reasoning, however, is not a bad thing if it is in alignment with God’s revelation. Let’s consider a verse from Philippians.

Philippians 4:8:

Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things *are* honest, whatsoever things *are* just, whatsoever things *are* pure, whatsoever things *are* lovely, whatsoever things *are* of good report; if *there be* any virtue, and if *there be* any praise, think on these things.



The word “think” is *logizomai*, the root of *logismos*. Kenneth Wuest translates the last part of this verse: “these things make the subject of careful reflection.” Here we are using the systematic, logical function of our brains to dwell upon these things that are true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent and praiseworthy. The things of the world are normally just the opposite—false, dishonorable, wrong, impure, ugly, disgraceful, second-rate and unworthy of mention. We deliberately choose to put off those things and focus on the things of God. Note that we don’t dwell upon these things because we feel like doing so. Often our mind will gravitate toward things that are not pure and lovely. We may not feel like giving praise to God. I might feel more like complaining. To think on the things of Philippians 4:8 is a deliberate choice we make. We decide to do so regardless of our feelings.

Let’s review verses we read earlier in Ephesians.

Ephesians 4:22–24:

That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts;  
And be renewed in the spirit of your mind;  
And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

We are to put off the old thoughts pertaining to the old man and put on the new thoughts pertaining to the new man. The words “be renewed” in Ephesians 4:23 are a translation of *ananeōō*, which has a similar meaning to *anakainōō*. It is in the passive voice. The spirit of our minds is being renewed as we put off the old man and put on the new man.

I Thessalonians 5:8:

But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation.

Romans 13:12:

The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light.

Colossians 3:12 and 13:

Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering;  
Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also *do ye*.

Each of these verses reveals things we are to put off and others we are to put on.

Romans 12:2:

And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what *is* that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

The New Century Version translates this verse: “Do not be shaped by this world; instead be changed within by a new way of thinking...” The New Living Translation reads: “Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think...” These translations don’t help us to understand whether it is God or ourselves who are doing the renewing. Yet whether the renewing of the mind itself is being done by us or by God, the other sections of scripture we’ve read clearly indicate that we are responsible to change our thinking if this renewing is to take place.

Unlike the transfiguration of Jesus, which was a one-time change in his outward appearance, we are being continuously changed on the inside, and it is manifested on the outside when our minds are renewed. In *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistle to the Romans*, Douglas Moo notes: “‘The renewing of your mind’ is the means by which this transformation takes place...Christians are to adjust their way of thinking about everything in accordance with the ‘newness’ of their life in the Spirit. This ‘re-programming’ of the mind does not take place overnight but is a lifelong process by which our way of thinking is to resemble more and more the way God wants us to think.”

As our minds are renewed, we prove what is that good, acceptable and perfect will of God. Let’s consider the translation from the New International Version: “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.” The word “prove” is active voice and “you” is the subject. You are doing the proving. How do we test and approve God’s will in our lives? We must put on God’s thoughts. We don’t conform ourselves to the world, and we allow ourselves to be transformed by the renewing of our minds.

While it is up to us to put the word of God in our minds, we must realize that it accomplishes in our lives what God desires and produces what He has sent it to do.

Isaiah 55:7–11:

Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

For my thoughts *are* not your thoughts, neither *are* your ways my ways, saith the LORD.

For *as* the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.

For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater:

So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper *in the thing* whereto I sent it.

Here is another illustration that excites our imagination. All of us have seen how green grass and plants sprout up following much snow or rain. God reveals that something similar happens when His word goes forth—it accomplishes what He pleases and brings success where He sends it. How the word works is up to God. We don’t make the word of God work. It does not accomplish that which I please and prosper where I send it, but that which He pleases and where He sends it. Yet I must forsake those thoughts contrary to the will of God and put on the thoughts

of God. I must allow His word, which reveals His ways and thoughts, to be planted in my heart and mind if it is to work.

We read in James 1:21 that we are to receive with meekness the “engrafted” word. It would better be rendered “implanted.” If the word of God is to be implanted in our hearts, we must receive it with meekness. *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* makes this note about receiving with meekness the implanted word: “receive like mellow soil, as it were.” Just as soil has to be prepared to receive the seed of grains and vegetables, so our heart must be prepared to receive the word of God. Earlier we read about those whose minds were darkened and were alienated from the life of God because of the hardness of their hearts (Ephesians 4:18). If our heart is hardened, it will not be receptive and the word cannot grow any more than a seed can take root in soil that is too hard.

Romans 6:17:

But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you.

God wants our hearts—our love and obedience. We were at one time the slaves of sin but we yielded wholehearted obedience to the form, the pattern or mold, of doctrine which was delivered to us. According to the Greek texts, the expression “which was delivered you” is passive and should be translated “to which you were delivered” or “to which you were handed over.” It literally says that you were handed over to the doctrine. By our freedom of will, we bring our lives into subjection and thus allow ourselves to be molded to the right teaching of God’s word regarding the reconciliation which has come to us by Jesus Christ and our identification in him.

That word of God will change our lives if we allow it to. Concerning this verse, Plumer writes: “It is a just and beautiful figure to represent the soul as receiving the exact impress of the system of revealed truth, as the wax receives that of the stamp, or the melted metal, that of the mould into which it is cast.” Our responsibility is to be obedient to the teaching. When I put the thoughts of God into my mind, I am testing and approving His good, acceptable and perfect will. His word is changing me from the inside. By considering other verses related to the renewing of the mind, it appears that this renewing is accomplished by God in partnership with us as we put off our own thoughts and put on his.

In one sense, we all have our history, which usually isn’t that commendable. What we too often carry with us is our old way of thinking about things. For instance, when we experience great financial lack, we may think, “What am I going to do? The bills are overwhelming me and my income is not sufficient to pay them.” We may then try to figure out a plan to meet our needs. Our proper response should be to put off the old man with his negative thinking and put on the new man. Our new way of thinking should be, “My God shall supply all my need according to His riches of glory in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19). I bring my thoughts into captivity to the obedience of Christ. I decide, “I am complete in Christ and all the resources of God are available to me. It doesn’t matter how great my need is. His resources are sufficient.”

If I experience pain in my body, my old way of thinking might be, “What is happening in my body? What if it is cancer? Perhaps it is some other terrible disease. I had better go see the doctor right away.” The new way of thinking is, “Why should I worry about this? I will give this over to God (Philippians 4:6). God is my healer (Exodus 15:26) and he has already accomplished the healing through His Son, Jesus Christ. By his stripes I was healed (Isaiah 53:4, 6). I will put

my trust in God. He will give the wisdom I need as to what I should do.” This is how we bring into captivity each thought to the obedience of Christ. We deliberately choose what we will think. While God gave us emotions and feelings, which enable us to richly experience life, these must be subservient to our reason that is based upon the word of God. Things are not true because of my feelings but because of God’s revelation.

We are still human beings who have come out of the line of Adam. That is why we must put off the old man. Just as the caterpillar is transformed into a butterfly, something magnificent and miraculous happens as we put off the old man and put on the new man.

We have become a new creation in Christ.

II Corinthians 5:17:

Therefore if any man *be* in Christ, *he is* a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

The butterfly has entered into a new stage in its life. Instead of slowly crawling on the ground, it now has wings and can lift itself above the ground into the air. The Monarch butterfly has been found to fly up to four miles high and travel 2,000 miles on a single journey. Likewise as a new creation in Christ, we are to soar above the world. While we aren’t the ones who change or transform ourselves, we are certainly responsible for deciding what thoughts we will hold in our minds. How far and how fast we go in life depends upon how much our minds are renewed by putting on the thoughts of God. What we have become spiritually becomes a heart reality and is manifested in our actions, words and behaviors. The change on the inside is evidenced outwardly.

## THE LESSON OF ISRAEL IN THE WILDERNESS

Let’s consider some events that happened to Israel which are applicable to our lives today. They were baptized into Moses just as we are baptized into Christ.

I Corinthians 10:1 and 2:

Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea;  
And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea.

Baptism in the Scriptures may refer to water baptism or it may not. It depends upon the context. Here it does not. The children of Israel were baptized into Moses in the sense that they were totally identified with Moses and all he represented—deliverance from slavery in Egypt and a new life as a free people in a better place (the land of Canaan). The things that happened to Israel are provided as a lesson for us today.

Verse 11:

Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.

The New International Version translates this verse: “These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has

come.” The accounts written down in the Scriptures are applicable for our lives. We can learn from them, for they give us powerful images that we can put in our minds.

God had sent Moses to the children of Israel with a message of hope and promise.

Exodus 6:6–8:

Wherefore say unto the children of Israel, I *am* the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will rid you out of their bondage, and I will redeem you with a stretched out arm, and with great judgments:

And I will take you to me for a people, and I will be to you a God: and ye shall know that I *am* the LORD your God, which bringeth you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.

And I will bring you in unto the land, concerning the which I did swear to give it to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob; and I will give it you for an heritage: I *am* the LORD.

God promised to bring them out from slavery in Egypt and to bring them into the land He had originally promised to Abraham. He did exactly as He promised. By a series of great signs and wonders Israel left Egypt. When the Egyptian army pursued them, Moses reached out his staff over the Red Sea. The waters were parted, the Israelites walked through the sea on dry ground and the pursuing Egyptian army was drowned. They were no longer slaves in Egypt. As we continue reading, however, we see that although they were out of Egypt, Egypt was not out of them.

When they had crossed the Red Sea and saw the Egyptians drowned, they danced and sang the praises of God. They confessed that He would bring them into the promised land and the people of the land would melt with fear (Exodus 15:1–21). Such praise of God and confidence in His promises soon died out in the wilderness. Let’s read the verses immediately following the record of their praising God and confessing what He had done and what He would do. Within three days they were complaining that there was no water.

Exodus 15:22–24:

So Moses brought Israel from the Red sea, and they went out into the wilderness of Shur; and they went three days in the wilderness, and found no water.

And when they came to Marah, they could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they *were* bitter: therefore the name of it was called Marah.

And the people murmured against Moses, saying, What shall we drink?

At the Red Sea they exuded great confidence that God would bring them into the land. Once they entered into the wilderness of Shur they began to have doubts. Perhaps for them the wilderness would have been better called “Not So Sure.” We are much more inclined to sing God’s praises and confess what He will do when we have just had a Red Sea experience. Praise and positive confession are easy when circumstances are favorable. But what about when we encounter negative circumstances? It is much more difficult to praise and confess when we seem to be walking in a wilderness in life. The lack of water had quickly dried up their enthusiasm for God.

Continuing to read Exodus reveals that God met that need, but it wasn’t long before another one arose. Isn’t the same true of us? God meets a great need we have, and we rejoice and give

thanks. Yet it isn't long before we are confronted with another problem. Will we respond by looking to God and confessing His goodness and ability to meet our need or we respond with doubt and worry? Let's see how the children of Israel responded when they faced the next problem. A few weeks after entering into the wilderness their food supplies were running low, and they complained about their lack of food.

Exodus 16:3:

And the children of Israel said unto them, Would to God we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh pots, *and* when we did eat bread to the full; for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger.

Their physical hunger had overtaken their spiritual hunger. Once again they were murmuring and complaining. They should have realized, however, that they were not complaining in Egypt. Hadn't God been faithful to deliver them? But now they are reminiscing about the "good old days" back in Egypt when they had an abundance of food. Oh how they longed to return back to their time of slavery when they were provided for!

Couldn't they trust Him to fulfill His promise of taking them into the promised land? Did He say that He would drag their dead carcasses into that land? If they are going to get to the promised land, wouldn't God take care of them in the wilderness? As we continue reading in Exodus, we see that God miraculously provided manna every day to meet their needs. Time and time again He took care of them. Certainly they would have been convinced of God's faithfulness to His promises. At least we would have thought so. Let's read an account that occurred months later to see if they were. When they came near to the land of Canaan, Moses sent twelve men to spy out the land and to bring a report back.

Numbers 13:23:

And they came unto the brook of Eshcol, and cut down from thence a branch with one cluster of grapes, and they bare it between two upon a staff; and *they brought* of the pomegranates, and of the figs.

The land was all God said that it would be. Can you imagine one cluster of grapes so large that it took two men to carry it? Those would have been some "amazing grapes." Let's continue reading the record of what happened when they came back from their mission.

Verses 26–33:

And they went and came to Moses, and to Aaron, and to all the congregation of the children of Israel, unto the wilderness of Paran, to Kadesh; and brought back word unto them, and unto all the congregation, and shewed them the fruit of the land.

And they told him, and said, We came unto the land whither thou sentest us, and surely it floweth with milk and honey; and this *is* the fruit of it.

Nevertheless the people *be* strong that dwell in the land, and the cities *are* walled, *and* very great: and moreover we saw the children of Anak there.

The Amalekites dwell in the land of the south: and the Hittites, and the Jebusites, and the Amorites, dwell in the mountains: and the Canaanites dwell by the sea, and by the coast of Jordan.

And Caleb stilled the people before Moses, and said, Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it.

But the men that went up with him said, We be not able to go up against the people; for they *are* stronger than we.

And they brought up an evil report of the land which they had searched unto the children of Israel, saying, The land, through which we have gone to search it, *is* a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof; and all the people that we saw in it *are* men of a great stature.

And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, *which come* of the giants: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight.

Ten of the twelve, while acknowledging the land was all that God had promised, looked at the greatness of the obstacles before them and lamented, “We are not able to take this land.” Apparently, these men had contracted a dreaded disease while in Canaan. It wasn’t, however, hepatitis, bronchitis, pancreatitis, or one of the other natural “itises.” It was Canaanitis, Amalekitis, Hittititis, Jebusitis, and Amoritis. The disease they came back with was the disease of unbelief. We will find that it was a highly contagious disease.

One man (and as we will later read another was in agreement with him) declared, “We are well able.” There is a lesson for us. The mind that is not renewed with the word of God will doubt the fulfillment of the promises of God, while the mind that is renewed will declare the absolute certainty of them coming to pass. What powerful images this record brings to our minds. The ten compared their ability with the inhabitants of the land. They left God out of the equation. When confronted with obstacles, will we be like the ten and forget that God is with us, see ourselves as grasshoppers and say, “We are not able”? Or will we be like Caleb and Joshua and realize that we are well able?

Numbers 14:1–4:

And all the congregation lifted up their voice, and cried; and the people wept that night.

And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron: and the whole congregation said unto them, Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! or would God we had died in this wilderness!

And wherefore hath the LORD brought us unto this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey? were it not better for us to return into Egypt?

And they said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt.

They cried and complained about their situation. The pandemic of fear and unbelief quickly spread through the camp. Not one arrow has been shot nor a spear thrown. Only twelve men have even seen the cities and the inhabitants, yet on the basis of words they have heard the entire congregation have abandoned their hope of entering the land. The image of mighty cities with powerful inhabitants has overwhelmed them with fear and dread. The images we hold in our minds powerfully affect our lives. We have certainly experienced this during the outbreak of

Covid-19 as the news media has broadcast powerful images of suffering and death that have spread much fear across our country and our world.

The people are not just murmuring against Moses and Aaron. They complain that the Lord had brought them into the land to die in war. Then they make an absolutely unreasonable decision—to return to Egypt. How would they make the return trip? They will have to go back across the wilderness but this time without the help of the Lord God, whom they have rejected. They will have to find their own food and water. Then they will have to swim across the Red Sea, for they won't have Moses to part the waters for them. Finally, they have to face the Egyptians, whose land was devastated by the plagues just before they left. Do you think these runaway slaves will be welcomed back with open arms? Will the Egyptians greet them with banners, "Welcome back boys! We sure missed you"? We wouldn't think so. We would expect that their enslavement would be worse than it was before.

How could it possibly have been better for them to return to Egypt? They were acting on the emotion of fear rather than logic and common sense. But hasn't the same thing happened to each of us when our minds were not renewed by holding the thoughts of God in a particular situation?

Verses 6–10:

And Joshua the son of Nun, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, *which were* of them that searched the land, rent their clothes:

And they spake unto all the company of the children of Israel, saying, The land, which we passed through to search it, *is* an exceeding good land.

If the LORD delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us; a land which floweth with milk and honey.

Only rebel not ye against the LORD, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they *are* bread for us: their defence is departed from them, and the LORD *is* with us: fear them not.

But all the congregation bade stone them with stones...

Two men stood up and reminded the people that the Lord was with them. The Canaanites didn't stand a chance. They were bread for the eating. Joshua and Caleb were hungering for some Canaanite soup. The mistake of the ten men and then the entire congregation is that they had left God out of the equation. Joshua and Caleb reminded the people about God. They put Him in the equation. The Israelites should have thanked Joshua and Caleb for speaking the truth. They should have declared, "You're right! We forgot all about God. We are so sorry that we let the report of the ten men to cause us to be afraid. Let's go get that land!" Instead they yelled out, "Stone them!" Because of their unbelief the people forfeited their opportunity to enter into this wonderful land. Over the next forty years the entire generation of those over the age of twenty would die in the wilderness.

When the children of Israel crossed the Red Sea and the Egyptian army was drowned, they were dead with respect to Egypt. Egypt had lost all control over them. They no longer had a relationship with Egypt. Yet when they didn't have food, their minds turned back to Egypt, and they recalled the wonderful food they enjoyed there. This was a foreshadowing of what would come. When it came time to enter into the promised land, they decided they couldn't defeat the inhabitants. Instead they said they would appoint a captain and return to Egypt. They were no longer living in Egypt, but Egypt remained in them—in their thoughts and desires.



So often something quite similar is the case with born-again ones. Although the old man was crucified with Christ and has no more power in their lives, they continue to have the old man in their thinking patterns. Even though they no longer have a relationship with the old man, they continue to allow lustful desires to rule their lives. Doubts, worries and fears infect their thoughts. God's word instructs us to put off the old man in our thoughts, attitudes and actions. What has already been done spiritually then becomes a manifested reality in our day-by-day living. Doesn't the record of Israel in the wilderness provide us with powerful images that can help us change our thinking about things so that our minds can be renewed to the truth of who we are as a new creation in Christ?

## REMOVING THE VEIL THAT KEEPS US FROM SEEING

Thus far we have considered the word *metamorphoō* in its two occurrences dealing with Jesus' transfiguration in the Gospels and our transformation by renewing our minds in Romans. There is one other occurrence of the word in the Greek New Testament.

II Corinthians 3:18:

But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed [*metamorphoō*] into the same image from glory to glory, *even* as by the Spirit of the Lord.

Let's read the context of this verse.

II Corinthians 3:13–17:

And not as Moses, *which* put a vail over his face, that the children of Israel could not stedfastly look to the end of that which is abolished:

But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same vail untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which *vail* is done away in Christ.

But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the vail is upon their heart.

Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the vail shall be taken away.

Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord *is*, there *is* liberty.

The Greek noun for "vail" is *kalumma*, which is derived from the verb *kaluptō*. When Moses returned from the mountain, after having been in the presence of God and having received the law, the glory on his face was so radiant that he had to put a veil on his face to keep the children of Israel from seeing the glory (Exodus 34). In verse 14 the words "untaken away" are a translation of the verb *anakaluptō* with a negative, meaning "not unveiled." It literally reads "the veil is not unveiled" when the Old Testament is read. The true veil was not that which was on the face of Moses but that which was on the hearts of the people of Israel. The records we've read about their murmuring about food and water as well as their decision to return into Israel provide us with much insight into the state of their hearts.

Moses had a relationship with God, while the children of Israel simply wanted commandments to obey. They could see what God was doing. Moses was shown the whys and wherefores.

Psalm 103:7:

He made known his ways unto Moses, his acts unto the children of Israel.

God certainly would have wanted all the people to know His ways, as Moses did. But He could not reveal His ways to them because the veil on their hearts prevented them from having the type of relationship with God that Moses had. When Paul wrote Second Corinthians, the veil, which had been done away in Christ, remained on the hearts. Instead of believing that he had already finished the work for their salvation and righteousness, they continued to pursue the works of the law to be made righteous in God's sight.

Romans 9:30–33:

What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith.

But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness.

Wherefore? Because *they sought it* not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumblingstone;

As it is written, Behold, I lay in Sion a stumblingstone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.

The Gospel of John provides a record of when Judean people came to Jesus and asked him what works God wanted them to do. His response is most enlightening.

John 6:28 and 29:

Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?

Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.

Jesus consolidated the works of God into one work—they were to believe on him. The Old Testament scriptures were read every Sabbath in the synagogues, but they failed to see Christ, who is the subject of those scriptures. Jesus declared this truth to the religious leaders.

John 5:39:

Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.

Most translations rightly render this verse as a statement of fact rather than a command. For instance, the New International Version translates it: “You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me.”

Matthew 13:13–15:

Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand.

And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: For this people's heart is waxed gross, and *their* ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with *their* eyes, and hear with *their* ears, and should understand with *their* heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.

This was the same group of people Paul wrote about. The veil on their hearts kept them from truly hearing, seeing and understanding. Even though they prided themselves on being followers of Moses, they rejected the very one of whom Moses wrote.

John 5:45 and 46:

Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father: there is *one* that accuseth you, *even* Moses, in whom ye trust.

For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me.

Even today the same is true. Most professing Christians are blinded by traditions, forms, structures, rules and regulations. These things keep them from truly knowing God. The veil is on the heart. It will remain on their hearts until they put their trust in Christ alone instead of their knowledge, religious practices, or good works. The Book of Hebrews is addressed to born-again ones from a Judean background who had turned to Christ from dead religious works.

Hebrews 6:1:

Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God.

These dead works were all they did formerly to endeavor to make themselves righteous in God's sight. As we continue reading in Hebrews we find a reference to a different kind of veil than the one that was on the face of Moses. It was the veil in the temple. Both veils had a similar effect—they kept man separated from God. With the death of Christ, the temple veil was torn in two (Matthew 27:50 and 51). The way into God's presence, which could never be earned by man's goodness or works, became available through Jesus' perfect sacrifice.

Hebrews 10:19 and 20:

Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus,

By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh.

Unlike the old way of dead religious works, the death of Jesus has opened a new and living way into the very presence of God. The veil separating us from God has been torn apart. Jesus is that new way unto God the Father.

John 14:6:

Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.

Religion had been replaced by relationship. Servants had become sons. Instead of working to be accepted by God, we now enjoy our relationship with the Father. Furthermore, the glory of God, which was on the face of Moses, is now in us.

II Corinthians 3:18:

But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed [*metamorphoō*] into the same image from glory to glory, *even* as by the Spirit of the Lord.

The Greek word translated “open” is *anakaluptō* as in verse 14. It should be rendered “unveiled.” So many born-again ones are still looking within themselves. As long as we put our trust in our own goodness, works and accomplishments, the veil remains on our hearts. When those things are taken away and our trust is only in Christ and his finished work, we will see clearly.

## THE POWER OF IMAGES

We are to behold ourselves as in a mirror and see the glory of the Lord. Then we will be transformed into the same image. What is that image?

Romans 8:29:

For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate *to be* conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.

Where can I find the image of Christ? Jesus is not physically on earth today, but I can go to the Scriptures and read about his character and works. Then I see myself the same way, imagining myself being as he is. When Jesus calmed a ferocious storm on the Sea of Galilee that caused his disciples, including men who regularly fished those waters, to fear for their lives, they were awestruck.

Matthew 8:27:

But the men marvelled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!

He took authority over the winds and waves. Even during the time he was upon earth, Jesus gave his disciples the opportunity to believe God and to do the miraculous. Let’s read what happened when there was a great multitude of perhaps 15,000 to 20,000 people (there were 5,000 men and there would obviously have been many women and children).

Matthew 14:15 and 16:

And when it was evening, his disciples came to him, saying, This is a desert place, and the time is now past; send the multitude away, that they may go into the villages, and buy themselves victuals.

But Jesus said unto them, They need not depart; give ye them to eat.

What many have failed to see in this record is that Jesus told his disciples to feed the multitude. He was giving them the opportunity to perform a great miracle. It was, however, too much for them.

Verse 17:

And they say unto him, We have here but five loaves, and two fishes.

When Jesus said, “You give them to eat,” their thoughts were, “What do you mean? How can we possibly do that?” What he told them to do seemed crazy. Their words were, “We don’t have anything here but five loaves and two fish.” They made the same mistake that their ancestors had made when they refused to act upon the promise of God and enter into the land of Canaan. They looked at their own resources rather than to God. The disciples were telling Jesus that they couldn’t do what he told them to do. So he would have to do the miracle.

Verses 18–21:

He said, Bring them hither to me.

And he commanded the multitude to sit down on the grass, and took the five loaves, and the two fishes, and looking up to heaven, he blessed, and brake, and gave the loaves to *his* disciples, and the disciples to the multitude.

And they did all eat, and were filled: and they took up of the fragments that remained twelve baskets full.

And they that had eaten were about five thousand men, beside women and children.

Only after they had shown their lack of faith does he instruct them to bring the fish and loaves to him. Instead of limiting himself to the resources at hand, Jesus looked up to heaven, meaning that he looked to God as his source of sufficiency. God miraculously multiplied the food to feed this great multitude of people. I once read in a commentary on the Bible that each person received a tiny portion of the bread and fish. The lesson Jesus was then teaching was how we could learn to get by on very little. Each did not get a tiny portion, however, but all ate until they were full. There was only a small amount of food, but no matter how much his disciples handed out to the people the supply never diminished.

God has marked us out to be conformed to the image of Christ. We certainly believe that Jesus calmed a storm, fed multitudes of people, healed the sick, and raised the dead. We also believe that we can do the same works he did (John 14:14). Can you, however, imagine yourself calming a storm? Can you imagine yourself feeding a large group of people with an insufficient amount of food? Can you imagine yourself healing the sick? Can you imagine yourself raising the dead? The English word “imagine” means “to form a mental image or concept of.” In the book *Imaginations: More Than You Think*, James Gills writes:

Our thoughts are intertwined with what I call “the imaginations of the mind.” Imagination is an ability God has given us that can be used for our good or our harm. A simple definition of *imagination* is “the image-making faculty of the mind.”

These mental images or pictures powerfully influence our thoughts, our ideas, and our attitudes. Imaginations form a pattern of thinking and develop a whole mindset toward life, which determines our creativity, our emotions, our outlook, our self-discipline, our ability to solve problems, and our ability to handle the choices we make every day.

Albert Einstein said, "Imagination is more important than knowledge."

Athletes today are realizing the power of images in becoming successful in their particular sport. In the online article, "Sports Visualization: The Secret Weapon of Athletes," Dr. Patrick Cohn, a leading sports psychologist, makes the following observations:

When athletes visualize or imagine a successful competition, they actually stimulate the same brain regions as you do when you physically perform that same action.

**Visualization in sports** or mental imagery is a way of conditioning for your brain for successful outcomes. The more you mentally rehearse your performance, the more it becomes habituated in your mind.

Sports visualization is an experience...a training experience, a preparation experience and a warm-up experience. Visualization for athletes is a skill that you can improve and benefit from.

Whether you realize it or not, you visualize during sports or mentally rehearse naturally. Everyone thinks in pictures. Some athletes unintentionally have recurring images of missed opportunities, injuries, mistakes and losses.

There is one thing that separates elite athletes from average athletes...Elite athletes utilize the power of guided imagery or visualization. Imagery has long been a part of elite sports and many Olympic athletes have mastered the skill with the help of Sport Psychologists and Mental Game Coaches.

Guided visualization or imagery for athletes is consciously controlling the images or directing an athletic script in your head. One example of guided imagery that you having unknowingly used is when your coach was teaching you a new skill. You created an image in your mind of how the skill should look or the successful execution of the skill.

Guided visualization or imagery is purposely rehearsing a skill, routine or performance in your mind's eye to program your body for success.

The article provides the example of Michael Phelps to illustrate the power of imagination.

Michael Phelps is already the most decorated Olympian of all time with 22 medals to his name including 18 gold medals. The 2016 Rio Olympics will be Phelps' fifth Olympic Games and, once again, he is using the power of guided imagery to prepare for success.

Bob Bowman has been Phelps' coach since he was a teenager and has included mental imagery or visualization as a part of Phelps' mental training.

Bowman instructed Phelps to watch a "mental videotape" of his races every day before he went to sleep and when he woke up in the morning. Phelps would

visualize every aspect of swimming a successful race starting from the blocks and culminating in a celebration after the race was won.

This article was written prior to the 2016 Olympics. Phelps continued his success in those Olympics. He finished his Olympic career with an astonishing twenty-three gold medals and twenty-eight total medals. No other individual has won more than nine gold medals. If Phelps and other athletes can apply the power of guided imagery to success in sports, couldn't we do the same when it comes to walking by the spirit from God?

We've seen the importance of the systematic, analytical and logical faculty of the mind to dwell on the things of God. He has given us words to put into our brains to counteract the negative and deceitful words of the world. Of equal value to the logical faculty of the mind is this image-making faculty. Earlier we read a section from the Book of Isaiah that compares rain and snow causing the ground to water the earth so that it will bring forth and sprout with the going forth of God's word to accomplish what He pleases and prosper where He sends it. This illustration activates the image-making faculty of our mind. Note the rich abundance of illustrations, stories, and accounts in the Scriptures that stimulate our imagination.

The website *chaimbentorah.com* quotes I Thessalonians 5:16: "Rejoice evermore," which is translated from Greek, and explains the difference between the Greek language and the Hebrew and Aramaic languages:

It is in the Aramaic where we get some kind of picture. Like Hebrew, Aramaic is a picturesque language, and understanding of the ancient world, at least what the ancients thought when they heard a word, can best be described in pictures. So, what is the picture of this word in Aramaic? The word is *chada* which means to rejoice and be glad, but this word is usually associated with something else. It is associated with a bridal dance. Not the word for a bridal dance, but the joy of a bridal dance.

The word thus indicates an enthusiastic celebratory joy like a bride dancing at her wedding. Remarkably the Scriptures have come to us in the original languages of Aramaic, Hebrew and Greek. The Aramaic and Hebrew languages give us word pictures or images, while the Greek language is more suited for systematic and logical thinking. All three are valuable in understanding the depth of meaning of God's word.

## **JESUS TEACHING USING IMAGES**

Jesus himself recognized the power of the imagination and thus often used comparisons with things in nature or told stories to illustrate truth. He was not raised in a Greek culture. Being a Galilean, he would have spoken Aramaic. He had thus grown up speaking a picturesque language. Let's read examples of his teaching where he revealed truth with vivid images.

Matthew 6:25 and 26:

Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?

Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?

The Greek word “behold” is defined by the *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* as: “literally, as an attentive looking on someone or something, fix one’s gaze (earnestly) on, look at attentively...figuratively, as giving careful attention consider, think about.” Jesus was telling them that instead of becoming worried about how their physical needs would be met they should imagine the birds and how their Father provides for them.

Verses 27–30:

Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?

And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin:

And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, *shall he* not much more *clothe* you, O ye of little faith?

The Greek word translated “consider” in verse 26 means “to observe well, examine closely” (Liddell, *Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon*). The English word “consider” means “to think about carefully, to gaze on steadily or reflectively” (Merriam-Webster). It comes from a Latin word. The root *sidus* meant “star” or “heavenly body.” It referred to the careful observation of the motion of the stars and planets. The Magi had so carefully observed the heavens that a particular alignment of planets and stars caused them to realize that the king of the Judeans had been born (Matthew 2:1 and 2).

The idea is that we just don’t casually observe but that we look at and then give deep reflective thought. The next time you see a bird or flower, think deeply about how God provides food for the bird and beautiful clothing for the flower. Reflect on how much more He cares for you.

Matthew 7:7–11:

Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you:

For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone?

Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?

If ye 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?

Think about the richness of these images that show how willing God is to answer our prayers. If earthly fathers will give what their children ask, how much more will our heavenly Father. Note how Jesus weaves these images in with logical thought. After giving the images, he asks them to realize the logical conclusion: “If ye 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?” When we teach the word or share the gospel, we want to incorporate both



elements of logical, systematic thought and images. We are not spiritual Joe Fridays—“Just the facts ma’am.” Images stir up emotions. God just didn’t make us people who can think logically but also emotional beings. We could read many more records of Jesus teaching with images, but these are sufficient for now. As we continue our study, we will see other examples.

## THE WORKS OF JESUS CHRIST

There is a television show called “The Chosen” that gives a vivid image of a miracle Jesus performed at the pool of Bethesda. It communicates the surprise and the joy the man must have experienced when he was able to walk after thirty-eight years of not being able to do so. Isn’t it wonderful when powerful godly images are portrayed on television or in movie theaters rather than the numerous ungodly images that are so often presented? A skilled writer can also engage the image-making faculty of our minds. As we meditate on what is written in the Scriptures, we can also formulate images in our minds. It may not come easily, but we can practice utilizing the image-making faculty of the mind. Let’s read some words that Jesus spoke after he was confronted by the religious leaders following this healing.

John 5:17, 19 and 20:

But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.

Then answered Jesus and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise.

For the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things that himself doeth: and he will shew him greater works than these, that ye may marvel.

The New International Version translates verse 19: “Jesus gave them this answer: ‘I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does.’ ” The *Enhanced Strong’s Lexicon* gives two possible meanings of the Greek word translated “seeth” in this verse. It can mean “to see, discern, of the bodily eye,” or “to see with the mind’s eye.”

Jesus said that he could do nothing of his own but only did what he saw His Father doing. Where in the senses realm did Jesus see his Father healing a man who was lame? Where did he see the opening of the eyes of the blind? The healing of a leper? The raising of the dead? Where did he see the Father calming a storm or feeding a vast multitude of people? All of these things he did not see with his physical eyes but with his mind’s eye. He knew the Father’s will and he must have imagined himself doing these things. He understood from the Scriptures that he was the Son of God, and he saw himself walking with the power of God.

Acts 10:38:

How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost [holy spirit] and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him.

We can also walk with the power of the holy spirit. Jesus promised that when he went away, he would send the comforter.

John 16:7:

Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.

He taught them that this comforter would be the holy spirit.

John 14:26:

But the Comforter, *which is* the Holy Ghost [holy spirit], whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.

We are also to do the same things that Jesus did and even greater things because he went to his Father and poured out the holy spirit.

John 14:12:

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater *works* than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father.

By the logical faculty of the mind we know that the reason we can do the works is because when he went to the Father, Jesus sent the holy spirit. By the image-making faculty of the mind we see ourselves doing those works by the power of the spirit. We need both faculties. If we used only the imagination we would get out of bounds. We would easily think that whatever we imagined would come to pass. If we used only the logical faculty, we would know from the Scriptures what we could do but we wouldn't see ourselves doing it. So many Bible scholars can give a logical analysis of a record in the Bible but never walk with the power of God.

We know from the Scriptures that we can do the works of Jesus and greater works. Most of us could do a systematic and logical presentation of scriptures showing that it is always God's will to heal. But do we see ourselves receiving God's healing? Do we see ourselves healing others? Have we engaged the image-making faculty of our minds to do the same works as Jesus?

## OUR VISION OF OURSELVES

Doing these same works and greater works begins with how we see ourselves.

II Corinthians 3:18:

But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, *even* as by the Spirit of the Lord.

The Greek word rendered "beholding as in a glass" is in the middle voice and present tense and thus should be rendered "beholding ourselves continually as in a mirror." Obviously, this refers neither to a physical mirror nor to physical eyesight. When we see ourselves in our mind's eye, what do we see? Do we have a vision of ourselves according to the standards of the world or according to God's revelation? The images produced by the world will not show us who we are in Christ. For the most part, the images produced in the Christian world have not done much

better. So many of God's people have left churches after being taught what sinners they were. They were not taught their identity in Christ. Recently, a dear friend of mine returned from Africa, where he taught of the manifestations of the spirit. Believers were surprised that they could do these things, for they had been taught that only the pastor could do it. Thus they had no vision of themselves doing. Walking with the power of God was for those holier than themselves. Or so they thought. After being taught rightly, they were able to manifest the spirit from God.

In the study "Release from Your Prisons" in *The Bible Tells Me So*, V. P. Wierwille writes about this vision of ourselves: "How have you mentally pictured yourself for the past week, month, year, ten years? The picture that you carry of yourself with clearness and with concern is what you are." He is not writing about whether I believe God's word to be true but whether I see it as being true of me. He provides a simple technique for answered prayer and being released from whatever may be enslaving us.

A camera offers an appropriate analogy of the means by which you can get results to prayer and find release from your prisons. If you want an answer to prayer, first get your object in mind. You select what you want in your picture. This is step one: you're clear on what you want. Secondly, you use the range finder and focus the subject properly. Then consider the length of exposure of the picture so that all factors may work together for a perfect picture. After all of this, shoot the picture.

When you are focused on the picture of what you want, keep your mind stayed on it. If you allow something else to come in and take precedence over that picture you will get a blurred answer to prayer; you will not get the results you desire; you will not get release from the prison which is encasing you.

To receive a clear picture of our lives as sons of God we need a revelation from God.

Proverbs 29:18:

Where *there is* no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy *is* he.

The *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* defines the Hebrew word rendered "vision" as "revelation (from God)." The word "perish" can be "to be unrestrained" or "to wander aimlessly." When we have no revelation from God, our lives will become uncontrolled. Man is unable to direct his own life.

Jeremiah 10:23:

O LORD, I know that the way of man *is* not in himself: *it is* not in man that walketh to direct his steps.

When people walked away from God, they had their own imaginations of what to do. They built the tower of Babel.

Genesis 11:6:

And the LORD said, Behold, the people *is* one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do.

They had a great vision of what they wanted to do, but it was not according to God's guidance. They endeavored to direct their own steps. They were not restrained in their imaginations because they had no revelation from God. There are many books written on how to use our imaginations to get the things that we want, but most of them seek to do this apart from God. We must keep our imaginations within the bounds set by the written revelation of God's word. A statement often quoted is "What the mind of man can conceive and believe he can achieve." That's what those at the tower of Babel thought. There certainly is great power in the imagination, but an unrestrained imagination may take us on a destructive path. While people may succeed in the endeavor they are pursuing, it doesn't guarantee real success in life.

We read about Michael's Phelps success in the Olympics. Yet in a documentary Phelps narrated in 2020, entitled "The Weight of Gold," he says, "I believe I have experienced a state of depression after every Olympics I competed in. For a long time, I only saw myself as a swimmer, not a person." In the documentary Phelps interviews other Olympic athletes and remarks: "We're just so lost. A good 80%, maybe more, go through some kind of post-Olympic depression." For some of the athletes who achieved Olympic success, their depression was so severe that it resulted in their committing suicide. As people they could never measure up to how others saw them as athletes. The same thing often happens to movie stars and models. Career success seldom translates into a fulfilled life.

As born-again ones we must be careful that we do not measure our lives by our success in ministry. Years ago Malcolm Smith wrote a book called *Spiritual Burnout*. He has counseled with many ministers from different denominations and found that spiritual burnout was a common problem. Their expectations as ministers were not met. Many quit the ministry. Smith taught that to avoid such burnout we need a fresh revelation from God to have a vision for our lives. Certainly God's word gives us a clear revelation of who we are. We behold within as in a mirror the glory of the Lord. This has nothing to do with our performance but with seeing who God has made us to be in Christ. When we focus on God's vision for our lives, we are transformed into the image of Christ.

Ephesians 1:18–20:

The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints,

And what *is* the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power,

Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set *him* at his own right hand in the heavenly *places*.

The word "understanding" in this verse is actually "heart" in the Greek texts. If the eyes of your heart are illuminated, it must mean that you see with your heart and not by your physical senses. Can you see with your mind's eye the exceeding greatness of God's power working in your life? Are you in agreement with His revelation? Are we merely mentally assenting to God's

promises or do we see them as a reality in our lives? Can we visualize ourselves walking with the power of God or do we only visualize it to be true of someone else? We have the revelation in God's written word and then we can receive specific revelation about our lives through word of knowledge and word of wisdom so that we don't wander aimlessly.

## WHAT MANNER OF MAN

Jesus had a clear vision of his life and walked with the power of God. Earlier we read the record where Jesus was asleep on a boat during a terrible storm that caused his disciples to fear for their lives. When he calmed the storm, his disciples marveled and said, "What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!" (Matthew 8:27). The disciples did not realize at that time that Jesus was showing them what manner of man that they themselves would become. Jesus came not only to do the works of his Father but to set an example for many others to follow. He revealed the pattern for how we are to live our lives. We are to be the same manner of man as he was. Let's read about others who became like him.

I Thessalonians 1:5:

For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost [holy spirit], and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake.

The International Standard Version reads: "For the gospel we brought did not come to you in words only, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit, and with deep conviction. Indeed, you know what kind of people we proved to be while we were with you, acting on your behalf." Paul, Silas and Timothy came into Thessalonica and revealed the kind of people God has called all of us to be—those who, just like Jesus, walk with the power of the holy spirit and with great confidence.

Verses 6:

And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost [holy spirit]:

The people in Thessalonica received the word spoken by Paul, Silas and Timothy. The word "followers" means "imitators." Paul later wrote the Corinthians about imitating him, as he imitated Christ.

I Corinthians 11:1:

Be ye followers [imitators] of me, even as I also *am* of Christ.

We are not to imitate the personalities, teaching styles, personal habits, or personal preferences of leaders but their ways in Christ.

I Corinthians 4:17:

For this cause have I sent unto you Timotheus, who is my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which be in Christ, as I teach every where in every church.

Timothy had become an imitator of Paul and thus he could bring others into remembrance of Paul's ways in Christ. There is a wonderful truth found in the Book of Proverbs.

Proverbs 13:20:

He that walketh with wise *men* shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed.

The people you surround yourself with have a great impact on your life. Hang out with wise people if you want to be wise. Hang out with fools and your life will go down the tubes.

I Corinthians 15:33:

Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners.

The New Living Translation renders this verse: "Don't be fooled by those who say such things, for 'bad company corrupts good character.'" We must carefully choose our friends if we want to live a godly life.

Those in Thessalonica who believed did what they saw Paul, Silas and Timothy doing. They became imitators despite the intense persecution in the city, and they had the joy that comes with being filled with the spirit. They then became examples to others in both Macedonia and Achaia.

I Thessalonians 1:7:

So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia.

The word "examples" is a translation of the Greek word *tupos*, from which we get the English "type." It means "literally *blow*; by metonymy, the impression made by the blow *mark, trace*; as a figure formed by blows of the hammer or chisel" (*Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*). Earlier we read about an idolator fashioning an idol. He thought he was forming a god. Yet the truth is that God has formed us. Now God is changing our lives according to the thoughts we chose to fashion in our minds. Then *tupos* came to mean the pattern or example for others to imitate. As we allow our lives to be changed, we become that pattern. The believers in Thessalonica left their mark on others. Let's review a verse we covered earlier.

Romans 6:17:

But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form [*tupos*] of doctrine which was delivered you.

The teaching of the word makes a mark or impression on the lives of those who obey it. Their lives are changed and they become the examples for others to imitate. This happened to those in Thessalonica. They saw men who so imitated Christ that they had become the same manner of man as he is. They imitated those men and then became the examples.

I Thessalonians 1:8:

For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing.

The New Living Translation renders this verse: “And now the word of the Lord is ringing out from you to people everywhere, even beyond Macedonia and Achaia, for wherever we go we find people telling us about your faith in God. We don’t need to tell them about it.” They had become the same manner of people as Jesus Christ. They too walked with the power of the holy spirit and with great confidence. They lived such dynamic lives that people far away spoke about the believers in Thessalonica. As was true of Paul, Silas and Timothy, they became the same manner of men as Jesus.

## **IMAGINE YOURSELF DOING THE WORKS OF CHRIST**

When we read the records in the Gospels, do we see yourself doing the same things? Can you see yourself rebuking the winds and the waves? Can you see yourself commanding devil spirits to leave? Can you see yourself restoring a withered hand? The words we read carry power when we imagine them to be true of ourselves and we act upon them.

In *The Power of Imagination*, Andrew Wommack describes what he learned by imagining himself doing John 14:12:

When I first began meditating on this Scripture, I went through each of Jesus’ miracles, saying, “Lord, You said I could do the same works You did. You healed the sick. So, I’m going to heal the sick.” I began imagining myself touching blind Bartimaeus, encountering the ten lepers, and healing the woman with the issue of blood, just like Jesus did. Then I got to raising the dead, and my imagination stuttered.

Again I said, “Lord, You said I could do the same works You did. You raised the dead. So, I’m going to raise the dead.” I studied every biblical instance of someone being raised from the dead, and I began to imagine. I wrote the stories down. I rehearsed them in my mind. But instead of just seeing Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead, I personalized it. I saw myself raising Lazarus. I saw myself standing in front of the tomb yelling, “Lazarus, come forth.”

You may think I’m crazy, but before long, I started dreaming about raising people from the dead. Every night I’d raise twenty to thirty people back to life. It became so commonplace, it was hard for me to tell when I was awake and when I was asleep. Then one day—while I was definitely awake—a man died in one of my meetings. Without thinking too much about it, I commanded that man back to life and saw him raised from the dead. Jesus’ words had become a part of me, and that man came back to life.

Earlier we read about Michael Phelps using imagination to become the most successful Olympic athlete in modern history. Wommack used the same technique for success in his walk with the power of God. The renewed mind is filled with powerful words, but it also must utilize powerful images of victory and success. I read those words from the Scriptures, and then I behold myself as in a mirror and see the glory of the Lord. I picture myself as Christ doing the same works he did and even greater ones.

We don’t have to come up with our own works.

Ephesians 2:10:

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

The word “ordained” would better be rendered “prepared.” The New International Version translates this verse: “For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” Wouldn’t these works be the same works Jesus did and the greater works? God has prepared them for us to do. We must follow the example of Jesus. Let’s recall what he said, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise” (John 5:19).

Jesus recognized that it was God at work within him.

John 14:10:

Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works.

The words “the works” would better read “his works.” Jesus carried out the works of his Father. He declared that he always did that which pleased God.

John 8:29:

And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him.

The same God who was at work in him is now at work within us so that we can do what is pleasing to Him.

Philippians 2:13:

For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of *his* good pleasure.

Kenneth Wuest renders this verse: “For God is the One who is constantly putting forth His energy in you, both in the form of your being desirous of and of your doing His good pleasure.”

## **IMAGINATION AND REALITY**

Our imagination allows us to perceive as real things that we don’t see in the senses realm. All of us living today are well aware of the power of images. With the advent of motion pictures and then television, we have been exposed to many images that are woven together in a way to make them believable to our minds. As we are watching a movie or television show, the characters are just actors and the scenes are filmed at different times and not in sequential order. Then the sequence of events is strung together in a studio, and a soundtrack and special effects are added.

The goal of the director is that we will experience a gamut of powerful emotions such as anger, sadness, and happiness as we watch the movie or television show. We may feel inspired or depressed. Although it is not real, and on an intellectual level we know it is not real, we still



find ourselves affected by what we watch. For example, actors who have played evil characters have shared about the abuse they have received in real life by the fans of their shows.

Studies have also revealed that what we imagine in our minds can also powerfully affect us. In the article “Your brain on imagination: It’s a lot like reality, study shows,” the website [sciencedaily.com](http://sciencedaily.com) observes:

Imagine a barking dog, a furry spider or another perceived threat and your brain and body respond much like they would if you experienced the real thing. Imagine it repeatedly in a safe environment and soon your phobia—and your brain’s response to it—subsides.

That’s the takeaway of a new brain imaging study led by University of Colorado Boulder and Icahn School of Medicine researchers, suggesting that imagination can be a powerful tool in helping people with fear and anxiety-related disorders overcome them.

“This research confirms that imagination is a neurological reality that can impact our brains and bodies in ways that matter for our wellbeing,” said Tor Wager, director of the Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience Laboratory at CU Boulder and co-senior author of the paper, published in the journal *Neuron*.

In the article “Does your brain distinguish real from imaginary?” Dr. David Hamilton presents an image of brain scans and then writes:

Judging by the brain scans in the image, it doesn’t seem so. The scans are from one of my favourite pieces of research.

Volunteers were asked to play a simple sequence of piano notes each day for five consecutive days. Their brains were scanned each day in the region connected to the finger muscles. Another set of volunteers were asked to imagine playing the notes instead, also having their brains scanned each day.

The top two rows in the image show the changes in the brain in those who played the notes. The middle two rows show the changes in those who simply imagined playing the notes. Compare this with the bottom two rows showing the brain regions of the control group, who didn’t play nor imagine playing, piano.

You can clearly see that the changes in the brain in those who imagined playing piano are the same as in those who actually played the piano. Really, your brain doesn’t distinguish real from imaginary!

Earlier we read how the same thing happens with athletes who imagined themselves competing in their particular sport. Let’s consider another article, this one entitled “Imagination Can Change Perceptions of Reality: What we see and hear can be reshaped by our imagination” in *Psychology Today*.

Researchers in Sweden have found that our imagination can change our perceptions of reality. Your mind can literally play tricks on you by changing illusions of what you think you hear and see into what seems like reality. The new study from the Karolinska Institutet is published in the scientific journal *Current Biology*. The findings offer new clues on how the human brain combines

information from the different senses and how imagination can alter mind-brain function.

“We often think about the things we imagine and the things we perceive as being clearly dissociable,” says Christopher Berger, doctoral student at the Department of Neuroscience and lead author of the study. “However, what this study shows is that our imagination of a sound or a shape changes how we perceive the world around us in the same way actually hearing that sound or seeing that shape does. Specifically, we found that what we imagine hearing can change what we actually see, and what we imagine seeing can change what we actually hear.”

The May 25, 2021 issue of *Newsweek* reports on a similar study:

“The sensory information we imagine is often treated by the brain in the same way as information streaming into us from the outside world,” explained researcher Christopher C. Berger of the California Institute of Technology in a statement.

“Our work shows that what we imagine in our ‘mind’s eye’ can lead to changes in perception across our sensory systems, changing how we perceive real information from the world around us in the future.”

When we speak about the imagination, we are not referring to something that is not real, as people will say, “You just imagined it.” Certainly there are people who allow their imagination to get out of control. One time I received a letter from a woman who believed that she was being watched by the government and that there were various government officials in the different apartments in her building. They were all there to spy on her. She never considered why the government would invest such great resources to do that. We can, however, use our imagination deliberately and reasonably to bring great profit into our lives.

## IMAGINATION AND FAITH

As born-again ones living in this present world, we are not to walk by our five senses. We don’t conduct our lives by what we see but by what we believe. We don’t rely upon the senses but rather we believe the revelation God has given to us.

II Corinthians 5:7:  
(For we walk by faith, not by sight:)

A verse in the Book of Hebrews describes the relationship between faith and hope.

Hebrews 11:1:  
Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

The word “substance” is the Greek word *hupostasis*, which originally meant “what settles, what remains, the sediment, collection, deposit, or residue, in whatever form” (*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*). In the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament,

it was used of “the reality which gives a firm guarantee” (*TDNT*). The *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* defines its usage in Hebrews 11:1 as “the objective aspect and underlying reality behind anything...as the objective reality that gives a firm guarantee and basis for confidence or assurance, *substance, ground of hope, foundation.*”

It is not really faith or believing per se that is the basis of our confidence but what our faith or believing is in—God and His word. While most translations render *hupostasis* here as “assurance” or “confidence,” others take it in the sense of substance or foundation. The Berkeley translation is: “But faith forms a solid ground for what is hoped for...” The New English Bible reads: “Faith gives substance to our hopes...” The Twentieth Century New Testament renders the verse: “Faith is the realization of things hoped for...” Darby translates the verse: “Now faith is *the* substantiating of things hoped for...” Faith is the evidence or proof of the things we hope for but cannot see. Faith brings those things into realization.

Let’s consider the biblical meaning of the word “hope.”

Romans 8:24 and 25:

For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth,  
why doth he yet hope for?

But if we hope for that we see not, *then* do we with patience wait for *it*.

Hope always deals with that which is not yet seen with the physical eyes. Louw and Nida define the Greek word as “to look forward with confidence to that which is good and beneficial.” It is the confident expectation and joyful anticipation of a future good. Today in our common English vernacular, we most often use the word “hope” in a sense of “wishing.” For instance, someone hopes to win the big jackpot when the odds are overwhelmingly against him. This, however, is not true of hope as used in the Scriptures. Faith gives substance to our hope.

Since hope deals with what we don’t presently possess, we can only imagine. A study of the Greek word rendered “hope” reveals that it can refer to what we won’t receive before Christ comes back, but it can also refer to things in this present life that we are waiting for but not presently in possession of. Since I don’t yet have them, I imagine them. For instance, let’s assume that you are planning to move. You hold in your mind a picture of a house you hope to live in. You may see yourself living there. Your mind begins filling in the details of doing things required for your move. Once you take possession of the house, your hope becomes a reality. You no longer need to hope.

When we pray we may ask for certain things we don’t currently have. They are thus in the category of hope. Faith gives substance to those requests.

Mark 11:24:

Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive *them*, and ye shall have *them*.

The Greek has the word “receive” in the aorist tense. Thus the New International Version more accurately renders this verse: “Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.” I’m certainly not asking God for something I presently possess. When I make request, I am to ask with the faith that I have already received that thing—whether it be wisdom, guidance, healing, a material need, or the furtherance of the gospel. The key to making such requests is found in the First Epistle of John.

I John 5:14:

And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us:

If we make our request according to God's will, He hears us and answers our prayer. Not specifically stated but implied in this verse is that if we ask anything that is not according to the will of God He doesn't hear us. Our prayer will not be answered. This is equally true.

Verse 15:

And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.

When we make our requests according to the will of God, He hears us and answers our prayers. The New Revised Standard Bible offers this translation of verse 15: "And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have obtained the requests made of him." Jan Magiera renders this verse from the Aramaic Peshitta: "And if we are persuaded that he hears us concerning what we request of him, we are confident that we have already received our requests that we requested of him." We pray according to the will of God, meaning that which God has revealed either in his written word or specific things that He shows us by direct revelation, and we believe we have already received whatever we are requesting. Then it will be manifested in our lives. For instance, the truth of the Scriptures is that God will supply all your need (Philippians 4:19), but only by word of knowledge and word of wisdom can you know whether a specific job is right for you.

An individual who received many remarkable answers to prayer was George Muller of Bristol, England. He declared that he had thousands of prayers answered and never failed to get an answer to prayer. How was that possible? Muller's secret was that he would go to God to ascertain His will in a particular situation, and only then would he make request. He wrote that he would get his heart into such a state that he had no will of his own. His desire was that God's will would be done. His prayers would thus be according to the will of God. He knew that when he prayed this way God would hear and answer his prayer.

Let's consider another section of Romans that deals with hope. The fourth chapter provides Abraham as the great example of the righteousness of faith. We will first read verse 17.

Romans 4:17:

(As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before him whom he believed, *even* God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were.

The New Revised Standard Version translates this verse: "As it is written, 'I have made you the father of many nations'—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist." Our hope must be in God, for He alone is the One who can cause the things that presently do not exist to come into existence. Although we often hear those who call themselves "faith preachers" declare that we call those things that be not as though they were, this verse does not really say that. It is God who calls into

existence the things that do not exist. We then agree with what God says—either in His written word or by revelation received by word of knowledge and word of wisdom.

We are not to attempt to bring to pass the things that we imagine. Jesus declared that he could do nothing of himself but what he saw his Father doing (John 5:19). Since he is our Lord, shouldn't we follow his example? It is not our faith or confession that causes things to come into existence. It is God's word.

Verse 18:

Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be.

The New Living Translation reads: "Even when there was no reason for hope, Abraham kept hoping—believing that he would become the father of many nations. For God had said to him, 'That's how many descendants you will have!' " Hope has no real substance. If Abraham had relied upon what he could see in the senses realm, his hope would never have been realized. Abraham didn't initiate the idea that he would have a child when he and Sarah were elderly. His imagination didn't bring it to pass. It was his believing in God's promise that gave substance to his hopes. Let's see when God made that promise to him.

Genesis 12:1–3:

Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee:  
And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing:  
And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.

This promise was made to Abram before he came into the land of Canaan. This was about twenty-five years before God had him change his name to Abraham and before the birth of Isaac. If God was to make of Abram a great nation, he would need to have a son. Now let's read words God spoke to Abram once he entered into the land.

Verse 7:

And the LORD appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the LORD, who appeared unto him.

God promised that Abram would have progeny who would inherit the land. Later God reiterates that promise and gives Abram additional revelation.

Genesis 13:15 and 16:

For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever.  
And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, *then* shall thy seed also be numbered.

He declared that Abram's seed would be as numerous as the dust of the ground. We see, however, as we continue reading that Abram was not yet convinced.

Genesis 15:1–3:

After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I *am* thy shield, *and* thy exceeding great reward.

And Abram said, Lord GOD, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house *is* this Eliezer of Damascus?

And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir.

Even though he had been told on several occasions that he would have progeny, Abram is lamenting that God has not given him seed. The “father of all who believe” (Romans 4:11) has not yet believed God’s promise. Instead he is looking at the five senses.

Verses 4–6:

And, behold, the word of the LORD *came* unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir.

And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be.

And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.

God then gave Abram something he could visualize in the senses realm representing His promise to Abram that he would have many descendants. He had words from God as well as an image. Words and images are a powerful combination. This promise was made years before the birth of Isaac, but Abraham believed and held on to it. His faith gave substance to his hope. But Abraham had the promise of God.

Romans 4:19:

And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sara’s womb.

The New American Standard Bible provides a better rendering from the Greek, which omits the word “not”: “Without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah’s womb.” Abraham was well aware of the impossibility according to the senses evidence that he and Sarah could have a child. Faith does not pretend. It is not ignorant of the senses. It, however, esteems the promise of God a greater reality than the senses evidence. What Abraham could see in his mind’s eye had to be greater than what he could see with his physical eyes. His hope could not have been based on what he saw but on what he believed—the promise of God. He walked by faith and not by sight.

Verses 20 and 21:

He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God;

And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform.

Did Abraham see with his physical eyesight his descendants as numerous as the stars of the sky? Not during his lifetime. One day he will be raised from the dead and see the fulfillment of what was promised to him. So will others.

Hebrews 11:13:

These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of *them*, and embraced *them*, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

This chapter of Hebrews, after describing the believing of Abel, Enoch, Noah and Abraham, reveals that they all died in faith. What these believers never saw with their physical eyesight, they saw with the eyes of faith. While Abraham never physically saw numerous descendants, he did see the miraculous birth of Isaac (as well as the birth of Isaac's son, Jacob).

Hebrews 11:11:

Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised.

The King James Version (and other translations) attributes this faith to Sarah rather than to Abraham. There are two problems with this translation. The first problem is that there is no other scriptural account of Sarah's faith as concerning the birth of Isaac. The record we read in Romans mentions only Abraham's faith and not Sarah's. In fact, when she heard that she was going to have a child at the age of ninety, she laughed in unbelief.

Genesis 18:10–15:

And he said, I will certainly return unto thee according to the time of life; and, lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son. And Sarah heard *it* in the tent door, which *was* behind him.

Now Abraham and Sarah *were* old *and* well stricken in age; *and* it ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women.

Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?

And the LORD said unto Abraham, Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I of a surety bear a child, which am old?

Is any thing too hard for the LORD? At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son.

Then Sarah denied, saying, I laughed not; for she was afraid. And he said, Nay; but thou didst laugh.

The second problem with the translation of Hebrews 11:11 is context.

Hebrews 11:8–12:

By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.

By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as *in* a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise:

For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker *is* God. Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised.

Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, *so many* as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable.

In the preceding and following verses, it is Abraham's faith that is described. Verse 12 seems to abruptly interrupt the context and refer to Sarah's faith. The problem is in translation. According to Greek scholars, the Greek words "to conceive seed" in Hebrews 11:11 are actually a common Greek expression that refers to the male function in producing sperm. One Greek scholar, F. F. Bruce, writes:

...a literal translation [of the Greek words] would be "for the deposition of seed"; it does not denote the reception or conception of seed. This is a straightforward matter of the natural sense of a Greek word, and had it not been for the apparent presence of "Sarah" as the subject of the sentence no one would ever have thought of finding a reference to conception here.

Thus this verse could be translated: "By faith he [Abraham] also received strength to father a child [by depositing seed], even though Sarah herself was barren and past the age of bearing a child, because he judged him faithful who had promised." This translation also better fits with the context of Hebrews 11:8–12.

Let's read three translations of verses 11 and 12 that refer the faith to Abraham and not Sarah.

New International Version:

By faith Abraham, even though he was past age—and Sarah herself was barren—was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise.

And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore.

New Revised Standard Version:

By faith he received power of procreation, even though he was too old—and Sarah herself was barren—because he considered him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one person, and this one as good as dead, descendants were born, "as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore."

The Lexham English Bible:

By faith also, [with Sarah], he received [the ability to procreate] even [past the normal age], because he regarded the one who had promised *to be* faithful.

And therefore these were fathered from one man, and *he* being as good as dead, as the stars of heaven in number and like the innumerable sand by the shore of the sea.



These translations are in agreement with the immediate context of Hebrews 11, as well as other scriptural accounts of the same event. While Sarah was a wonderful godly woman (see I Peter 3:1–7), in this section it is Abraham’s faith and not Sarah’s that is described.

## DOUBT AND DOUBLE-MINDEDNESS

Let’s review a verse about Abraham’s faith from the fourth chapter of Romans.

Romans 4:20:

He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God.

The Greek word for “staggered” means “as being undecided within oneself” or “to be at strife with one’s self, i.e. hesitate, waver” (Bullinger). This same word is translated “doubt” several times in the King James Version. Let’s read two of those instances.

Matthew 21:18–21:

Now in the morning as he returned into the city, he hungered.

And when he saw a fig tree in the way, he came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves only, and said unto it, Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever.

And presently [immediately] the fig tree withered away.

And when the disciples saw *it*, they marvelled, saying, How soon is the fig tree withered away!

Jesus answered and said unto them, Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this *which is done* to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done.

An absolute requirement for genuine faith is the absence of doubt. If you are to command a mountain to be removed and expect it to come to pass, you cannot be undecided or at strife within yourself. Let’s consider a similar account to this one. It actually occurred on the day prior to the event we just read about in Matthew.

Mark 11:12–14:

And on the morrow, when they were come from Bethany, he was hungry:

And seeing a fig tree afar off having leaves, he came, if haply he might find any thing thereon: and when he came to it, he found nothing but leaves; for the time of figs was not *yet*.

And Jesus answered and said unto it, No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever.

And his disciples heard *it*.

Verses 15 through 18 then describe things that happened that day when Jesus went to Jerusalem. Let’s continue reading in verse 19.

Verses 19–21:

And when even was come, he went out of the city.

And in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots.

And Peter calling to remembrance saith unto him, Master, behold, the fig tree which thou cursedst is withered away.

Perhaps when we first read this record we might think that it is identical with the one recorded in the Gospel of Matthew. Unlike the account in Matthew, however, this fig tree did not die immediately. It appears that nothing happened to the tree when Jesus first cursed it. Since they would likely have returned from Jerusalem and gone back to Bethany the same way as they came, there must have been no evidence of any change in the fig tree that same evening. Do you think that when Jesus cursed this tree and there was no immediate evidence anything had happened that he beat himself up about it? Do you suppose he spent that day wondering what went wrong? Maybe this truth about commanding only works some of the time. Certainly not! He knew it was done. He didn't need evidence in the senses realm, for faith does not see with senses eyes.

It was only the next morning as they returned from Bethany to Jerusalem that the disciples noticed the fig tree had dried up from the roots. This caused Peter to remember what Jesus had said to the tree the previous morning. He seemed surprised at what had happened. Jesus, however, was not. Even though nothing was apparent in the senses realm at the time he declared that the tree would never again produce fruit, he saw with his mind's eye a dead tree. When the disciples saw the dead tree with their physical eyesight, Jesus then taught them a great lesson.

Verses 22 and 23:

And Jesus answering saith unto them, Have faith in God.

For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith.

The doubt Jesus spoke about is not merely a passing thought in the mind but something deep in the heart. When we are acting upon the revelation God has given us, thoughts may arise in our minds that will tempt us to question, but we are to lay those thoughts aside and continue to move forward. We don't allow doubts within our hearts. Just as the water on the surface of an ocean may be agitated, so our minds may register various thoughts. As in a great ocean the waters deep below remain undisturbed, so our hearts can be calm and unmoved by things going on around us. Jesus declared that if we don't doubt in our hearts but believe what we say will come to pass we will have whatever we say. We thus have to keep it in the mind's eye before we see it with the physical eyes.

The lesson from the cursing of the two fig trees is that it doesn't matter whether there is immediate evidence in the senses realm or not. Once we speak according to the revelation we have received from God, we should expect that it is done. When by the will of God we command the mountain to be removed and cast into the sea, we are to be confident that it is going for a swim.

The same Greek word rendered "staggered" in Romans 4:20 and "doubt" in Matthew 21:21 and Mark 11:23 is translated "wavering" and "wavereth" in the Book of James.

James 1:5–8:

If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all *men* liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.

But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.

For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord.

A double minded man *is* unstable in all his ways.

The one who desires wisdom is to ask in faith and not doubt. If he doubts, he will not receive from God wisdom or anything else he asks for. The one who doubts is called “a double minded man.” In English the words “doubt” and “double” are semantically related. As one linguist who writes a blog under the name “Linguistic Girl: The Linguistic Librarian” observes:

Both doubt and double have the *doub* root. Prior to borrowing the French *doute* and *douter*, Old English had the word *tweogan*, which means “to doubt” or “to hold two opinions at once.” Note the similarity between the modern two and the Old English *tweogan*. Likewise, doubt and double have a sense of “two-ness.” Double means “consisting of two equal, identical, or similar parts or things” and “twice as much or many.” Likewise, doubt means “to second guess” or “be of two minds.” Doubt and double share both a ‘b’ and a root that mean “two-ness.”

God warns us to remain focused if we want to receive the things He has to give, which includes wisdom. Let’s consider a record of a man who had faith to begin doing the impossible but then lost his focus and succumbed to the senses circumstances.

Matthew 14:25–31:

And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea.

And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear.

But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid.

And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water.

And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus.

But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me.

And immediately Jesus stretched forth *his* hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?

This Greek word rendered “doubt” in verse 31 means “to be of two minds about something.” Bullinger defines it as “to stand in two *ways*, be uncertain *as to which to take*.” At first Peter was focused on Jesus and asked if he could walk on the water to go to his Lord. Lest we be too critical of Peter, let’s note that he was the only one of the disciples who got out of the boat. Furthermore, he walked on the water. How many of us can say the same? (Walking on frozen water doesn’t count.) Peter’s failure resulted because he “saw” the wind agitating the surface

waters of the sea. He then began to doubt and this allowed fear into his heart. Peter's faith was enough to get out of the boat and start walking on the water but not strong enough to overcome the senses circumstances. Unlike Jesus, it was not in the depth of his heart so that he could walk by faith and not by sight. The senses circumstances overwhelmed him, and he started to sink. Fortunately, Jesus was there to catch him and lift him up.

Earlier we read a record from the sixth chapter of Matthew where Jesus taught his disciples that they were to look at the birds and consider the flowers to realize how much their Father cared for them and would provide their needs. He gave these same illustrations on another occasion and then told his disciples not to have a "doubtful mind."

Luke 12:22–29:

And he said unto his disciples, Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat; neither for the body, what ye shall put on.

The life is more than meat, and the body *is more* than raiment.

Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouse nor barn; and God feedeth them: how much more are ye better than the fowls?

And which of you with taking thought can add to his stature one cubit?

If ye then be not able to do that thing which is least, why take ye thought for the rest?

Consider the lilies how they grow: they toil not, they spin not; and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

If then God so clothe the grass, which is to day in the field, and to morrow is cast into the oven; how much more *will he clothe* you, O ye of little faith?

And seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind.

The Greek word rendered "doubtful mind" is *meteōrizō* (from which get our word "meteor"). Bullinger defines this particular Greek word for "doubtful" as "to lift on high, raise in the air." According to the *Enhanced Strong's Lexicon*, the original meaning of the word was "to rise up on high...to put a ship [out to sea] up upon the deep." Later it acquired a different meaning—"by a metaphor taken from ships that are tossed about on the deep by winds and waves...to cause one to waver or fluctuate in the mind." Bullinger defines it as "to be fluctuating in mind (as if floating in the air)." It can mean "to vacillate between fear and hope" (*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*). In this context it is vacillating between the hope of getting your needs met and the fear you won't. Isn't this the opposite of a mind that is stayed or steadfast because a person trusts in God? The English word "suspense" has a similar meaning. When something is in suspense, it is undecided or doubtful. We are never to be this way when it comes to having our needs met. We should be living with a confident expectation that God will provide. Faith gives substance to our hopes.

## WORRY AND THE UNRENEWED MIND

Closely connected with doubt is worry. Jesus taught his disciples to "take no thought" for their physical needs. Of course, we have to take thought. Ignore your checking account and soon you will be writing checks that will be returned because of insufficient funds. Ignore your taxes

and you may be meeting with an auditor with the IRS. Ignore your mortgage payments and you might need to find a new place to live.

The word “take thought” would better be translated “worry” or “be anxious.” The root of the Greek word means “divided.” Thus Bullinger defines the word used here in Luke as “to be full of anxiety which *divides up and distracts the mind*, to be full of cares, anxious.” It has a similar meaning as the words for “doubt.” Let’s consider other occurrences of this word.

Matthew 6:34:

Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

The New Living Translation reads: “So don’t worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today’s trouble is enough for today.”

Matthew 13:22:

He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful.

This would better read “it becomes unfruitful.” We can hear God’s word with great excitement and begin to act upon it, but then we may allow worries that arise because of worldly matters to choke that word so that it becomes unfruitful. God’s word accomplishes what He pleases and prospers where He sends it, but our worry can prevent it from doing this in our own lives.

Philippians 4:6 and 7:

Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.

And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

The New Living Translation renders these two verses: “Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God’s peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.” The remedy for worry is thankful prayer. Worry arises because we think we must keep control of a situation and yet it seems beyond our control. If we really believed we could really control things, why would we worry? Apparently, however, that doesn’t keep us from trying to maintain control. Peace comes when we give it over to God.

I Peter 5:7:

Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.

The New Living Translation reads: “Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you.”

## THE POWER OF OUR WORDS

We have seen that the mind consists of thoughts we hold—both words and images. Another aspect of the mind we must consider is the power of the words we speak. Our thoughts and words are closely linked.

Proverbs 18:4:

The words of a man's mouth *are as* deep waters...

There is so much more underneath words than what one actually sees or hears. Words carry intents and motives. Remarkably, the Book of Proverbs uses the illustration of deep waters not only of the words of the mouth but also of what is in a man's heart, which is the depth of the mind, including our innermost thoughts, character, will, emotions and desires.

Proverbs 20:5

Counsel in the heart of man *is like* deep water...

The word “counsel” can also be translated “purpose” or “intent.” The New American Bible translates this verse: “The intention of the human heart is like water far below the surface...” Thus Proverbs reveals both aspects of the “deep waters.” The words of a man lie on the surface, while the thoughts and intents of the heart that words carry are underneath. Consequently, the very words we speak can defile us.

Matthew 15:18–20:

But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man.

For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies:

These are the things which defile a man...

It is easy to underestimate the effect our words have on our own lives, yet the Scriptures teach how powerful they are.

Proverbs 12:13 and 14:

The wicked is snared by the transgression of *his* lips: but the just shall come out of trouble.

A man shall be satisfied with good by the fruit of *his* mouth...

Our words can either ensnare us or deliver us. The James Moffatt translation is most enlightening, “By sins of the lips bad men get into trouble; good men get out of trouble. A man reaps the results of all his words...” If someone continues to be beset by negative circumstances, they might check the words proceeding from their own mouth.

Proverbs 18:20 and 21:

A man's belly shall be satisfied with the fruit of his mouth; *and* with the increase of his lips shall he be filled.

Death and life *are* in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof.

These verses unequivocally set forth how much power our tongue has over our lives. We eat the fruit of what we say. If we love to talk (and most people seem to), then we better watch what we say, for life and death are in the power of the tongue. Moffatt translates verse 20: “A man must answer for his utterances, and take the consequences of his words.”

Proverbs 13:3:

He that keepeth his mouth keepeth his life: *but* he that openeth wide his lips shall have destruction.

Look at the deadly power that our own words can have upon our lives. There is, thus, an urgent need for us to control our tongues.

Proverbs 18:6 and 7:

A fool’s lips enter into contention, and his mouth calleth for strokes.

A fool’s mouth *is* his destruction, and his lips *are* the snare of his soul.

The fool’s own words are entangling and destroying his life, and yet he usually goes around and blames everyone else for his problems. However, his greatest enemy is his own mouth.

### CONTROLLING OUR TONGUE

It is imperative that we watch what comes out of our mouths.

Psalms 34:12 and 13:

What man *is he that* desireth life, *and* loveth many days, that he may see good?

Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile.

Proverbs 21:23:

Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul from troubles.

If we desire life, want to see good, and keep our soul from trouble, we are to heed God’s instruction. We ignore it at our own peril. There are many other verses we could read concerning watching our words. Perhaps at times you have diligently endeavored to control your tongue and found it to be quite difficult. In fact, one verse of scripture appears to declare the impossibility of doing so.

James 3:8:

For the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.

Taken at face value, this scripture would bring this chapter to a quick conclusion. Yet there must be a deeper meaning to it. God cannot instruct us to control our tongues at one place in His word and elsewhere tell us it cannot be done. As we examine the third chapter of James, the context will open our understanding of this verse.

James 3:2:

For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body.

The word “offend” means “to make a mistake or stumble.” If a man can avoid mistakes in his words, he will be a mature man and able to bridle the whole body. The word “bridle” means “to lead or guide with a bit.” The context of the chapter discloses that the bit is the tongue.

Verse 3:

Behold, we put bits in the horses’ mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body.

A small bit in the horse’s mouth gives us control over its whole body. This illustration is followed by another.

Verse 4:

Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very little helm, whithersoever the governor listeth.

This refers to large sailing vessels that are powered by the winds. A very small helm or rudder sets the direction of the ship. The “governor” is the pilot or helmsman, the one who controls the rudder and thus determines the ship’s course.

Verse 5:

Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!

“Even so” compares the tongue with a horse’s bit and also with a ship’s rudder. The point of comparison is power relative to size. As a small bit controls the horse and a tiny rudder the ship, the tongue, though small in comparison to the whole body, controls the direction of our life. Now we have a third illustration. The word “matter” in verse 5 would more accurately be translated “forest.” A little fire can destroy an entire forest. This illustration is markedly different from the previous two. While the bit and rudder are constructive, the fire is destructive. The bit and rudder put a man in control, but a forest fire burns out of control.

Verse 6:

And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell.

For the most part, man’s tongue has not been constructive but destructive. Man could use his words constructively but has usually done the opposite. The words “course of nature” could literally be translated “wheel of birth.” This expression refers to the course of a man’s natural life which begins with his birth and ends with his death. Thus the tongue can set on fire, or ruin, his



whole life. Furthermore, this verse tells us that the man's life is "set on fire of [by] hell." This third chapter of James will soon expose the source that is adversely affecting that man's life.

Would a person deliberately set out to wreck his life? Certainly not! Then we can reasonably conclude that if they do so, they are not in control of their tongue.

Verse 7

For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind.

We have all visited a circus and witnessed wild animals from the jungle that have been tamed. Even great sea creatures like whales have been trained to do tricks in aquatic shows. These have all been tamed of mankind. The Greek word translated "mankind" is rendered in the center margin as "nature of man." How has man tamed wild animals? Has he done it by the spirit of God or by his natural abilities? It has been by his natural abilities.

Verse 8:

But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.

Obviously it must be possible for a man to tame his tongue. Otherwise why would the word of God instruct us to do just that? We must understand this verse in light of the context. Every kind of animal has been tamed by the "nature of man," by man's natural abilities. However, no man can tame the tongue—by his natural abilities. Then there must be a way for a man to tame his tongue apart from his natural abilities. We will now learn what that way is.

Verses 9–12:

Therewith bless we God, even the Father, and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God.

Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be.

Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter?

Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine figs? so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh.

This blessing is hypocritical and not a genuine indication of the person's heart, for if a person says they love God and hates their brother, they are a liar (I John 4:20). A genuine heart of praise will not curse people. We should not be hypocrites about what is in our heart. A fig tree, for instance, does not produce olive berries. The heart is thus by analogy the tree, and our words are the fruit produced by the tree. Just as we identify a tree by the fruit it produces, so we can realize what is in our heart by what is coming out of our mouths.

Matthew 12:33–35:

Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt and, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit.

O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.

A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things.

Jesus showed that the great barometer to knowing what thoughts we are holding in our hearts is the words we speak. They are the canary in the coal mine, revealing to us the state of our heart.

In the illustrations in James, the words are the fruit and the heart is the tree or vine; the words are the water and the heart is the fountain sending forth the water. Now if a person is going to change what is coming out of their mouth, what do they have to change first? The heart. God doesn't desire that we have one thing in our heart and then hypocritically speak something else.

We control the tongue by controlling the heart. The tongue cannot be controlled by just working on the tongue. The root problem is not the tongue but the heart out of which the words come. Now we will find the answer to our question of how we control our tongue.

James 3:13 and 14:

Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom.

But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth.

Note where this envy and strife is located—in the heart. The word “glory” is the word “boast.” This contrasts with “meekness of wisdom” in the previous verse. Weymouth translates this verse, “But if in your hearts you have bitter feelings of envy and rivalry, do not speak boastfully and falsely, in defiance of the truth.” We are not to allow those things to proceed forth from our hearts. Instead we are to change our hearts. If we don't, it will most certainly come out in our words. Yet, how do we change our hearts? We learned earlier that the thoughts we frame in our mind will determine the state of our heart. We read in Genesis 6:5 that when people turned away from God, the framing of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually.

Verse 15:

This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish.

Now we are getting to the root cause of evil words. The bitter envy and strife in the heart that manifests in corrupt words is the result of that wisdom which is earthly, sensual and devilish. It is in the world and received by way of the five senses. Man without God will be filled with this kind of wisdom. Furthermore, it is devilish because this wisdom originated in the kingdom of the adversary. The word “devilish” is not the normal word for the devil. It is rather a form of the word translated “devils” or “evil spirits.” But how does Satan introduce his lies into the earth? He does so by means of devil spirits who take control of men's minds. They feed false information to those men who then pass it on to others. Then men who pick it up begin to speak it as if it were their own idea.

Remember that verse 6 told us that the tongue is set on fire of hell. The information going into the heart which then controls the tongue is devilish. It is no wonder, therefore, that the tongue is full of deadly poison.

Verse 16:

For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work.

This verse reveals how that envy and strife will manifest itself. We have seen this many times in the Body of Christ, and the chief instrument of destruction has been the tongue. Evil and corrupt words have done more damage than anything else. Those words have come out of hearts filled with envy and strife because they walked by the wisdom of this world. There is, however, a markedly different kind of wisdom.

Verse 17:

But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.

When we fill our hearts with this wisdom from God, the words coming out of our mouths will be constructive—both to ourselves and to others. The same factories that are used to produce automobiles and household goods, which have enriched our lives, can be used to make tanks and other armaments, which have been used as instruments of destruction. So it is with the tongue.

## CONFESSING GOD'S WORD

There is great power in confessing God's word. This confession, however, is not merely mechanically reciting Bible verses to produce results. The words we speak need to be aligned with what is in our hearts. Victor Paul Wierwille referred to this as "the synchronized life." He writes the following on coordinating our mouth with our heart:

If you will confess with your mouth at the same time that you confess in your heart what The Word says, you will have power. Your prayers will be answered as you apply these keys in your life by your action. Thus, the abundant resources of heaven are made available to you. (*The Bible Tells Me So*).

When synchronized with a heart filled with the wisdom of God, positive confession of God's word is a dynamic key in tapping the power of God. Most men do not want to relinquish their lordship over their tongues. They believe that they have the right to say whatever they want. David described such men.

Psalm 12:2–4:

They speak vanity every one with his neighbor: *with* flattering lips and with a double heart do they speak.

The LORD shall cut off all flattering lips, and the tongue that speaketh proud things:

Who have said, With our tongue will we prevail; our lips *are* our own; who is lord over us?

Man has long recognized the power of words. Earlier we saw how the negative words of ten men carried fear and defeated an entire nation. One of the most famous quotes on the power of

words is: “The pen is mightier than the sword.” Karl Marx knew this to be true and claimed: “Give me twenty-six lead soldiers, and I will conquer the world.” The Communists, upon seizing power in China, paraded the printing press as their mightiest weapon.

Men believe that they can prevail with their words. They take great pride in their ability to use words to manipulate others, but God says that “they speak vanity” (verse 2). Their words are actually empty and will come to nought. Contrast the words of God with those of men.

Verse 6:

The words of the LORD *are* pure words: *as* silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times.

### WORDS FITTED TO OUR LIPS

The words of the Lord should fill our hearts and come out of our mouths. When God formed, made, and created man, He designed man’s heart to hold His words and man’s mouth to speak those words. Consider these verses from Proverbs.

Proverbs 22:17 and 18:

Bow down thine ear, and hear the words of the wise, and apply thine heart unto my knowledge.

For *it is* a pleasant thing if thou keep them within thee; they shall withal be fitted in thy lips.

Circus clowns draw laughs by their outrageous behavior and ludicrous appearance. They wear shoes that are many sizes larger than their feet. Could you imagine going into a shoe store needing a size eight pair of shoes and walking out wearing a pair that was size sixteen? You would look ridiculous. Yet is it any less ridiculous for negative words of unbelief to be on a believer’s lips? They are not fitted to our lips.

The Amplified Bible renders verses 17 and 18 this way: “Listen [consent and submit] to the words of the wise, and apply your mind to my knowledge; For it will be pleasant if you keep them in your mind [believing them]; your lips will be accustomed to [confessing] them.” The New English Bible translates verse 18, “To keep them in your heart will be a pleasure, and then you will always have them ready on your lips.” Again we see the truth of heart and lips. Our confession must be synchronized with the word of God living in our hearts—it becomes us as believers.

Proverbs 17:7:

Excellent speech [*margin*: a lip of excellency] becometh not a fool: much less do lying lips [*margin*: a lip of lying] a prince.

People don’t expect a well-known fool to make a brilliant statement nor a well-respected man to be caught lying. What about a son of God? What kind of words should come out of our mouths? Think about the one who is our example of what it is to be a son of God—the Lord Jesus Christ. Can you picture him saying, “What a terrible day! I hope things don’t get worse,” or “Why do I always seem to get the bad breaks?” or “Why don’t people just let me alone.” We

would be stunned if we read of such words coming out of his mouth. We should likewise be amazed to hear those kinds of words coming out of our own mouths.

There is no other revelation in the Scriptures (or anywhere else) that provides such a magnificent description of our oneness in Christ as the Book of Ephesians. The first three chapters spell out in wonderful detail who we are in our identification with Christ. The last four chapters instruct us how we are to conduct our lives in light of that identification. Let's consider a verse dealing with our words.

Ephesians 4:29:

Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.

The New International Version reads: "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen." Negative words that tear down others are not fitting for one who is a child of God.

Our mouth should bring forth praise to God.

Psalm 119:171 and 172:

My lips shall utter praise, when thou hast taught me thy statutes.

My tongue shall speak of thy word: for all thy commandments *are* righteousness.

That is what God has prepared our lips and tongues for.

Hebrews 13:15:

By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of *our* lips giving thanks to his name.

The words "giving thanks to" are given more accurately in the center margin as "confessing to." This is the type of fruit that the lips of a believer should bring forth.

Psalm 35:28:

And my tongue shall speak of thy righteousness *and* of thy praise all the day long.

Look what David did with his tongue. The word "speak" is a translation of the Hebrew *hagah*, a word we will examine in detail.

I Chronicles 16:8 and 9:

Give thanks unto the LORD, call upon his name, make known his deeds among the people.

Sing unto him, sing psalms unto him, talk ye of all his wondrous works.

Most men want to talk of all their great works. Some talk about the works of other illustrious men. As believers we should talk about God's wondrous works. The word "talk" is translated from the Hebrew *siach*.

## MEDITATION ON GOD'S WORD

Both *hagah* and *siach* are also translated “meditate.” These words are synonymous in meaning. According to Wilson’s *Old Testament Word Studies*, when used of meditation, each refers to talking with oneself. Both words are used of talking to others and also of talking to oneself. The context alone determines which is indicated. Biblically, to meditate on God’s word involves speaking His word to yourself. Let’s look at some examples.

Joshua 1:8:

This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate [*hagah*] therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.

The *Dictionary of Biblical Languages* defines *hagah* as: “**meditate**, ponder, give serious thought and consideration to selected information, with a possible implication of speaking in low tones reviewing the material.” The *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* notes: “Perhaps the Scripture was read half out loud in the process of meditation.” One Hebrew linguist explained it as that active thinking that demands expression. As you are meditating you may recall specific scriptures that you then recite, or you may declare, “Yes!” or “Amen!” You may say, “Wow!” or “That’s amazing!” or “God, teach me more.” As you are reading from John 14:12 that you can do the same works as Jesus, you may say to yourself, “I can do this!” You may do this out loud or silently with your inner voice.

I came across an article called “Self-talk: What are YOUR young athletes telling themselves?” on a website of the National Alliance for Youth Sports. It deals with the very thing we are considering.

How many times have we seen a professional player step out of the batter’s box and reassure themselves that they can do it? Or basketball stars pulling their jerseys over their mouths and talking to themselves before heading to the free throw line?

These so-called *self-talks* are much more than pep talks; they can help athletes overcome tough times and the fear of failing in clutch situations.

“Losing, failing and not meeting our goals in a clutch situation hurts,” says Dr. Josie Nicholson, sports psychologist at the University of Mississippi. “Parents and coaches must remind young athletes of the things that are true, meaning that whatever situation they were in was tough, and that they did the best they could in that situation.”

So where do self-talks come in to play in youth sports?

“After a young athlete fails, it is important for parents and coaches to listen to what kids are saying to themselves,” Nicholson says. “Are they saying things like, ‘I’m the worst athlete on the team,’ or ‘I will never be able to make that shot again.’ Or are they saying, ‘It’s okay, I will have another chance.’ Seeing how an athlete *self-talks* in those moments shows if they will be able to handle the pressure during the next game, and later on in life.”

It's important that those talks stay dialed into positive words and imagery; otherwise negative messaging can wreck an athlete's performance.

The subject of self-talk is a big deal in psychology today. Type "self-talk" in on the search engine on your computer and you will find many articles. Businesses recognize the value of positive self-talk for their employees. One writer who has over a million followers on social media has an article on her website titled "The Relationship Between Self-Talk And Your Bottom Line." She describes the importance of self-talk in business.

It is widely understood by psychologists that the power of our inner voice is immense in its relation to how we think and operate in the world. Many people do not even notice how negatively their thought patterns and self-talk can be, thus not relating its impact to one's livelihood—including their business or career. Carrying limiting beliefs for yourself directly affects your loved ones, employees and ultimately your bottom line. It is crucial to recognize any false limitations you may be putting upon yourself. These can include simple inner monologues such as "I am going to bomb in this presentation", "There is no way I am qualified for this job promotion", or "this market is already saturated there's no chance my product will sell". All of these false and limiting statements stunt our opportunity to not only pursue our full potential but to actually fulfill our dreams.

Psychologists work with their patients by helping them recognize and change their self-talk. How amazing it is that God declared centuries ago how we were to talk to ourselves. He instructed us as to what we should be telling ourselves. If we are to be successful, we must confess God's word to ourselves day and night. Yet this alone will not be sufficient for success. There also must be a corresponding action. God told Joshua that he was to "observe to do it" as well. In our final section we will see how important it is to be doers of the word.

Psalm 1:1–3:

Blessed *is* the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.

But his delight *is* in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate [*hagah*] day and night.

And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.

The Rotherham translation of verse 2 is "...and in his law doth he talk with himself day and night." R. K. Harrison renders it, "...so that day and night he recites this law to himself." Confessing God's word is a great key for success in any endeavor. Yet consider carefully the heart that is behind the confession of the word. This man's **delight** is in the law of the Lord. Speaking the word to oneself is much more than a technique for winning success. People in the world employ "positive confession" to achieve success, but as believers we confess the word of God, not primarily to get results, but because it is the truth. We confess it continually because it is God's word.

Psalm 143:5

I remember the days of old; I meditate [*hagah*] on all thy works; I muse [*siach*] on the work of thy hands.

Both words for “meditate” are used in the same verse. According to the *Holman Bible Dictionary*, the word *siach* means “ ‘to be occupied with or ‘concerned about.’ Thus meditation is the repetitious going over of a matter in one’s mind because it is the chief concern of life.” As with *hagah* this involves speaking to one’s self.

Psalms 119:23 and 24:

Princes also did sit and speak against me: *but* thy servant did meditate [*siach*] in thy statutes.

Thy testimonies also *are* my delight *and* my counsellors.

Men in positions of authority sat in counsel to make decisions against the psalmist. He could have been thinking about how he was treated unfairly and then about planning out his next move. Perhaps he could marshal public opinion in his favor or make his appeal to the king. Instead he was meditating in God’s word. The testimonies were his “counselors” or, as the center margin renders it from the Hebrew, “men of my counsel.” While the rulers were sitting and taking counsel, so was the psalmist—taking counsel from the Scriptures. He was speaking the word to himself.

Psalm 19:14:

Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength and my redeemer.

Here “meditation” is the noun form of *hagah*. David’s prayer is that both the words he spoke to himself and the words he spoke to others would be pleasing to God.

Psalm 104:34:

My meditation of him shall be sweet: I will be glad in the LORD.

Here “meditation” is the noun form of *siach*.

Psalm 119:97:

O how love I thy law! *it is* my meditation all the day.

We don’t confess God’s Word just so we can be healthy or prosperous. We confess God’s Word to ourselves out of a love for it.

Verses 99 and 100:

I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies *are* my meditation.

I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts.



In verses 97 and 99 the word “meditation” is the noun form of *siach*. The teachers had studied the Scriptures and thus had a head knowledge. But the psalmist had more understanding because he meditated in God’s word. Study without meditation will not bring understanding. Furthermore, he did more than meditate; he also kept God’s precepts by acting on the words of God.

## THE BOUNDARIES FOR CONFESSION

There is remarkable power in confession, but it must stay within the boundaries imposed by God’s word. Let’s investigate a commonly misunderstood verse.

Mark 11:23:

For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith.

This verse says that we receive what we believe and confess. Some people have taken this as a license for claiming anything they can picture in their mind and make confession over. Others have sarcastically referred to confession as “name it and claim it” or “blab it and grab it.” Such criticism is warranted if the confession is not based upon God’s word, either written or given by direct revelation. Note the previous verse.

Mark 11:22:

And Jesus answering saith unto them, Have faith [believing] in God.

To have faith in God is to believe His word. If a man is to believe God, he must receive information from God. The example Jesus Christ gave of commanding a mountain to be cast into the sea cannot be something a man thinks up but something God has told him he can do. Merely saying something long enough or loud enough doesn’t mean it will come to pass.

Lamentations 3:37:

Who *is* he *that* saith, and it cometh to pass, *when* the Lord commandeth *it* not?

As we saw earlier, we are not the ones who call those things that are not as though they were (Romans 4:17). God does. In the wilderness Jesus was tempted to speak into being what God had not commanded. The devil tried to get Jesus to use his words to change stones into bread.

Matthew 4:1–3:

Then was Jesus led up of the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungered.

And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.

The word “command” is the same word as “say” in Mark 11:23. After forty days of fasting, Jesus certainly had a need for food. The devil tempted him to command the stones to become bread. Consider his response.

Verse 4:

But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.

Our Lord would do nothing without words coming from God. Recall his words, “The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do” (John 5:19). He knew that his Father would take care of his need for physical food. When we compare this record with that of Mark 11:23, it becomes even more obvious that he would not later have given his disciples an unrestricted license to have whatsoever they said. We don’t live by the power of our confession. We live by every word proceeding out of the mouth of God. What we can say is whatever God has said we can say, either in His written word or by direct revelation. Then if we say it and believe it, it will come to pass.

## DOERS OF THE WORD

Let’s review a verse that we have covered earlier in this study.

II Corinthians 3:18:

But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, *even* as by the Spirit of the Lord.

In my time of prayer and meditation before God, I gaze upon the glory of the Lord, which is now within me. As I do so, I am being changed into the image of Christ by the spirit of the Lord. Yet it is so easy to forget who I am as I deal with the affairs of the day. Let’s consider words written in the Epistle of James.

James 1:22–25:

But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass:  
For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.  
But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth *therein*, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.

James writes of a man who beholds his natural face in the mirror but then goes his way and forgets who he is. This is true for those of us who behold our spiritual face in the mirror. We see the glory of God but then throughout the day forget who we truly are. We will keep in mind our true identification only by applying God’s word in the situations we are confronted with. We see the clear image of who we are and then we act as those who have Christ in us.

Jesus taught a great lesson to his disciples and a great multitude of people.

Luke 6:47–49:

Whosoever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings, and doeth them, I will shew you to whom he is like:

He is like a man which built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock: and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it: for it was founded upon a rock.

But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that without a foundation built an house upon the earth; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great.

Note that both individuals heard the words spoken by Jesus, yet only one had a foundation. The one who heard Jesus' sayings and did them was like a man who built the foundation of his house upon a rock. The storms could not shake his house because of the solid foundation. The one who heard Jesus' sayings and did not do them was like a man who built his house with no real foundation. The storms destroyed his house. It is not our hearing or reading the word that is our foundation. It is not even our study and meditation. It is the doing of the word. Our minds are renewed when we put the word on in our minds and act upon it. We behold as in a mirror the glory of the Lord and then we are changed into the image of Christ. Both the words and the images we hold in our minds determine the state of our heart, out of which comes all the issues of life. We confess the truth of the word to ourselves and we go forth and manifest the Christ within us in our day-by-day living by our words and our deeds.