

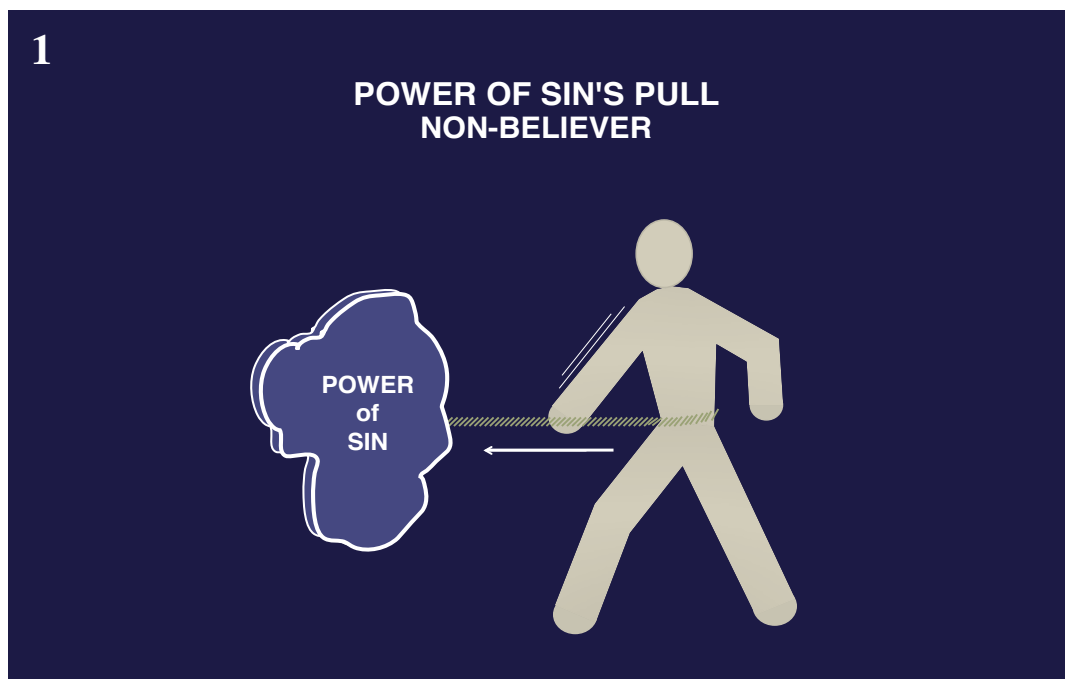
WHY YOU DO THE THINGS YOU DO!

The answer to “Why do you do the things you do?” is a simple one—“You choose to do the things you do!” It’s simple except when it comes to supporting theological positions. Then the simple becomes complex. And complexity is directly tied to how particular passages are interpreted. Those explanations can even lead to the idea that “the devil made me do it!” On the other hand, others conclude with an idea of “letting-go-and-letting God do it” through you.

The first idea is supported by the “power of sin” concept in which sinful flesh seeks to control the Christian, while the second is undergirded by the “power of the Spirit” enabling the believer to live the Christian life. I suggest that both are myths perpetuated by the traditions of the Church. Time does not allow us here to discuss each of these in detail, but the “power of sin” is addressed in chapters 3 and 4 of *Escape* and the “power of the Spirit” for Christian living is the topic in chapters 9 and 10 of *Escape*.

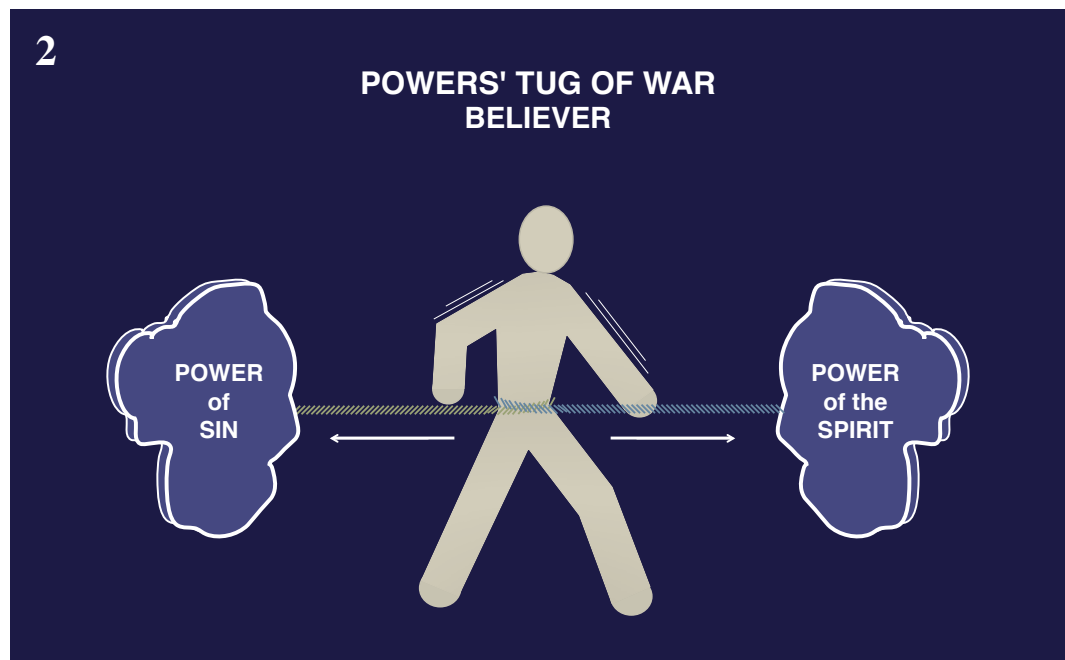
This is the usual explanation given in the Church. It is taught that there are two opposing powers competing to control and produce the Christian’s behavior. This situation is likened to a rope-pulling contest in which the believer is being tugged one way by the “power of sin” and the other way by the “power of the Spirit.” Lets consider the problem of the non-believer (see chart 1). Until we trust in Christ for eternal life, Ephesians 2 tells us that we

Two Opposing Powers?



were spiritually “dead in your trespasses and sins” (v 1) and that we “walked according to the course of this world” (v 2). Frankly, the non-believer can do nothing to please God since his behavior, being empowered by sin, always aligns with the world system.

Notice that things changed when we trusted in Christ: “God...even when we were [spiritually] dead in our transgressions, made us [spiritually] alive” (vv 4-5). Being made alive to God, the believer can now respond to God, but continues to possess that pesky sinful flesh. So, how does that work out in real life? Paul’s section on the Christian living in Romans gives insight (Rom 5–8). The Christian can walk “according to [the power of] the flesh” or “according to [the power of] the Spirit” (Rom 8:4, 13). The same thing is taught in Galatians 5 when Paul again instructs Christians to “walk by [the power of] the Spirit” and not “walk by [the power of] the flesh” (Gal 5:16-17). Then Paul confirms, “these [powers] are in opposition to one another” (v 17). Consequently, the Christian life is choosing to allow either the power of sinful flesh or the power of the Spirit to produce or cause either the “deeds of the flesh” (vv 19-21a) or the “fruit of the Spirit” (vv 22-23a). These two opposing powers are continually seeking to control the Christian (see chart 2).



Choices, Not Power Sources

This is *not* the typical Church view. There are no power sources that affect the Christian life. In fact, this author believes the tug-of-war approach between these two powers misses the intent of Romans 8 and Galatians 5 for a number of reasons:

First, in the quotes above from Romans and Galatians, the bracketed phrase *the power of* is not actually in those texts. Yet that is assumed since that is how it is usually taught. Nevertheless, the term *power* is nowhere found in Roman 5-8, Paul’s important section on the Christian living, with the exception of Romans 8:38 when Paul addressed demonic beings at work in the world. The term *power* is also never used by Paul in Galatians. The exclusion of the term *power* is deafening. Surely if that is a key ingredient for Christian living, it would have been prominently mentioned.

Second, in the New Testament sinful flesh is always understood as the propensity to sin, not as a power of sin causing or producing sin. Every person, both Christian and non-believer, possess the inclination to sin.

Third, the primary passage used to teach an alleged empowerment for Christian living is Acts 1:8:

You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.

The promise of this text, however, speaks directly to the Apostles' power for ministry as Christ's "witnesses," not for their Christian walk. While the Spirit gives gifts (Rom 12:6-8; 1 Cor 12:8-10), the purpose is empowerment for ministry primarily within the Church. We should not confuse empowerment for ministry with a supposed empowerment for Christian living. Consequently, there is no special power for living.

Fourth, since it is generally assumed that the "power of sin" exists to trip up the Christian, the needed antidote to overcome that power is the alleged "power of the Spirit." Within the tug of war, these powers cause or produce the believer's behavior. Since the believer is the conduit through which these powers work, any and all behavior is actually that of the power, not the Christian.

Rather than a tug of war to see which will control behavior, there is another way to look at the conflict. It actually occurs within the believer's choices—of disobedience or obedience. The translation of both the Romans 8 and Galatians 5 texts is better stated in the following way: Christians can choose to walk or live "with respect to sinful flesh" or "with respect to the Spirit."¹ This alternative translation captures the intent of the texts, centering on the "manner in which one behaves"² and referring to "'those who walk flesh-wise,' and 'those who walk Spirit-wise,' that is, with a fleshly or with a spiritual orientation."³ First John 1:5-7 sheds further insight. To walk "with respect to the Spirit" is to "walk in the Light" and experience "fellowship with Christ." On the other hand, to walk "with respect to sinful flesh" is to "walk in darkness," forfeiting experiences of intimacy with Christ.

Maybe another sport's illustration will help our understanding. Indulge me as we switch from a tug of war to tennis—particularly the tennis racket. In tennis the racket is used to strike the tennis ball coming at you at 100 mph. The strings in the racket are strung tight in order to redirect the flight of the ball back toward the opponent. If the strings are broken, the racket's effectiveness is severely limited and you are at the mercy of your opponent. On the other hand, the center area of a well-strung racket provides the best control and power to keep the ball in play. That particular area is called the "sweet spot," since it provides the racket's most effectiveness.

In a similar manner, the mind responds to what the world system throws at you. The non-believer's mind or racket has a hole in the middle of it (see chart 3). He has a "darkened mind" (Rom 1:21), being unable to respond to God and, therefore, never able to do anything pleasing to God. He is the natural man who—

does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised (1 Cor 2:14).

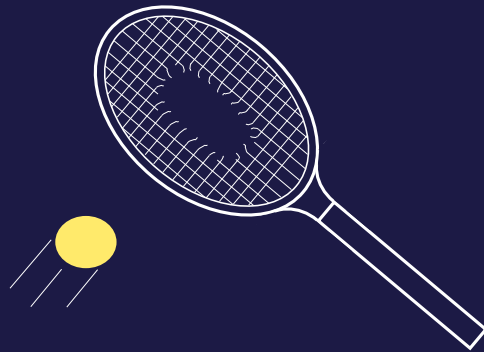
Owing to his inclination to sin, he embraces the world system. His ineffectiveness to respond to God is due to being spiritually dead (Eph 2:1), so naturally he walks "according to the course of this world" (v 2).

On the other hand in chart 4, the Christian's mind or racket has a sweet spot in the middle area of the strings, representing the believer's illumined mind that can choose harmony and fellowship with God (1 Cor 2:16). Once dead but now made positionally alive by God (Eph 2:5), the Christian's mind "spiritually appraises all things" (1 Cor 2:15). Utilizing the sweet spot, which aligns with God's will, the believer chooses to experience abundant living (John 10:10b). In that case, he allows himself to be influenced by the Spirit's leading, filling and teachings ministries. The ball goes where intended since he is walking "with respect to the Spirit." On the other hand when the sweet spot is not used, the ball flies into the net or

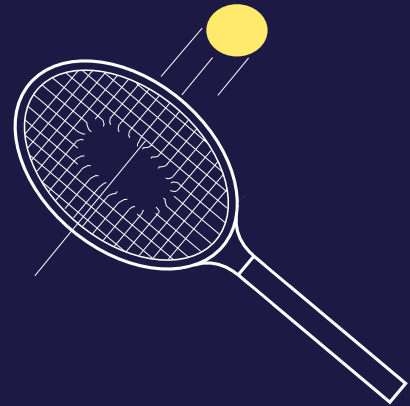
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**CHOICES OF THE MIND
NON-BELIEVER**

**INCOMING STIMULUS
FROM WORLDS SYSTEM**



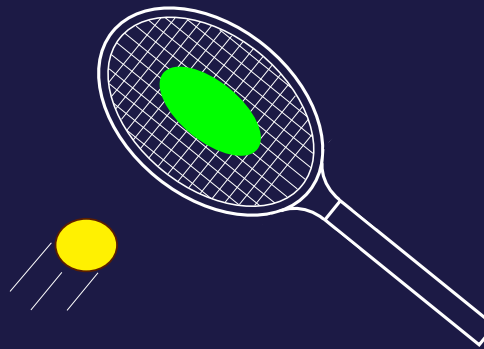
**NON-BELIEVER'S RESPONSE
TO INCOMING STIMULUS**



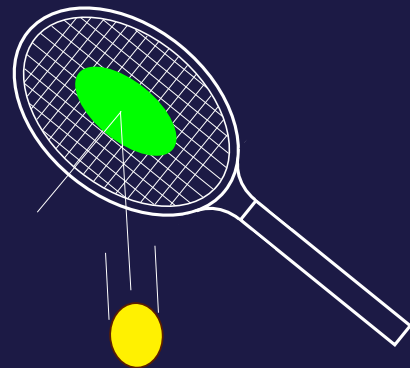
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**CHOICES OF THE MIND
BELIEVER**

**INCOMING STIMULUS
FROM WORLDS SYSTEM**



**CHRISTIAN'S RESPONSE
TO INCOMING STIMULUS**



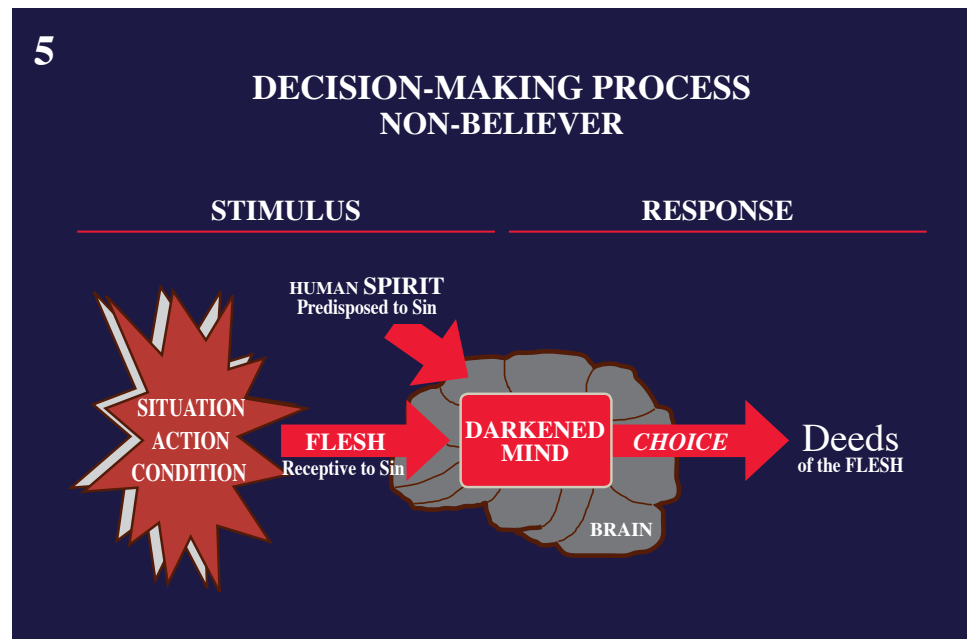
out of bounds. The Christian then is walking “with respect to flesh,” being influenced by his inclination to sin. In those instances, the believer has chosen to experience a living death. Rather than a matter of competing powers, Christian living has to do with how you respond to the influences of sinful flesh or the Spirit when the world system tries to seduce you.

Decision-Making Process

Non-Believer's Decision-Making

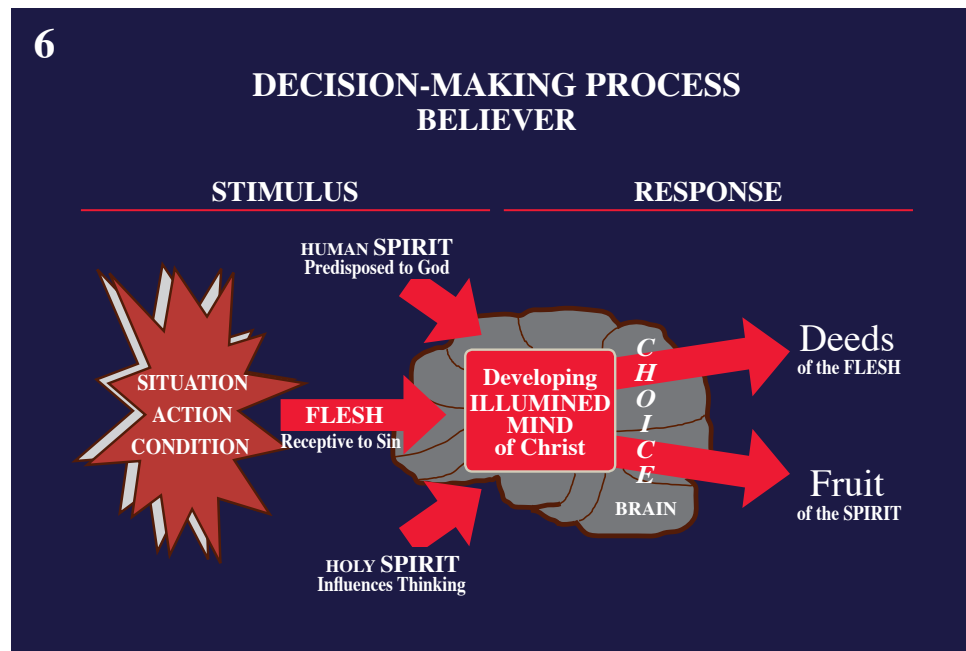
Like any illustration, tug of war or tennis both fall short of what needs to be conveyed. The Scripture provides the solution to our current discussion concerning the Christian life. The answer is found in the way we make decisions, in the choices we make that affect our behavior, not power sources. As discussed in detail in *Appendix B* of *Escape* based on the two-part (mind and human spirit) inner man from Ezekiel 36:26, the Scripture provides clarity as to the ways decision-making for the believer differs from that of the non-believer.

Chart 5 indicates how the non-believer makes decisions, moving from stimulus to response. The flesh (physical body, outer man) is receptive to the world's stimuli whether good or bad, while the person's mind processes everything received and makes decisions in concert with his human spirit. Notice that the non-believer has a darkened mind and an ungodly spirit, predisposed to sin (Rom 1:21; Eph 2:3). Consequently, the result of this process is sinful behavior. The choices of the non-believer continually produce the "deeds of the flesh" (Gal 5:19-21), behavior that is displeasing to God (Rom 8:8). Nevertheless, the non-Christian can still choose to do "good," yet that behavior even with the right motive does not bring merit before God.



Believer's Decision-Making

Differing from the non-believer (see chart 6), the believer at conversion now has an illumined mind and a godly human spirit (1 Cor 2:15-16; 1 John 3:9). While the believer's spirit is predisposed to godliness, the illumined mind, which is spiritually discerning, can experience a renewal and growth in appraising spiritual truth. Again there is collaboration between the mind and spirit. When the illumined mind harmonizes with the godly desires of the human spirit, the Christian does not sin and cannot sin. Notice too that the believer's decision-making process is enhanced through the Holy Spirit's ministry, as the Christian places himself at the disposal of the Spirit's influence (Rom 6:12-13). On the other hand, when the illumined mind ignores the godly desires of his human spirit and rejects the Spirit's ministry, the Christian sins. The outcome of the process is a twofold product of choices. If godly behavior is the choice, the "fruit of the Spirit" is evident (Gal 5:22-23). If not, the "deeds of the flesh" are the result (vv 19-21).



*Processes
Distinguished*

**You Are Responsible
for What You Do!**

While the believer can choose to please God, the non-believer is left with only one option. After what God has done for Christians, is it no wonder God is displeased when we decide to ignore Him and go our own way.⁴

The answer to “Why do you do the things you do?” is indeed a simple one. “You choose to do the things you do!” No mystical power is responsible for the things you do. You decide and you are accountable for your behavior whether good or bad.



Endnotes

1. Zane C. Hodges, *Romans* (Corinth, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2013), 208-09. “With respect to the Spirit” or “in relation to the Spirit” is also a valid translation for the (*kata* [preposition] + accusative noun [object of preposition]) construction of the prepositional phrase depending on the context. Walter Bauer, the author of the leading Greek resource, indicates that *kata* used with an accusative noun can be translated “with respect to” or “in relation to” when denoting a relationship to something [see, Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 513].
2. *Ibid.*, 208.
3. *Ibid.*, 209, 213-14.
4. Ken Neff, *Escape* (Jacksonville Beach, FL: LeaderQuest, 2018), 165-168.