

CHAPTER 11

MIND: MAKING CHOICES

After passing various tests in the final scene of *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, Indy (Harrison Ford) and two Nazi villains enter the temple's inner sanctuary in search of the Holy Grail, which was thought to possess the power of eternal life. The Knight, the protector of the Holy Grail, told them the final challenge was to select the true grail from all the false ones in the room. He warned, "But choose wisely. For as the true Grail will bring you life; the false grail shall take it from you." Selecting the most beautiful chalices, one of the villains filled it with water and drank. Immediately he began to decompose and turned to dust. The Knight muttered, "He chose... poorly." Realizing the Holy Grail could be a carpenter's cup, Indy chose the plain, wooden one. He chose...wisely...and lived.

This was a movie and was make-believe. Nevertheless it held a biblical principle for the Christian life: *wise choices result in life; poor choices lead to death*. That was the teaching throughout Romans 6–8 regarding a believer's walk with Christ. Remember, there eternal destiny was not the issue; rather *life* related to intimacy in fellowship with Christ versus *death*, the loss of fellowship.

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Supplement Belief Versus Choice

Before addressing Christians and the subject of choices, we must distinguish between coming to faith and walking by faith. Faith in Christ for eternal life is not a choice that is accepted or rejected, rather faith in Christ is a persuasion, a realization that what Christ said was true, based on the biblical evidence of His claims and works.¹ While evidence provides factual information that can either be accepted or rejected, faith is a conclusion based on your assessment of the evidence's validity. Consequently, *coming to faith in Christ is a persuasion*, not a choice.

On the other hand, *walking by faith is a choice*, which relates to the various options everyone faces in their daily life. For example all, believer or non-believer, walk by faith when entering a building or crossing a bridge, trusting that the construction is sound. While we all walk by faith, our concern here is how Christians walk with respect to God's word. Notice that faith is *never the cause of* our actions, but rather *the bases of* our actions.

While God's desire is that believers would continuously walk by faith, the Scriptures are replete with examples of failure to do so. Eve in the garden doubted God's goodness and unfortunately ate the fruit (Gen 3). She sought knowledge on her own terms. Ananias and Sapphira also doubted God, seeking unjustified recognition for the sale of land for the ministry, holding back some of the money for themselves (Acts 5). Even Peter regrettably chose to separate himself from Gentile Christians in order to associate with Judaizers (Jewish Christian) from Jerusalem (Gal 2). Peter's decision was based on how he would be perceived by men rather than edify the body in Galatia. God has saved and created us for good works (Eph 2:9-10) and He wants us to make the choice to obey Him. Benefits abound, but only if we choose wisely.

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Since faith is the bases, not the cause, of behavior, faith in God's character must be applied in every life situation. If not, the believer's behavior is based on fleshly impulses. More important, continuing to live by faith in different areas of life results in increased trust in God and Christian maturity.

Decision-Making Process

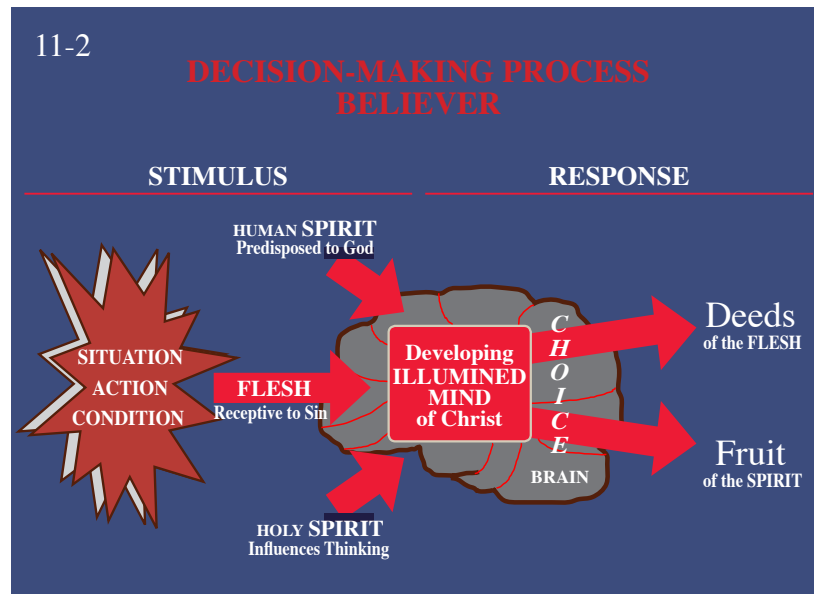
In the business world, a formal cost-benefit analysis is used to determine the pros and cons of any business opportunity. Prior to making a decision to proceed, benefits are compared to the associated costs. If the costs outweigh the benefits, the decision is obvious. The proposed plan is abandoned.

Isn't that what we individually do everyday? While in an informal manner, every decision a person makes is evaluated by cost versus benefit. At the grocery store, is it hamburger or steak? In a car purchase, is it a Ford or a Mercedes? In college selection, it is Harvard or a state college? You get the point. What you eat, what you drive, or where you go to school is not necessarily good or bad. Nevertheless, we have to acknowledge that the cost associated with any endeavor should not be only thought of in terms of time or money. There is always a spiritual component, either positive or negative, associated with any decision. Certainly that is the case for a decision to speed, to lie, or to have an affair.

The process of making any decision concerns not only your mind but also the influences of the world around you. How we react to those influences is determined to a great extent by our own mindset, which serves as a filter to differentiate the appropriate from the inappropriate. As discussed in detail in *Appendix B* 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.

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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 (see chapter 5, *Supplement*). 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

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

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it no wonder God is displeased when we decide to ignore Him and go our own way.

Motivation

The young lady I dated the last two years of high school became captain of the cheerleaders, homecoming queen and valedictorian. Now I had some things going for me too, but she was much different from the rest of the girls in my school. On our second date she ask me an interesting question. “Why do you bite your nails?” I thoughtfully said, “I don’t know.” Counseling professionals could provide the answer, but within a few weeks I had broken the habit. That is how it is when you have affection for another person. In a growing friendship there is a mutual sharing of likes and dislikes and each person must decide how to respond. Frankly, that is the purpose of courtships since they ultimately lead to marriage commitments.

But the “why” question always catches us off guard. A parent asks, “Why didn’t you get home on time?” A policeman asks, “Why didn’t you stop at the red light?” A teacher asks, “Why didn’t you complete the assignment?” A boss asks, “Why hasn’t your new project gotten off the ground?” Not wanting to pull Dr. Phil on you, but the answer is found on a highway billboard—*Everything happens for a reason. Sometimes the reason is you’re [not to bright] and make bad decisions!* While being ignorant can lead to some really bad decisions, it all comes down to motivation—the dreaded “Why.” Why do you do what you do!

Why You Do—What You Do—When You Do It! When a theological error popped up in Galatia, Paul confronted the perpetrator directly (Gal 2:11-14). The offender happened to be Peter and Paul got right in his face. This wasn’t the first time Peter received a reprimand, finding himself on the wrong side of an issue. You remember the incident when Jesus told him, “Get behind Me, Satan” (Mark 8:33). There, Peter had the wrong response, misunderstanding Christ’s intentions and ultimate mission. In Galatia he acted inappropriately, separating himself from Gentile Christians and associating with the Judaizers who

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had come from Jerusalem. Why? Because he was “fearing the party of the circumcision” (Gal 2:12).

If Peter had been in Jerusalem, his actions would not have been questioned. It would have been the norm.⁵ In the transitional first-century period, Jewish Christians continued to be circumcised and followed the Mosaic Law. Rather than a means of obtaining eternal life, Jewish believers understood that keeping the Law was for God’s people in order to experience fellowship with Him.⁶ Nevertheless in Galatians 2 *when* Peter withdrew from the Gentile Christians, the incident is linked to *where* it took place as well as to the *why*. Peter’s primary concern was what others would think of him, particularly those from Jerusalem, neglecting how it would impact the Gentile believers.

Paul had taught the believers of Galatia that keeping the Mosaic Law was neither a requirement for salvation or for living the Christian life. Nevertheless, Peter’s actions signaled that both Jew and Gentile believers alike must obey the Law. Consequently, Paul confronted Peter in the presence of all and asked the *why question*—“How [Why] *is it that* you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?” (v 14). Paul pointed out Peter’s hypocrisy, showing the inconsistency in his behavior because of the Judaizers’ presence.

“Want To” or “Got To”

In the trailer to the movie comedy *The Breakup*, Brooke (Jennifer Aniston) complained to Gary (Vince Vaughn) for not helping her wash the dishes. Talking as he continued to play a video game, she said, “I want you to want to do dishes.” He responded, “Why would I want to wash dishes?” You readily understand why the movie’s title was *The Breakup*. They obviously had different expectations.

When motivation is being addressed it usually comes down to the “want to” versus the “got to” issue. Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38-42) are the biblical epitome of this dilemma. When Jesus and His disciples came to Bethany, Martha was preoccupied in the elaborate preparation of a meal for her guests, while at the same time her sister Mary sat listening to Christ’s teaching (vv 39-40a). Mary “wanted to” listen to

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Jesus, but Martha “had to” devote herself to all the cooking. When Martha approached Jesus and pleaded with Him to “tell her [Mary] to help me [Martha]” (v 40b), Jesus had a teachable moment with Martha about priorities. He said, “Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; but *only* one thing is necessary, for Mary has chosen the good part” (vv 41-42). No doubt Martha wanted to listen to Jesus, but only if she could be relieved from *all* the necessary work that organizing a meal involved. Jesus’ response also addressed the obsession of service for God to the neglect of His Word. On both counts she had made the wrong choice. Again it comes down to *why* you do, *what* you do, *when* you do it.

Typically in Christian circles whenever motivation is discussed there is a tendency to opt for a coin flip. On one side is fear and guilt and on the other is love. Mary chose love and Martha chose guilt. But every decision is not that simple. Rather than a coin-toss, motivations cover a spectrum with numerous alternatives, which at times some may even overlap. For example consider the following five motives, moving along a continuous spectrum from fear to love as shown in chart 11-3. [Note: While there may be others, these five were selected since they are the ones almost exclusively referenced in Christian literature. The order of fear, guilt, and merit on the left of the spectrum are interchangeable depending on the individual.]

Fear

Fear is the reasoning that some action either by man or by God will cause harm, pain or shame. Since homes typically represent a large financial asset and the replacement cost would be significant, fear is the motivation of homeowners to purchase insurance. The judgment of God also produces fear. When Jonah went to Nineveh with a warning of their coming destruction (Jonah 3:4-10), the Ninevites feared God and repented. Those who do not trust in Jesus for eternal life should be fearful of the return of Christ. They will not escape the judgment at the Great White Throne at the end of time (Rev 20:11-15).

Jesus taught that those who believed in Him for eternal life would never “come into judgment” (John 5:24), meaning the Great White Throne

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judgment of non-Christians. At a different judgment, the Judgment Seat of Christ, each believer's works, "whether good or bad," will be evaluated (Rom 14:10-12; 2 Cor 5:10). That coming judgment is a strong motivation for faithfulness and obedience to Christ, "so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away in shame at His coming" (1 John 2:28). The context is the believer's shame if he disappoints Jesus by not continually abiding in Him by keeping His word.⁷



Guilt

Guilt is the end result of committing an offence associated with an action or inaction toward someone or something. Running a red light, whether intentionally or unintentionally, causes a quick glance in the rearview mirror to see if a patrolman may be near. Signing the bottom of your 1040 Form and knowing you omitted a revenue source can also produce anxiety. The Scriptures tells us that the role of the Spirit is to convict the world of sin (John 16:8-9), producing a sense of remorse with a view to repentance and thus salvation. Believers are instructed, "do not grieve the Holy Spirit" (Eph 4:30), reminding Christians that sinful behavior not only brings sorrow to the Spirit but also loss of fellowship with Christ. Guilt clouds the conscience and is the result of sinful behavior.

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Merit

Merit refers to the assumption that a reward is deserved based on effort. Inherent in merit is an expectation that something is earned and justified. In politics, pay-to-play occurs when campaign funding is given in exchanged for support of a pet project or access to an important person. Many understand Christianity in a similar manner. To earn salvation, rules must be followed, whether biblical or man-made. That's the deal—pay-to-play. On the other hand, the teaching from John 3:16 is that we cannot do anything to merit eternal life. It is solely by faith alone—"whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life." God's gift of salvation is the result of God's work alone through simple trust in Jesus for eternal life (Eph 2:4-9).

Christians "are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them" (v 10). This fits right into the work ethic found in America. If we work hard at a job, we expected advancements, increases in paychecks, and a future retirement. Unfortunately, many understand the Christian life in this same manner. If we continue to walk obediently in the good works that God prepared for us, we deserve blessings now and heaven in the future. If not, we forfeit our salvation.

Gratitude

Gratitude is appreciation and thankfulness. In an economically declining city a person starts a new business. As the business grows, the employees benefit not only by having a job but also through salary increases and stock options. Their appreciation of and thankfulness to their employer and for their jobs is readily understood. Likewise, there should be gratitude to God for all He has done. John 3:16 tells us that God was the initiator when He sent Jesus: "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son." In gratefulness to God's love, a corresponding response would be expected. John states the obvious. "We love [or should love], because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

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Love

Agape is the god-type love that seeks the highest good for another person, having that person's best interest in view. This is the type of love under consideration here.⁸ This takes us back to the very foundation of the Old Testament—the teaching to love God and to love others (Matt 22:36-40). Jesus taught how we can show love for God. He said, “If you love Me, you will keep my commandments” (John 14:15), referring to living in light of Ephesians 2:10. In so doing, we become more like Christ who said, “Just as I kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love (15:10b), if you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love” (v 10a). Continuing He taught, “This is my commandment, that you love one another, just as I loved you” (v 12). This is the theme John picks up on later. “Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another” (1 John 4:11).

While God's love for us is the motivation behind our gratitude, our concern here is how it is demonstrated. It isn't a feeling. It is action toward the one that is loved. Notice that God's desire is that the Christian not only love Him but also others, believers and non-believer alike. The Scriptures is clear how our love for God and others is made a reality through “good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them” (Eph 2:10).

“Got To” Cancels Out “Want To”

The range of motives above points out the possibly of wrong actions based on fear, guilt or seeking a reward. Notice that these different motives can overlap and interact. Out of fear someone can try to work his way to heaven, including even mixing it with faith. Out of guilt a person can accomplish a task that God desired a Christian might do, yet while beneficial to another person, without the motivation of love, they are worthless from God's perspective. Unfortunately, actions out of gratitude alone, without godly-love, are hollow and feed into a merit mindset.

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Embracing “Want To” Living

Only as a Christian grasps the biblical concept of godly-love as a motivating factor, grounded in gratitude to God, will he move along the continuum from *having to obey God* to *wanting to obey God*. As previously addressed in this book, a “got to” activity is of no benefit to the Christian other than for mere satisfaction in just doing something. On the other hand, “want to” love demonstrates love for God and for someone else, ultimately leading to being rewarded at the Judgment Seat of Christ (2 Cor 5:10).

Consider the stop sign. God established government and they in turn set up laws for society, which include stop signs (Rom 13:1, 5-7). The issue isn't if there are rules, but how we respond to those rules. While stop signs can be a nuisance, particularly if you are the only car at the intersection of a four-way stop, the purpose of the sign isn't to inhibit your progress. It is for the protection and safety of all drivers, including you. So yes, we all need to stop at stop signs. It is essentially a “got to” issue for your protection. Nevertheless, the Christian's motivation should supersede basic reasoning by a desire to seek the welfare of others. With other drivers' best interest in view, you come to a complete stop.

Notice the issue isn't if there are laws to be obeyed. Rather *the issue is why you obey*. For the Christian, this takes us back to the rewards. Remember you can do the right thing for the wrong reason, and *rewards are based not only on what you do, but why you do what you do when you do it!*

Motivation and Choice

Motivation and choice go hand-in-hand in decision-making. From the non-believer's perspective shown in chart 11-1, most choices are rarely based on love for others or God. Of course, he may seek another's best interest, such as those in his own family. Nevertheless being apart from Christ, those decisions will not find or earn favor from God.

On the other hand (see chart 11-2), as the believer's illumined mind is increasingly aligned with his spirit, which is oriented toward

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God, and is progressively more disposed to the Spirit's influence, then his motivation gravitates to the love end of the spectrum. As a result, behavior should reflect the highest good for both God and others.

Choices and the Christian Walk

As with most things in life, people tend to look for shortcuts to wealth, happiness, approval or whatever. The Church is likewise susceptible to the need for instantaneous gratification. You hear, "I want fulfillment in life," "I want to be spiritual," and "I want to be mature in Christ." Unfortunately, Christian growth is often presented as easily achievable—"you can have it now!"

When the premise of a promise is false, the promise is unattainable. If it sounds too good to be true, it usually is. Yet, the repetition of the same promise over and over by Bible teachers tends to lead credence to its validity. Hollow, yet accepted, church members continue to chase after the unachievable. In the last chapter, we addressed the biblical promise of "being filled by the Spirit" (Eph 5:18).⁹ While "being filled by the Spirit" is potentially available to any Christian, the way that particular biblical promise can be realized is the issue. In the extended section of Ephesians 5:1-18, three times Paul addressed the believer's conduct. He instructed believers to "walk in love, just as Christ also loved you" (v 2), "walk as children of light" no longer being children of darkness (v 7) and "walk, not as unwise men but as wise" (v 15). In this context Paul gives the basis for a wise walk. First, he writes, "So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is" (v 17). Foolish living dismisses the Word, while wise living conforms to the light of God's Word. Then, he concludes, "Do not get drunk with wine... , but be filled with the Spirit" (v 18), emphasizing the believer's life should be influenced by the Spirit rather than by wine. Consequently in this section of Ephesians 5, the wise walk of the believer, under the influence of the Spirit's ministry through the light of God's Word, is Paul's concern.

Yet, this text has been incorrectly used to teach how to be filled with the Spirit. From Ephesians 5:18 Bible teachers insist that since God desires all believers to "be filled with the Spirit" we then can

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claim that promise of the Spirit's filling merely through prayer based on 1 John 5:15: "And if we know that He hears us *in* whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him." We just pray for it and then we can claim it as true. You possess it automatically and instantaneously. With that same logic we could use 1 John 5:15 to instantly "walk wisely" (Eph 5:15) since it is also God's desire. Clearly, that approach misrepresents the intent of Ephesians 5.

There are other teachings that address how Christians are to live in obedience to God. In each there are differences in regard to the underlying premise. Below we will consider two faulty viewpoints and then the one the author believes is correct.

Faulty Premise

Appropriating Power

We have all watched a very young child struggling to take his first steps—wobbling and holding on to furniture. We typically say, "Look, he is trying to walk!" Should we expect a new child in Christ to do otherwise? I think not! The new believer needs to learn to walk in God's ways. Unfortunately Christian authors typically insist that believers *cannot walk in their own strength*. In fact, they tell us that believers should stop *trying to walk in their own human effort*.¹⁰ Reacting, my first thought is that this is exactly how every person begins to walk—one wobbly step in front of the other. We obviously expect babies to walk with human effort and that is true whether they are physical or spiritual babes. To think otherwise is absurd.

Nevertheless, those that adhere to this faulty idea base their reasoning on Acts 1:8 and Ezekiel 36:27 where the Spirit causes obedience in and through believers. This notion is understood as *appropriating the Spirit's power*.¹¹ The believer's choice is either to allow the Spirit to live through him or not. If so, godly behavior is the Spirit's work, having nothing to do with the Christian's own effort. Contrary to that position, the biblical picture isn't if believers can walk by means of either the Spirit or human effort, but rather if they chose to allow either the Spirit or their inclination to sin to influence their behavior. An obedient Christian must place one foot in front of the other just as

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does the disobedient one. Both must exert human effort and energy to walk.

The issue isn't if but how when it comes to walking and the Christian life: either with respect to sinful flesh or with respect to the Spirit. Choices filtered through the illumined mind, which in turn is influenced by the Spirit, actually result in godly conduct. On the other hand, the same mind influenced by sin fosters decisions that actually bring about sinful behavior. It is the believer himself who walks "in his own strength," and the end product is behavior based either on sinful desires or what pleases God.

Appropriating Identity

Beginning in the sixth grade and continuing for a year into college, I played basketball. I found my identity as a player and was recognized for my ability. During each game I would face various challenges: health, injury, and of course the opponent. One particular problem was scoring. I was one of those players labeled a "streak shooter." I could score more than twenty points or as less than ten points in any particular game. The difference in each case was how many of my shots would go through the basket. It was a mystery as to when I would be hot or cold. I could shoot well in the first half and hit poorly in the second or vice versa. In fact in high school, I scored 18 points in the first half of a game and would have been recognized in *Sports Illustrated* if I had continued at that same scoring pace. Alas, no. Yet, while continuing to shoot in the second half, I only scored 4 points, but I knew my identity did not change regardless of how many or how few points I made. I was still a basketball player.

Lets relate identity in basketball to the Christian life. A believer is a new man in Christ because of God's work of regeneration. This is the believer's new identity and it is the very reason every Christian can live obediently.¹² But that life of adherence to God's Word is only a possibility. It's not automatic since he can also live ignoring God. As in basketball, each believer can experience ups (obedience) and downs (disobedience). Yet, his identity as a new man in Christ remains unchanged in either case. Nevertheless those who hold the *appropriating-your-identity* idea understand the Christian's life is

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likewise connected to the premise of “appropriating-power.”¹³ We are told that each believer must appropriate his identity in Christ by allowing Christ to live His resurrection-life through them. Invariably this can only take place when the Christian dependently trusts in the power of the Spirit to live out Christ’s life.

In opposition, appropriating the new-man identity is not the issue in the Christian life. While one’s identity is the bases for the Christian life, the believer’s identity in Christ does not solve the believer’s struggle with sin. The answer is not in deciding to appropriate one’s identity. *You are who you are in Christ.* While your identity in Christ is the *basis* for making the right choices, choosing to walk with respect to the Spirit rather than to live with respect to the flesh is the *issue*.

Biblical Premise

The premise of both views above is inaccurate, leading to faulty conclusions concerning the Christian life. Underlying each promise of how to live in obedience to Christ is the necessity of the Spirit’s power to actually produce godly behavior in and through the Christian. As discussed, that is a biblically incorrect.

The way Christians can live obediently does not involve the Spirit causing godly behavior. Rather as shown in chart 11-2, the Christian’s behavior is the result of the believer’s illumined mind, interacting with (1) the flesh, (2) the godly human spirit, and (3) the Holy Spirit, that sets a course of action. As the believer increasingly places himself at the disposal of the Spirit’s influence, his walk pleases God (Rom 6:12-13).

Making Choices

As we have discussed before, the issue in the Christian life is not power. Rather, the issue is choosing to obey or disobey. The product of those decisions either pleases God or disappoints Him.