



#10

The Ultimate Mind Game

Have you ever gotten a computer virus? It can wreak havoc with your personal computer and change the way it performs! A virus introduces a malicious code into your system with devastating results. It can be very costly. What if someone were trying to hack their way into your *mind* to change the way you think? How costly would that be?

In 2 Corinthians 10:3-5, Paul points out that the biggest battlefield in the universe is your mind, because your mind is the place where you make moral decisions and choose your allegiances. Someone is trying to gain access to your mind! How do you protect yourself?

Paul gives us a simple yet valuable “anti-virus” program: Is every thought captive to an obedient life in Christ? He gives similar advice in Philippians 4:8, advising us to think only on things that are pure and honest. Keep your “hard drive” clean and uncluttered.

Why does Paul give this advice? Because he knew that there is a war being waged for your mind. Jesus warned us in Matthew 6:24 that we cannot serve more than one master. Our minds are designed to run in only one direction. If you try to go in two directions at once, according to James 1:8, you will become unstable.

If you load a home computer with a lot of conflicting information, it starts to run slowly and becomes unstable. Your mind works much the same way. You can't fill it with both pure and corrupt thoughts at the same time and expect to carry on without any problems (Matthew 12:35). And in 1 John 5:4, we read that it is our duty as Christians to *overcome* the world through faith.

So how does harmful information get into our minds? The Bible tells us in 1 John 2:15 that there are three primary areas of temptation the devil uses to get to us: (1) the lust of the flesh, (2) the lust of the eyes, and (3) the pride of life. Every temptation imaginable can be categorized as falling into one of these three broad categories.

As Christians, we need to be able to assess ourselves honestly. The devil tries to corrupt our thought processes through our senses—and two of the senses through which he especially seems to be working in the modern world are the senses of hearing and sight. Let's explore that for a moment.

In Proverbs 23:12 and Proverbs 22:17, we read that our ears were given to us for the purpose of gathering wisdom. Let's be honest: How much of what the world listens to today for entertainment would honestly fall into the category of wisdom? Not much! And when you set wrong thoughts to music, it's all that much easier to plant them in your mind. That is why advertising jingles are so effective.

Most of what is broadcast on television today isn't much better than what is on the radio. Sexual immorality and violence have become a standard part of most television and movie entertainment. Even

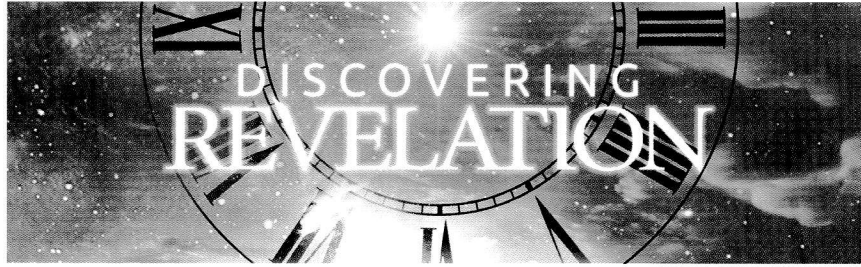
Christians are watching things they wouldn't have dreamed of watching just a generation ago. Yet the Bible warns in Psalm 101:2, 3 that God's people should set no wicked thing before their eyes!

Some people argue that what we listen to and what we watch doesn't really affect the way we think. Why is it, then, that major corporations are willing to pay millions of dollars for mere seconds of television advertising time? It is because they understand what many Christians are loathe to admit—what you watch can change how you think!

It is not an issue of all or nothing. You don't have to throw out your TV or radio if you can control your exposure. (Although, if you find you can't control it, it just might be better to get rid of it!) The Bible doesn't necessarily call for complete abstinence—it calls for *discernment*. Philippians 4:8 provides some excellent guidelines for what the Christian ought to listen to, read or watch.

There is another area of temptation that moves away from our senses and deals more with our appearance. The Bible refers to it as the *pride of life*. This is the Bible's warning to keep life simple, and to keep our eyes on Christ rather than self.

We have been made ambassadors of Christ. What a privilege! Wouldn't you like the world to notice the difference He has made in your life?



The Ultimate Mind Game

Almost as soon as there were computers, there were computer hackers. For some, it's a "game," an attempt to see how deeply they can hack their way into complex computer sites. Others try to steal sensitive information. Some hackers insert viruses into software, crashing computer systems worldwide.

If you've ever gotten a virus on your home computer, you know how much havoc it can wreak. But what if someone were trying to hack into your mind—trying to change the way you think? How much worse would that be?

The Bible tells us that someone is trying to do just that. Satan wants to control your thinking through his ultimate mind game.

THE WORLD'S GREATEST BATTLEFIELD IS YOUR MIND

1. How serious is Satan's effort to gain access to your mind?
(Ephesians 6:11, 12)

Each of us stands at the center of a struggle between God and the "spiritual hosts of wickedness." Satan and his "rulers of darkness" try to fill our minds with evil. God wants to protect us and cleanse us from the virus of sin. Our daily lives are a hotly-contested battleground between the forces of good and evil.

2. Is it possible to serve both God and Satan? (Matthew 6:24)

If you load a lot of conflicting software onto your computer, it begins to malfunction and become unstable. Your mind works in much the same way. As the Apostle James wrote, "A double-minded man [is] unstable in all his ways." (James 1:8) You can't fill your mind with both

pure thoughts and corrupt thoughts without experiencing problems. Ultimately, you must choose one direction or the other. (Matthew 12:35; James 3:11, 12)

3. How can we hope to overcome Satan in this battle for our minds? (2 Corinthians 10:3-5)

We don't have to fight against Satan's ultimate mind game in our own strength. In fact, we can't. We walk "in the flesh" (human strength), but "we do not war according to the flesh" (human strength). By God's power, using the weapons He gives, we can bring "every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ."

GARBAGE IN, GARBAGE OUT

Computer programmers have a saying: "Garbage in, garbage out." The results you get from a computer are only as good as the data that goes into the computer. That principle is also true of the mind.

4. How does the Bible express this basic principle? (Philippians 4:8)

Think of this as an "antivirus" program for your mind. Keep your "hard drive" clean and uncluttered by filling your mind only with those things that are pure and honest.

5. What are three primary areas in which the devil concentrates his temptations? (1 John 2:15, 16)

(a) _____

The lusts of the flesh include more than sexual impurity. Certainly, that is a problem today with pornography being so accessible. Standards of purity are being largely swept aside. But the lusts of the flesh can also include such things as the amount of food and the kinds of foods we eat, greed, alcohol, drug abuse, and a host of other temptations that appeal to our sinful human natures.

(b) _____

The devil tries to corrupt our thought processes through our senses—especially our eyes and ears. Let's be honest with ourselves—how much of what we listen to and watch for entertainment is in harmony with God's ideals for our lives?

If we are to overcome “the lust of the eyes,” this may mean that we will need to be much more selective in the TV programs we choose and the movies we watch. It may mean that we need to pay better attention to the music we listen to throughout the day.



What we watch and listen to can change how we think. We should be like David, who vowed, “I will set nothing wicked before my eyes.” (Psalm 101:3)

(c)

This area of temptation deals with attitudes and appearances. God wants us to keep life simple and Christ-like—in our habits, dress, interactions with others and possessions. Paul warns us not to think too highly of ourselves. (Romans 12:3) Peter urges us to reflect Christ even in the way we dress. (1 Peter 3:3, 4) Jesus tells us that the way to spiritual greatness is through humility and being willing to serve others. (Matthew 18:1-4; Mark 10:35-45)



THE SECRET TO OVERCOMING SATAN'S MIND GAME

6. In vision, what special group did John see in heaven and how does he describe them? (Revelation 14:1, 4, 5)

This group of people follow the Lamb (Jesus) wherever He goes. The Father's name is written in their foreheads—their minds. They are without fault.

That sounds rather daunting. How can we ever hope to become faultless and follow Jesus in all things? The people in this group have been “redeemed from among men.” (vs. 4) This means that they have sinned in the past, but they have been forgiven. God's offer of redemption is for everyone; it's for you.

7. If you have been redeemed, what marvelous transformation does God work in you? (2 Corinthians 5:17-21)

Those who are redeemed “in Christ” are “a new creation.” “Old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.” (vs. 17) This is why the 144,000 are “without fault before the throne of God.” (Revelation 14:5) If you choose to accept Jesus Christ as your Savior, He promises to forgive your sins and cleanse you from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9) He promises to transform you into an entirely new creation. He promises to give you the power to live for Him and overcome Satan's mind game. With the Apostle Paul, you can say, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” (Philippians 4:13) You can be in the group that follows the Lamb wherever He goes.

MY DECISION

- I choose to accept Jesus as my Savior and to experience His power in my life to overcome Satan's temptations.

MY PRAYER

Father, I want to be a new person because Your Son, Jesus, lives in my heart. Give me the strength daily to resist Satan and to follow You in all things. In Jesus' name, Amen.