A Sense of Self

Why Did I Do That?

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Course I – Unit 2, Lesson 1
(New Life Behavior English Edition)

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"If any person be in Christ, he is a new creature..."
(2 Corinthians 5:17)

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Why Did I Do That?

Before starting this lesson, take a few minutes to complete the following thought: "I am in my current personal position and condition because I did… or did not do...." "**Write your thoughts on the enclosed** Response Sheet **and then put it away until you finish this lesson.** We also suggest that you read the lesson through the first time without looking up the scriptures. Next, study the scriptures. Finally, go back to a more in-depth study before completing the Response Sheet.

I. Introduction

As you worked through Unit 1, you learned about three ways of viewing the world: the atheistic, agnostic and Christian world views. You also learned about the "new life" that is available to the Christian. Now you are ready to begin a new unit on behavior. Since this is the "New Life Behavior" course, our central theme is how a "new life" or "new life thinking" can impact our behavior. In this first lesson we will ask the title question: "*Why* did I do that?" We will look at how thinking and feeling lead to behaving.

Why did Adam and Eve disobey God? Why did Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10) offer unauthorized fire before the Lord? Why did Moses strike the rock instead of speaking to it as he had been commanded (Numbers 20)? Why did Peter deny Christ three times and Judas betray Him? Why did Peter later change his behavior while Judas committed suicide? It wasn't that they didn't know better. Why do *we* act the way *we* do? In this lesson we will explore this question. The basis of this "why" is in Proverbs 23:7 (King James Version): "As a person thinks in his heart, so he behaves...." This thought could be considered the "motto" for this whole series of studies.

Let's begin by looking at some common responses that people give whenever they are asked *why* they behaved in a certain way:

- After Adam and Eve sinned, Adam said, "Eve made me do it." Eve said, "The devil made me do it."
- Some say, "A little voice told me to do it."
- King David, after his sin with Bathsheba, would say, "It was due to lust."
- Some say pride caused them to do it.
- Some say they were hungry, or drunk, or "high," or angry.
- Some say they didn't know what they were doing.
- Some say their parents are to blame.
- Peter and Judas blamed themselves.

There are three general answers that people give as to why they behave as they do:

- The atheist says: "I decided to satisfy my biological and social needs and urges," or "What do you expect? I'm just human."
- The agnostic answers, "I don't know why I did it," or "They made me do it," or "I was afraid they would not like me."
- The Christian declares, "As a person thinks and feels, so he behaves. Since I allowed myself to do it, I am responsible. I can control my behavior. I will accept the consequences of my negative actions and enjoy the benefits of my positive behavior."

Part of the "good news" (the Gospel) is that we do not have to be a victim of our upbringing, our environment or even of our present condition, but that we can *choose* how we behave. We think this is truly a reason for rejoicing! Through the power of Christ we can say "I can..." (Philippians 4:13), rather than "I can't...!"

Now let's look at some details that can help us understand why we behave the way we do.

II. The Four "G's" That Control Our Behavior

Experts recognize that there are "**F**our **G'**s" that impact our behavior, as shown in figure 1–1, and discussed in the following paragraphs.

Figure 1–1. The "***Four G's***" That Impact Human Behavior

A. <u>**G**enes</u>

The genetic structure (road map) that we inherit from our parents and other ancestors is a factor in our behavior. Just as we might have inherited "grandpa's big nose," we may also have inherited his disposition. According to studies of identical twins raised apart in different environments, researchers found striking similarities in the behavior of separated twins We have no choice in the basic temperament (behavorial styles) that comes to us via the genes. We are born with different temperaments and different

talents. There is no right or wrong kind of temperament. It is a beautiful thing when we can give our temperament and talents over to God and live in harmony with the style or temperament that we receive via our genes. While we don't *have* to follow the behavior predisposed to us by our genetic structure (road map), we are *inclined* to follow it unless we, someone, or something redirects our behavior. The groups in our home, school, work place, church and other places can be strong factors in influencing out behavior.

B. **G**roups

The groups into which we are born (parents), with whom we grow up (family, peers, friends, teachers), marry into, work and socialize with, can be powerful influences on our behavior. They can encourage or discourage our natural tendencies. A child learns what is acceptable and unacceptable behavior from the group into which he was born and usually acts accordingly. When we are small, we may act like our parents. As preteens and teens, we tend to act like our peers or heroes—sometimes in a distinctly different way from our parents.

Dating and the anticipation of dating can cause all kinds of behavioral changes. (Preteens and early teenage boys begin changing their behavior from being sarcastic toward girls to trying to impress them. Many behavioral changes also take place in the girls.)

The groups with whom we associate are very important. The Bible warns against having evil companions (I Corinthians 15:33). Like our genetic structure, we did not have a choice of the group into which we were born nor very much choice in the groups with whom we associated during our childhood. As we become older, sometimes our best choice and perhaps only choice is to leave a group. This is where our guidelines come into play.

C. **G**uidelines

We "catch" or develop our guidelines, priorities, ethics or values from the groups mentioned above. (We do not inherit our guidelines.) We also develop guidelines of our own. When we are young, we tend to be politically and religiously similar to our parents because we value their opinions. Later, as we learn about other opinions, we may either reject our parents' values or go through a process of evaluating them until we consciously choose them as our own. Those we chose as important and/or valuable form the basis for our guidelines or priorities. Our guidelines have a strong impact on our **G**oals.

D. **G**oals

The goals that we set for ourselves, believe in and diligently work toward, greatly influence our behavior. Obviously, a parent whose goal or aim in life is merely to have a good time is going to act differently than, for example, a parent who gives up many pleasures for himself in order to provide for his children. The goals that we set for ourselves are largely determined by our guidelines or values that we feel are important.

We all have goals whether we are consciously aware of them or not. To choose not to have goals is to choose to live aimlessly, which is a goal itself. When Jesus was being crucified on the cross, He could have responded as some others who would have cursed their enemies. Instead He asked God to forgive them. Jesus had a goal: fulfilling God's plan. Between the usual reaction (cursing those who hurt us) and His response (asking for blessings and forgiveness for them), He made a decision based on love and the value of man's redemption. We, through Christ, can do likewise (Phillipians 4:13).

III. How Our Mind Works

A. The Three Functions or Parts of Our Minds

According to our lesson motto (Proverbs 23:7), there are three separate but interrelated parts of our minds (see figure 1–2):

1. *Thinking (Cognitive)* – Includes knowing, remembering, perceiving, analyzing, synthesizing, evaluating and understanding.
2. *Feeling (Affective)* – Includes love, fear, resentment, anger, compassion and a wide range of other human emotions
3. *Behaving (Action)* – The action/reaction or "doing" part of behavior, which includes running, hitting, testing, drinking, listening, hugging, touching, talking, etc.

   As you view figure 1–2, notice that the three interlocking circles overlap and form additional shapes. The innermost shape we will designate as THE MIND. The mind is the *core* of our thoughts, feelings and actions. Under the mind we note an area designated as ***Needs***. Our *needs* for health, security, relationships, expectations and appreciation will impact on our THOUGHTS, FEELINGS, and GOALS, and vice versa.

Another area is designated ***Thoughts***. It represents our *perception* of self, parents, family, friends and all "others" we know. Our ***Thoughts*** of ourselves (self-image) will also influence how we **FEEL** and **BEHAVE**.

You also notice an area designated as ***Genes***. Each of us is given *temperaments* (styles) of behavior, through our genes. As we mature, we learn to express or restrict the free expression of our *behavioral styles* (daring, talkative, shy, analytical, etc.). Our *temperaments* influence how we THINK, FEEL, and ACT. We will study more about this latter, but briefly: our internal factors (goals, feelings, thoughts, genes, guidelines and needs) interact with each other and interact with our external factors to produce our behavior.

BEHAVIOR MODEL

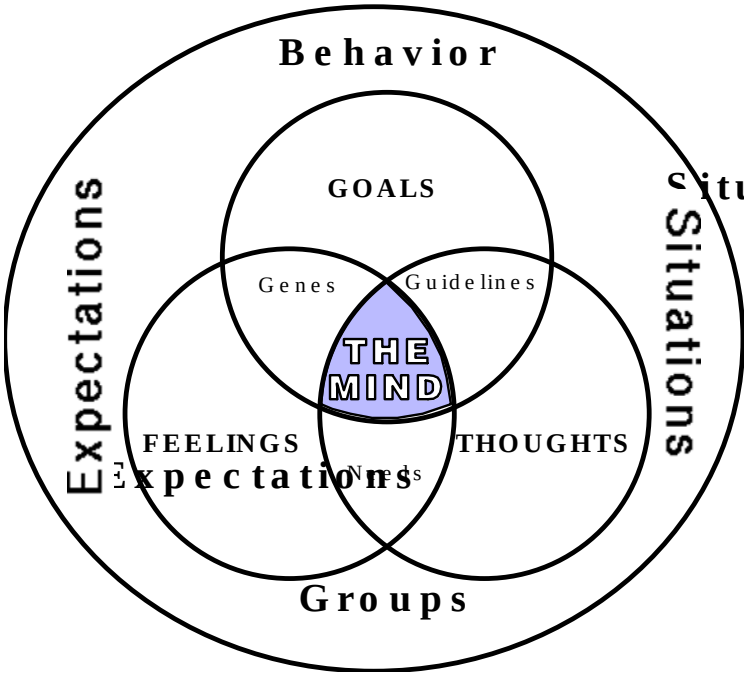

Figure 1–2. Internal and External Factors Interact to Produce Behavior

B. <u>Which Comes First?</u>

It is difficult to know if THINKING precedes FEELINGS or vice versa, or does BEHAVIOR precede both (figure 1–3)? I suggest that we think of our lives as a continuous circle, going from one situation to another; each situation can cause a person to either BEHAVE, FEEL or THINK. Thinking, feeling and behaving are interrelated (figure 1–1). Each of the three has a cause and reaction. Any of these three basic functions of the mind can come first, but they all work together!

1. *Thinking first*

   Many times thinking comes first. Our thinking can lead to good or bad feelings. Thinking and feeling *together* can produce certain behaviors.

   Thinking ----------> Feeling ----------> Behavior

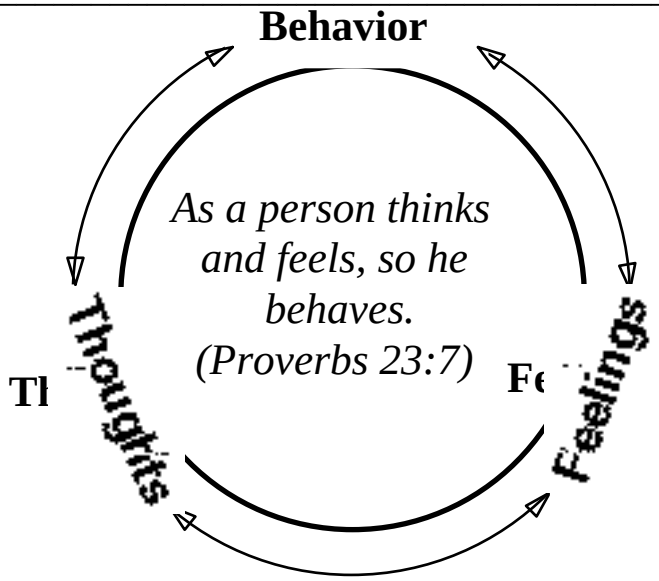

Figure 1–3. Possible Order of Events

Example:
Luke 15:17: "When he (younger son) came to himself"-—(realized how much better his father's servants had it), we see the thought process at work. Then the son feels, "I am not worthy to be a son." Next he humbles (feeling) himself to be a servant. Next he arises and goes home (action).

Realization ---------> Humility ---------> Goes Home ---------> Salvation
(Thoughts) (Feelings) (Behavior)

It is very important to see all three steps (thinking, feeling and behaving) working together at the same time. We can see from these examples that what we put into our minds and allow ourselves to dwell on are *the* determining factors of our behavior.

2. *Feelings first*

Sometimes feelings come first. Negative or positive feelings about a person or situation may lead to negative or positive thoughts, which will produce a certain behavior.

Feelings ----------> Thinking ----------> Behavior

Example:
James 1:13–15 explains how this progression from feeling to thinking to behavior can lead to sin. We are tempted (something appeals to our lust). Lust has three forms: the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh and the pride of life (I John 2:16). Lust is something from the inside (feeling). Then something from the outside comes into our path, creating an enticement. With the enticement, we begin to rationalize the behavior (thinking) we are considering. Our own desire or lust has allowed us to be enticed. When we give in to the enticement we sin (act), and sin (unless dealt with through coming back to Christ for a correction in thinking, feeling, and acting) leads to death.

3. *Behavior first*

Or, behavior may come first. Perhaps we inadvertently do something without really thinking about it. Feelings of shame or esteem may result in negative or positive thoughts about ourselves.

Behavior ----------> Feelings ----------> Thinking

Example:

Saul (later known as Paul), in Acts 9, was going from house to house persecuting the Christians. He asked for and received a letter from the high priest to go to Damascus and look for Christians so he could bring them back to Jerusalem for punishment. On his way, Paul was struck blind. Out of his fear (emotions, verse 6), he asked God for instructions. After obeying God in baptism, Paul modified his concept of Jesus as the Messiah. Now Paul saw Jesus not as an impostor but as the one to whom Paul would devote his life.

Persecution ----------> Fear ----------> Instruction
(Behavior) (Emotions) (Thoughts)

This is why what we think about is most important. Philippians 4:8 says that we should think about such things that are lovely, admirable, excellent or praiseworthy. When we fill our minds with good and positive things (*thinking*), we will have good *feelings* about ourselves and about others. These good feelings will lead to positive *behavior.*

Good Thinking ---------> Good Feelings ---------> Positive Behavior

IV. Summary

By consciously considering (thinking) our response to a given situation or stimulus, we can change our responses to temptations. This is great news! We are *in charge* of our actions! When we die to self and live for Christ, we are capable of decisions to behave in a manner which may be very different from our past.

In summary, we see that human behavior involves more than just a spontaneous reaction. We can learn to control our behavior by working on the way we feel and think. It is comforting to know that it is possible to be and do what we choose, rather than be puppets of someone else.

Now that we realize that we are free to change, let us decide to become the servant of Christ. Christ was *free* and became a servant (Philippians 2:1–11). Then we will feel, act and think as Christ did. Then, if someone asks, "*Why* did you do that?", we can say "Because that is what Christ would have done." Please study Philippians 4:8 and Galatians 2:20 for a better understanding of this idea.

Now, please start over and study the lesson and the related scriptures. **When you finish your in-depth study, return to the enclosed Response Sheet and write your answers to the study questions about this lesson.**