

# How can we say we are really in control of our lives if we are consciously aware of such a small percentage of our total experience? Why is this relevant to the Christian life?

Bear with us here as we get to the answers of these two questions.

Our daily experiences seem to convince us that we are in control of many things about ourselves because God gave us free will and a mind with the ability to use it. If, during a trial, we say we want to do the right thing, then we might think this means we will do the right thing or at least we'll keep searching for God's will until we discern it. The idea is that God gave us the ability to be able to say something and mean it, including during a trial. This is what we mean by thinking we are consciously in control of our being. It is the idea that, as believers, we are aware of all our motives, attitudes, etc. It is the idea that free will seems to imply that we have conscious control of ourselves.

This idea that we have full conscious control of our minds directly conflicts with the truth that we can deceive ourselves and that Satan can deceive us. This idea of us having full conscious control of our thinking is in direct conflict with how God designed our minds to actually work. *Feelings 101* (F101) highlights areas in which the Bible points this out and how to recognize this in your own life. F101 talks about the fact that God didn't design the conscious portion of our minds to be in total control of our being. And, this observation raises certain issues. It impacts how we must approach spiritual problem-solving in trials. It shapes the responsibilities we have during trials! And, it can help us gain a better understanding of how the Bible tells us to watch out for the roaring lion, to extinguish the fiery darts, how to incline our hearts toward God, and how to renew the mind in trials.

Just because we do not have full control of all our thought processes does not mean we do not have free will. In fact, it is an essential part of how God designed free will. God designed our mind (the conscious, unconscious, conscious awareness parts) to have to function together with our hearts in order to discern the godly action God would have us take in a trial. Free will involves both understanding and actually drawing on the Lord to cause our hearts and minds to work together in godly ways during trials.

God designed the most powerful, controlling, and influential part of the human mind to be the UNconscious part. This is the one part God did NOT design human beings to consciously control. Satan knows we cannot control the unconscious mind simply by our conscious thinking. And, it is in this unconscious part of us that Satan's attacks originate! God designed us such that Satan can attack us and we can be completely deceived. This serves a good purpose though. It enables us to be participants in the spiritual war that has raged between God and Satan since even before we were created. However, to be godly participants, we will need God's help because we can't control the unconscious on our own!

When we are deceived, it is possible that we can be unaware of Satan's attack. It is possible for us to simply not pay attention to his attack. And, it is possible to actually believe we are not being attacked when in fact we are being attacked. It is the deceptive attribute of Satan's attacks that caused Jesus to speak about such things as "get the beam out of your own eye first" (Matthew 7:3-5). It is also why Paul talked about doing things he didn't want to do and not doing things he wanted to do during trials (Romans 7:15-25). With these things in mind, we see that

free will has to do with the freedom to make spiritual choices in the spiritual war. One thing we do not have a choice over is whether or not we will be involved in the spiritual war. This is because everyone born into the world is part of the spiritual war in the sense that Satan will tempt them. So, what choices can we make with our free will?

Free will centers around the fact that while we may be tempted and deceived, in every trial we have the opportunity (free will) to make the choice to connect with God to resist temptation (Genesis 2:16-17; James 1:12-15). To make this choice we have to actually be aware when we are in a trial. Alerting us to this is one of the key functions God designed the heart to perform. The heart alerts us to trials. How? The heart will be disturbed whenever a trial begins. However, part of free will includes the fact that we don't have to pay attention to the heart! The Bible calls this hardening of the heart or quenching the Spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:19), and Christians can do this too if we aren't careful. If we do pay attention to the heart, free will involves several other choices we must make as a trial unfolds.

The most obvious choices we'd usually like to make in a trial are ones that lead us to feeling better when we feel bad and/or knowing what God would want us to do. Sometimes we are able to experience those two things rather quickly. But in other trials, it doesn't happen quite as easily. In the tougher trials, we end up having to make certain choices more consciously and deliberately. When we do, we grow. These choices can involve seeking to recognize old-self desires, doing our part to transform Satan's attacks on our identity in Christ, and, of course, actually doing what God tells us to do.

While we do not have complete conscious control over our minds when we are being attacked by Satan during trials, we do have the ability to control as to whether we pay attention to our hearts during trials (exercises in *Feelings 101* will help you improve in this area). This is in accordance with the "check and balance" system God designed into the human spirit. God did not design us to be able to consciously control our old-self behavior without interacting with Him. The bottom line is that to be successful in trials we NEED God! We cannot think our way through trials. We cannot solve trials on our own in a godly way. Free will allows us certain choices to make during trials, but it does not allow us to be godly in a trial without interacting with God.

WE ARE IN CONTROL OF OUR CHOICES,  
BUT NOT OUR ENTIRE THINKING PROCESSES.  
WE NEED GOD'S HELP FOR OUR  
CHOICES TO BE GODLY,  
BUT WE HAVE TO CHOOSE TO DO OUR PART TO ACCEPT HIS HELP!

FREE WILL DOES NOT MEAN WE CAN CHOOSE  
TO BE GODLY WITHOUT ACTUALLY INTERACTING WITH GOD!

Because we are consciously aware of such a small portion of our total experience, people often tell us, "Pay attention!" Paying attention is the key to discerning godly choices because there is so much of our experience we can easily overlook. If we were aware of everything, nobody would have to say, "Pay attention!" If we actually could control our thinking, God would not have designed our hearts to disturb us in an effort to get our attention concerning trials.

The issue of not being in full control of our thinking raises other questions. If we are living our lives with such a small percentage of conscious awareness then how in the world can

we ever expect to get a handle on what the other 90% of us is doing? When the unconscious 90% is being deceived by Satan, and the conscious 10% cannot perform the same duties as the unconscious, then is it really possible to overcome Satan's attacks? The answer is, "yes," it is possible to get a handle on the unconscious part of us. To do this we must wield our free will to exercise the Biblical principles which govern the transformation of heart disturbances to peace. This is a vital part of discerning God's will for us in a trial... we must get our hearts to peace and at rest in the Lord. The heart at peace is able to change the mind. However, the mind cannot consistently change the heart!

As human beings, God designed us to work well with the heart, and to be able to interact with Him in order to glorify Him in our trials. God designed us to be able to do this by using only the fraction of 10% of our minds which is consciously aware. This fraction is sufficient, provided we always work to direct that fraction toward the Lord. The idea is to pay attention to the spiritual heart when it is disturbed, specifically so we can transform it in Christ. With the small percentage of us that is consciously aware, we are able to focus on discerning the Holy Spirit's counsel when our hearts are disturbed. That focus, however, is not automatic to us. It is of the new self and must be cultivated by seeking out the counsel of the Spirit.