

## The Other Half of The Chain

### Note for Adventist Readers:

We would like to re-iterate that in the following study I am using the modern definitions of the terms "tendency" and "propensity." If this is not understood, then it could be concluded by some readers that in discussing the born-again state of the Christian, I am ignoring or disputing a statement by Ellen White about Christ Himself, in which she says, "He took upon Himself human nature, and was tempted in all points as human nature is tempted. He could have sinned; He could have fallen, but not for one moment was there in Him an evil propensity." [*S.D.A. Bible Commentary, Vol. 5, p. 1128*]

Later in that same passage, Mrs. White gives advice that we believe ought to be taken very seriously, stating, "In treating upon the humanity of Christ, you need to guard strenuously every assertion, lest your words be taken to mean more than they imply..."

In other writings of Mrs. White, she seems to use the term "propensity" in the sense of actually carrying out actions. One such place is here: "If you allow yourself to become a talebearer, you will not be welcome in any family, because of your propensity to report every transaction that may occur." [*Spalding and Magan Collection, p. 77*]

**I am not using the word in that sense.**

Regardless, **the position presented here is not that Yahshua had any inclinations whatsoever to evil, only that Christians may be tempted based on propensities that they have not yet addressed from their original, natural births.** Yahshua was "tempt-able," and needed to overcome those temptations, but He would not, as other human beings, have "weaknesses" based on *past indulgences* in sin.

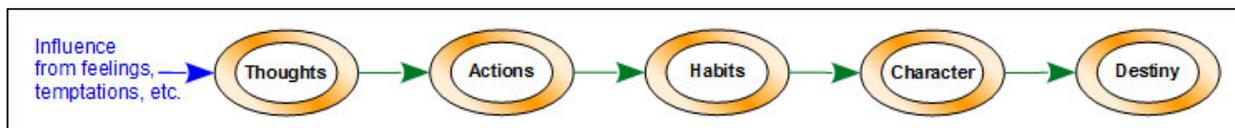
For example: **The manner in which we overcome our inclinations, propensities, etc., is in the same way that Yahshua overcame His temptations, by relying upon the promises of the Father that He will keep us always from sin, and by submitting to the Holy Spirit that the Savior had from birth, and that we possess from the point of the New Birth. This is a very important distinction to make.**

Happy Sabbath to all.

This week, I would like to talk a bit about two words that are sometimes found in Adventist literature, and their relation to a very important concept that we call the "chain of character."

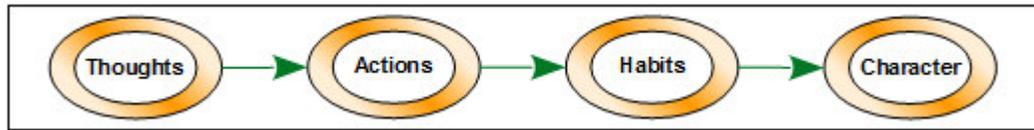
The two words are "tendency" and "propensity," and they form something of a "feedback" in the chain that allows it to be strengthened within us either toward or against a Heavenly destiny. As we know, and have studied before, thoughts that are indulged lead to actions. Actions that are repeated lead to habits. Habits that are permitted lead to the formation of our character, and it is ultimately our characters that determine our destiny with regard to our everlasting inheritance.

Here is a diagram that portrays this.



Destiny is included at the end of the first diagram and shows the result of the chain; it is revealed in the Day of Judgment, and as such is therefore not a part of our present work to shape.

If we were to look at the part over which we have direct, daily control, it would consist of the first four links, thus.



Yahweh provides the destiny appropriate to that character we develop through our choices, and for the Christian, those choices are inspired by the Holy Spirit, and that Character thus developed is equivalent to the divine character of the Savior Himself.

In considering that chain, I have thought that while it gives us a very useful picture of our responsibilities within the process of sanctification, it is not perfectly complete, and that we ought to have a more full picture of how this all works.

For example, while it is certainly true that the connection between each pair of links is accurate, it is also certainly true that an individual's character must have an impact on his or her thoughts.

Before the global flood, it is recorded that "Yahweh saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." (Gen 6:5)

Now, if it is true that "thoughts" are the first link of the chain, and that they begin the set of concepts that lead to character, then it might be surmised by some that man might have less control over his thoughts than his actions or habits. After all, we are told that actions influence habits, and thoughts influence actions...but what is it that influences thoughts?

This is where the true battle lies, and if we are to have, as the Scriptures indicate, complete control over our thoughts, (Mat 22:37, Rom 12:2, Phil 2:5, 1Pet 1:13) then it is not sufficient to simply let our thoughts drift wherever the flesh inclines, and then filter them afterwards.

Of course, we cannot always control the thoughts that occur to us. The Scriptures and Spirit of Prophecy writings make it clear that we must indeed "filter" our thoughts, accepting the pure ones and rejecting the corrupt, because we do have the Tempter and his spirits overly and increasingly active in the world.

At the same time, we are not to (and never to) consider ourselves and our thoughts at the mercy of a defeated enemy. We are not helpless in this regard, but through Christ we may even have some control over what thoughts we receive, that our filtering might become efficient unto perfection.

We read, for example, "Commit thy works unto Yahweh, and thy thoughts shall be established." (Pro 16:3)

Now, it does not say that one action will clean up our thoughts; we must “commit” our works to Yahweh, which indicates a mode of life, a way of being, and a means of dealing with this consistent with having a Spirit-filled, Christian character. Here is how this works:

There was something of a controversy among SDA pioneers with regard to the nature of Christ as He related to His temptations. I do not recall the exact place, or the exact details, but I do remember that there was some discussion about whether or not He had a “propensity” to sin that He did not encourage, or a “tendency” to sin that He denied. The final resolution as I have understood it is that we would err in thinking that Yahshua was just like any other human in certain ways, primarily in that He had the Holy Spirit from birth. As such, and as we have said, the life that Yahshua lived from the womb is the one that we begin to live at the point of conversion.

In simpler terms, then, we might say that Yahshua was “born again” from the first birth. As such, He would have no “tendency” to commit sin, because to “tend” to do something means it is likely that we do it. If I said, “I have a tendency to smoke cigarettes,” it means that occasionally, perhaps frequently, I would smoke.

On the other hand, as it is used at least in current English, a “propensity” is something of a preliminary state. It is a leaning toward something, a desire to do something, a capacity to do something with inclinations toward it...but the word does not necessarily imply the fulfillment of an action. Thus, even the born again would have a “propensity” for certain sins, perhaps certain weaknesses of the past, but through Yahshua they overcome at this stage, before the works are manifest. We might then see a correspondence between propensities and temptations, just as there would be similarities between tendencies and actual sins.

Therefore, just as resisting a temptation prevents the appearance of sin, so by denying and claiming victory over propensities, we guarantee that the tendency does not ever manifest.

And understand, of course, that I am speaking here of propensities and tendencies toward evil. No Christian, therefore, has a “tendency” to commit any sin, even though we might be tempted according to some propensity of the flesh.

Looking up these two words in the dictionary, I find that they have similar meanings, both regarding a “leaning” toward something, but under tendency, it is specifically indicated that this is a “prevailing” disposition...in other words, one likely to appear in the actions. (\*Please see note at end of study)

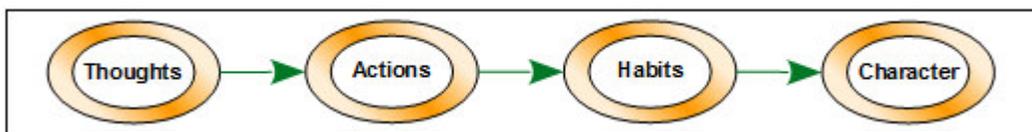
So how do we make use of this distinction?

Well as I’ve said, by denying and claiming victory over our propensities, we ensure that no evil “tendency” is permitted to exist in our lives. It is very important to deny, in our testimony, the possibility of submitting to sin –because we must overcome even as Yahshua overcame.

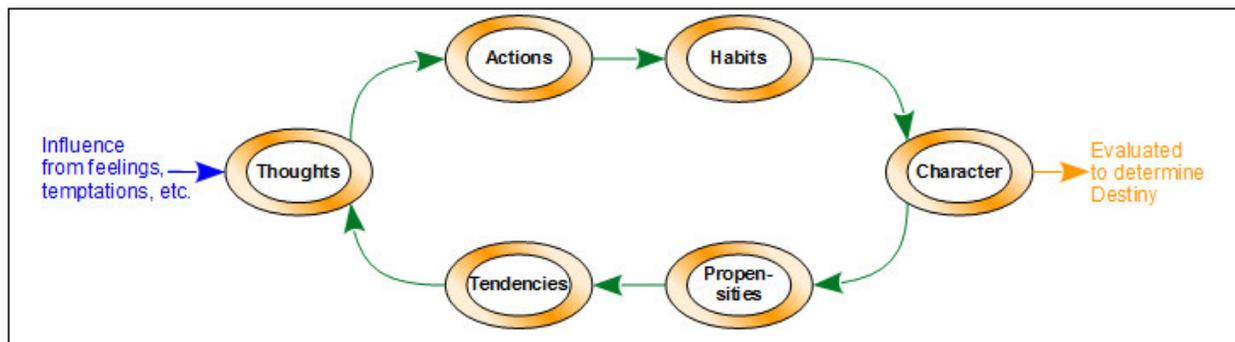
We acknowledge a theoretical possibility, because we are aware that Yahshua's struggles with temptations were real, and had actual consequences, and we are tempted in the same way He was. At the same time, we "know" that those who are born again commit (actually do) no sin and the Evil One is not permitted to force them to perform his will. (1 John 5:18)

We also know this: Those who sin find it easy and then easier to sin again. Those who act righteously find it easy and then easier to pursue righteousness. There is clearly an effect that moves "backward" down the chain of character, even as the main concepts move forward. The actions clearly have an effect backward on the thoughts, and the two words I have been defining here are actually the way by which this is accomplished.

What we have in the classical display is what I have shared before:



A somewhat more complete picture, factoring in the effect that "committing" one's works to Yahweh (as a matter of character) have on the thoughts, would be a cycle that would look like more complete picture, this:



Thoughts lead to actions, which lead to habits, which define character, but then character determines our propensities which, if encouraged, become tendencies, which influence our thoughts...and it circles around again.

Now, at the Day of Judgment, and in the Judgment of the Living, the character that develops as a result of this cycle is what is weighed in the balances of the Sanctuary. If that character is like Christ's, then the individual who has developed it not only does the works of Christ, but also has the thoughts of Christ, because his propensities lead him to perfect righteousness, and his tendencies are to perform righteous acts. For such a person, Sabbath is his natural state, and Heaven his inheritance.

By contrast, one who has "self" injected into ANY of the links in the system pollutes the entire work of sanctification, because it isn't just a one-way chain of influence, we also influence ourselves and a little leaven leavens the whole lump. One with impure thoughts cannot have a

divine character, because the divine character, if developed, or if received, would work backwards to cleanse and purify the thoughts.

The “bottom line” is that the development of character, and the working-out of salvation, is not a unidirectional task. It is not a result that we keep working toward without seeing any “real” results until Judgment. Every day, we become better workers-out of our own salvation, because the characters that we develop, and are developing daily, are literally their own reward.

It is, in a sense, a spiral staircase leading ever upward, ever closer, for the true, Spirit-led, born-again Christian...and that very same staircase leads down for those who are walking in the opposite direction. We must control our thoughts, because they lead to actions, then habits, and finally our characters. At the same time, we must allow the divine character of Yahshua, which is already given to us as a gift of faith, and which we claim by faith, to reign over our propensities.

As we do this, claiming victory over our every imperfect inclination, and testifying openly to the overcoming, born-again life of Christ, then we will find ourselves free of every evil tendency. No sin will ever be manifest in our lives, because we have tendencies only to that which is good, and pure, and holy. In addition, because the chain is linked back around, this will influence our very thoughts. As we speak our invincible testimonies, as it becomes our character to do so, and as we accept the character of Christ, we also develop the mind of Christ, and we prove the verse true, that “The thoughts of the righteous are right.” (Pro 12:5)

Satan may have the power to “suggest” thoughts, and to inspire feelings, but as our natural thoughts become purer, because our characters are like that of Yahshua, we will begin to more and more clearly see the difference between the two. We cannot be deceived by the Enemy of souls... and this discernment is very important for these last days.

More than once we have been asked, even by members, “How do we know which thoughts come from Yahweh, which come from self, and which come from Satan?” As we understand the other half of the chain, and let Christ and our increasingly sanctified characters control our propensities and tendencies, then we see an ever-widening gap between the thoughts of Yah and the thoughts of the Enemy. That is, we become increasingly aware of the infinite gap that is between them in reality. We then decide, due to the freedom we have in Christ, to share the thoughts of Yah; thus our discernment, as well as our acts, become perfected to the glory of our Father.

In Hebrew, the word translated as “established” means “made steady” “be securely determined,” and “made (morally) steadfast.” Thus it should be clear that as we make our actions harmonize with our Father’s will, as our habits reveal His character to the world, then as we commit our works unto our Father, as Proverbs 16:3 tells us, our thoughts shall be “established” – blessed in all these wonderful ways –even today, and onward unto our everlasting inheritance.

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