

## Playing Mind Games

We all likely play “mind games” from time to time. Some obviously do so more than others. At times, we use these mental tactics on other people, perhaps to gain an edge over or influence them in some way. However, most of our mind gaming efforts are expended on ourselves, and for the same reasons. We play these games on ourselves in an effort to manipulate or influence our own thinking to do something that we want, or to excuse or justify what we’ve already done. What do I mean? See if these examples sound familiar...

The **“Is It Really Wrong?”** Game. We actually already know the answer to this question, we just don’t want to accept the answer. So, we play this mind game and pose the question anyway hoping for some way to excuse or justify the activity because it is what we *want* to do. The subtle serpent Satan got Eve to play this game in Genesis 3:4-6, *“The serpent said to the woman, ‘You surely will not die! For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.’ When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate.”* Thus, through playing this particular mind game, Eve did what she already knew, and had previously stated, was wrong.

The **“It Isn’t A Big Deal”** Game. We usually play this game after playing “Is It Really Wrong?” game and realizing that the answer is still “yes.” So, rather than just admitting defeat and accepting that we shouldn’t do what we *want* to do, we advance to this game. Notice that this one admits the activity is wrong (and therefore shouldn’t be done), but seeks to justify the activity anyway by claiming that this particular “wrong” activity is somehow “less wrong” than other “wrong” activities. Notice that 1John 3:4 doesn’t use (or allow) this method of classifying sin, *“Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness.”*

The **“It Won’t Hurt Anything Just This One Time”** Game. This game is also usually engaged after the previous two have been played and lost. The desired activity is still desired despite the previous defeats, so we move on to this game. Notice the progression: the activity is admitted to not only be “wrong,” but also to have harmful consequences; but, the object of this game is to justify the wrong activity anyway by claiming that its harmful consequences only ensue after repeated offenses. Uzzah probably would not agree with that conclusion, 2Samuel 6:6-7 (his life was taken because of a single offense); neither does James 2:10, *“For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all.”*

The **“It’s Not Hurting Anyone Else”** Game. There is progression, or more precisely, digression, again. Now we’re admitting that the desired activity is wrong, and that it has harmful consequences, but are still clinging to the desired activity anyway by claiming that it is only harmful to me, and therefore does not affect anyone else. While there may be some “private” sins that don’t affect anyone else, such is not really the point. The “private” rather than “public” consequences of a sinful activity do not make it any less sinful, or consequential, for the player personally. There is no real “win” when playing this game, Romans 6:16, *“Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves to the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness.”*

The **“It’s Not Really Who I Am”** Game. This particular game claims that a “win,” which means going ahead and doing/justifying the desired activity despite admitting that it is wrong, contradicts the outcome. In other words, it claims that committing sin doesn’t really make one a sinner. 1John 3:7-8, *“Little children, let no one deceive you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, that He might destroy the works of the devil.”*

The **“I Can Quit Anytime I Want”** Game. Note that playing this game concedes defeat in all the previous ones. It admits the desired activity is wrong, has harmful personal consequences, and that it makes the participant a sinner destined for destruction. But, playing it bolsters the notion that desire is all that is necessary to stopping a sinful activity and altering our future course. Millions of addicts would strongly disagree, and so does the Bible, Matthew 27:3-5. Judas “tried to quit” on his betrayal of Jesus, but found out that it was too late, and that the events he had set in motion couldn’t be undone.

The **“I’ll Straighten Up Later”** Game (aka, the **“Wild Oats Game”**). This one is very much akin to the previous game. It is based on the premise that each person has some allowed quota of sin before “growing up.” Galatians 6:7-8 proves this premise to be completely false, *“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh shall from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit shall from the Spirit reap eternal life.”*

The **“I’ve Already Gone This Far”** Game. The idea behind this game seems to be that “If one sin can condemn me, I might as well go ahead and get my monies’ worth while I’m at it.” There are many problems here, but perhaps the main one is that the more “wrong” turns we make, the harder it is to get back to the “right” road. By playing this game, we surrender to defeat. What if Paul had played this particular mind game? But he didn’t- and so he wrote, *“It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all. And yet for this reason I found mercy, in order that in me as the foremost Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience, as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life,”* 1Timothy 1:15-16.

The **“It’s Too Late For Me Anyway”** Game. This is the ultimate surrender mind game we play with ourselves. It admits total defeat and is unwilling to even continue the struggle against sin. But again, IT’S BASED ON A FALSE PREMISE! If a denier of the deity of Jesus and persecutor of the church can repent and become a preacher of righteousness, so can you. 1Corinthians 15:9-10 says so, *“For I am the least of apostles, who am not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.”*

Don’t play mind games- defeat is the only outcome, and your soul is at stake. Read the Word, study the Word, understand the Word, and live the Word; and “yes,” YOU CAN DO IT! It does take effort, but no “games” are required. (Philip C. Strong; Southport Church of Christ; 7202 Madison Ave, Indianapolis, IN 46227; online at [southportcofc.org](http://southportcofc.org); email to [mrpcstrong@hotmail.com](mailto:mrpcstrong@hotmail.com))