

External vs Internal Behavior Control Study Guide

Key Concepts

1. External Control:

- External control refers to the structures or measures put in place to regulate behavior, especially in children, for their safety and development. These controls can include physical boundaries like fences or socket covers, rules, and laws in society.
- While external control is necessary for protection, it is ultimately insufficient for ensuring moral behavior in every situation. It cannot guide individuals toward righteousness, only manage conduct temporarily.

2. Internal Control:

- Internal control comes from within and is guided by a standard higher than mere character or personal integrity—it is based on the Word of God. Internal control develops over time as a child or person matures and learns to align their decisions with God's truth.
- As individuals grow, the goal is for internal control to replace external control. This is done by allowing the Holy Spirit to guide their thoughts and actions, leading to self-discipline and the fruit of the Spirit.

3. Transformation from External to Internal Control:

- The transition from external to internal control involves instilling God's Word in the heart. When people operate under internal control guided by the Holy Spirit, they exhibit behavior that reflects spiritual maturity, obedience to God, and personal responsibility.
- A story that illustrates this is of a child named Ivory, who initially lied about a mess but later, under the conviction of the Holy Spirit, confessed, cleaned it up, and asked for forgiveness. This shows the presence of the Spirit working through internal control.

Biblical References with Key Insights

1. II Corinthians 3:2-3 (NKJV):

- *“You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men; clearly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart.”*
- **Insight:** This passage contrasts external law (tablets of stone) with internal transformation (tablets of the heart). True righteousness comes from the Spirit’s work within, not external rules alone. When the Word is written on our hearts, it naturally guides our behavior.

2. 1 John 2:26-27 (NLT):

- *“But you have received the Holy Spirit, and he lives within you, so you don’t need anyone to teach you what is true. For the Spirit teaches you everything you need to know, and what he teaches is true—it is not a lie.”*
- **Insight:** Internal control is empowered by the Holy Spirit, who guides believers into truth. External rules and teachers help, but ultimately the Spirit’s presence within shapes a believer’s understanding of right and wrong.

3. Galatians 5:22-23 (NLT):

- *“But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!”*
- **Insight:** The fruit of the Spirit reflects internal control. When the Spirit governs our hearts, we no longer need external laws to guide us because our behavior naturally aligns with God’s will.

Practical Applications

1. For Parents:

- Use external controls (rules, boundaries) when children are young, but gradually teach them to internalize God’s Word so they can self-regulate as they mature.

- Avoid over-reliance on external control (such as removing dangerous objects). Focus on training children in wisdom and godly character so they learn the value of obedience and responsibility.

2. For Personal Growth:

- Reflect on areas of life where you are still relying on external rules rather than the internal guidance of the Holy Spirit. Ask God to help you grow in self-control and spiritual maturity.
- Study the Bible regularly to deepen your understanding of God's standards. Allow the Holy Spirit to transform your heart so that obedience becomes a natural, internal response to God's love.

3. In Society:

- Recognize that laws and rules have limits. While society needs regulations for order, true justice and moral behavior arise from hearts transformed by the Holy Spirit. Advocate for the importance of moral education based on God's principles.
- Encourage others to seek the internal control that comes from a relationship with God. Share how the Holy Spirit can guide them to make choices that align with His will.

Study Questions

1. What are some examples of external control that parents or society use to regulate behavior? How effective are they in producing long-term character change?
2. How does 2 Corinthians 3:2-3 describe the difference between external laws and internal transformation? Why is internal control superior?
3. In 1 John 2:26-27, what role does the Holy Spirit play in guiding believers toward internal control?
4. How does Galatians 5:22-23 explain the result of living under the internal control of the Holy Spirit?
5. How can you begin shifting from external control to internal control in your own life? What areas need more reliance on the Holy Spirit's guidance?

Personal Reflection

1. Relying on External Control:

- Are there areas of your life where you are still relying on external rules or regulations rather than the internal guidance of the Holy Spirit? How can you shift toward greater internal control?

2. Role of the Holy Spirit:

- How often do you seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit in your daily decisions? Are you sensitive to His promptings when it comes to issues of obedience and righteousness?

3. Growing in Self-Control:

- Self-control is a fruit of the Spirit. In what areas do you struggle with self-control? How can you pray and surrender these areas to God, asking Him to develop greater self-discipline within you?

4. Impact on Others:

- Just as others can read the “epistle” of your life (2 Corinthians 3:2-3), what message are you sending to those around you about your internal transformation? Are your actions showing that God’s Word is written on your heart?

Sample Prayer

"Lord, I thank You for the gift of the Holy Spirit, who guides me into all truth. Help me to rely less on external rules and more on the internal guidance that comes from Your Word and Spirit. Teach me to walk in obedience, not out of obligation, but from a heart transformed by Your love. Help me to bear the fruit of the Spirit, showing love, patience, and self-control in all I do. Amen."