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Frank W. Nelte

## **THERE IS ALWAYS A CAUSE FOR EVERYTHING**

One foundational teaching that Mr. Armstrong repeated time and again is that "there has to be **a cause** for every effect". He didn't claim to be the first one to state this, and he wasn't the first one. Many different philosophers throughout the ages had made essentially the same point before Mr. Armstrong ever made this statement: for everything that happens, there is always a cause. Nothing happens without a cause. Mr. Armstrong made this statement **because it is true**, not because he wanted to claim to be the first one to think of making this statement.

This statement that "there has to be a cause for every effect" is a fact that we may intellectually acknowledge, but then **in our own personal lives** we sometimes forget it. When we find that certain things happen to us, often **we don't associate those things with specific causes**. Frequently we don't fully grasp the application of the word "every" in this statement. And sometimes, specifically when things go wrong for us, we don't actually want to know the causes.

## **THINGS GOD DOES NOT KNOW IN ADVANCE**

God knows almost all things in advance. But there are also some other things that God does not know in advance. Do you understand the difference between these two groups: things God knows in advance, and things God does not know in advance?

Let's first look at the things that God does not know in advance.

God knows **EVERYTHING** in advance **EXCEPT for the decisions** that individuals with free independent minds will make. Individuals with free independent minds includes human beings and angels. Now once individuals with free independent minds **have made** certain decisions, **then** God also knows in advance the precise and detailed consequences those decisions will have.

This situation continues even after individuals with free minds have proved themselves faithful to God. For example, when one of the righteous angels (or at some point in the future someone who will be in the first resurrection) has to make a decision, or has to offer a suggestion to God, then God will know in advance that whatever that decision or suggestion will be, it will be an expression of total agreement with and submission to the will of God. But within those parameters the righteous angel (or the individual from the first resurrection) may suggest something that God had not anticipated.

That is the principle of the "24 elders sitting around the throne of God", who even have "crowns of gold" on their heads (see Revelation 4:4). God knows in advance that all of these "24 elders" will only express things that are in total agreement with God's ways. But precisely what counsel they may offer in specific situations will be the result of them using their own independent free minds, and I believe that God does not know in advance the precise details of the counsel these individuals may at some future point present to God.

And at the time God created Satan, I don't believe that God already knew that at some future point Satan would rebel against God. Consider also God's statement where regarding the perverse practice of human sacrifices God said in Jeremiah 7:31: "which I commanded them not, **neither came it into my**

**heart"**, meaning that **God had not anticipated** this degree of depravity.

Revelation chapter 4 shows a real situation within the context of God's existence. God does not say to these 24 elders "I already know in advance every word you are ever going to say, but say it anyway". No, these individuals are there to offer **original thoughts** to God for God's consideration. But God does know in advance that those original thoughts will always be within the parameters of what is acceptable and right before God, and they will always, always be an expression of the supreme respect all of these individuals have for God. God knows the unconditional desire these individuals have to seek to please God in every way possible.

So God doesn't know in advance in absolute terms what decisions you and I will make tomorrow, in this life, when we may be confronted by totally unexpected circumstances. If God did with certainty know that in advance, then we would not really have a free will to make our own decisions. And in that case God's statement "I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing, **therefore choose life ...**" (Deuteronomy 30:19) would lose all its validity.

Think about that the next time you face a serious test. The reason we all have to face tests and trials is precisely because at that point God does not yet know with absolute certainty how we will decide, and how we will deal with that test or trial. Therefore we have to face tests, so that God can know for sure how we will respond when we are severely stressed. Our responses to tests and trials reveal to God how our minds work; our responses reveal our level of commitment to God.

But even though God does not know in advance what decisions any individual with a free mind will make, **God DOES know in advance** what will be **the consequences** of any and every decision such individuals could possibly make.

Now let's look at some of the things that God does know in advance because they are a matter of cause and effect.

### **THERE IS A CAUSE FOR EVERY EFFECT**

In the beginning there were two individuals, whom we know as God the Father and as Jesus Christ. They had a certain lifestyle which they wanted to extend outwards, by creating other beings who would of their own free will fully embrace and internalize that exact same lifestyle.

So even **before** they created first all the angels and then this entire present universe, **They already established an all-encompassing set of laws**. That included laws that govern a spiritual existence and interpersonal relationships, and also laws that govern physical circumstances, i.e. laws that govern the physical creation.

Everything, and I mean absolutely everything, from the molecular level right up to the level of galaxies in the heavens, in addition to all interpersonal relationships, is governed by one or more of those laws that God enacted even before creating the angels. Any and every creation has to have laws as a foundation in order to control that creation. **Without laws no creation is sustainable**. And laws must always precede a creation.

[As an aside, this is where atheists want the existence of laws because their very lives could not continue without the existence of laws; they just don't want to admit that the existence of laws absolutely demands the existence of a Lawgiver!]

Now when God first created the angels, God **already** had the intention to subsequently create a physical creation as well. And therefore God also already had determined all of the laws that He would enact for that physical creation. God can and God does plan ahead everything that is not conditional on other beings with a free will making their own decisions. That is what is meant by God "declaring the end from the beginning" (Isaiah 46:10). And God will do His good pleasure.

Now even when a further course of action depends on other beings with free wills first making their own decisions, God still plans ahead by assuming that those individuals will make the best possible decisions, while being prepared for dealing with the situations if those beings make the wrong decisions. God's disposition is expressed by the word "love", and love always anticipates the best (see 1 Corinthians 13:7). So God anticipates all of us making the right decisions.

**It is the creation of all those laws, with their inevitable consequences for both willing acceptance and obedience, and also for transgression, that enables God to know in advance what will happen in any situation in the future.**

Laws, and I mean God-created laws not human laws, have automatic consequences for both obedience and disobedience, for compliance and non-compliance. Anything that happens anywhere at any time is always a consequence of some or other law that God has established.

God explained this to Cain back in Genesis, after God had shown disapproval for Cain's offering (Genesis 4:5). God told Cain:

**If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee *shall be his desire*, and thou shalt rule over him. (Genesis 4:7)**

God in effect said: **there is a cause for everything that happens to you, Cain.** And God says exactly the same thing to you and to me. It is absolutely certain that **if we do well**, then **we will be accepted by God**; and if we don't do well, then God will not accept us. Acceptance by God has nothing to do with who we are.

It doesn't matter what our race or color may be; it doesn't matter whether we descended from the man Israel or from any other progenitor. That's the point John the Baptist made when he said that "God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham" (Matthew 3:9). A person's genetic line of descent is ultimately inconsequential before God. Acceptance by God is based on us "doing well", and not on who we are.

With God everything is a matter of cause and effect, and therefore the only thing that matters is how and with what motivation we live our lives before God. Do we do all things in integrity of character, or do we sometimes compromise our integrity?

Here is something that we need to understand very clearly:

We human beings have made many laws. And in our law books we have stipulated certain penalties for people who transgress our laws. There is almost always some form of penalty attached to every human law that is transgressed. However, here is the important point:

In every case the penalties for transgressing our human laws **depend on the transgressor being detected** and identified by someone in authority. And even in those cases where the transgressor is identified, he may still avoid the penalty either by fleeing and hiding, or because the transgressor is simply too powerful for anyone to impose the incurred penalty upon him. And people who plan to transgress some law typically plan ahead to try to avoid being detected, because avoiding detection is

the way to avoid the penalty.

With all human laws all penalties absolutely depend on the transgressor being detected by someone in authority. And no detection means no penalty. That is what Satan has conditioned our minds to believe.

### **But that is not how the laws of God work!**

In stark contrast to human laws, the consequences of **God's laws do not depend on detection** by someone in authority in order to exact their inevitable consequences. The consequences for both obedience and disobedience to God's laws are spontaneous and inexorable, even if, totally theoretically, God was not watching. God established His laws in a way where the consequences are automatic and unavoidable.

For example, the law of gravity will cause objects to drop to the ground. And God does not have to be watching for the law of gravity to exert its effects. The same is true for all other physical laws; their effects are automatic and spontaneous, without requiring direct supervision from God. God's laws that regulate conduct and behavior and interpersonal relationships function in the same way; their consequences are just as automatic and spontaneous as are the consequences of the law of gravity, without requiring direct supervision from God. Consequences to both right and wrong conduct are spontaneous, automatic and unavoidable.

### **That is the reason why Jesus Christ had to die for our sins! Once God had modified His plan at the time of the flood, there simply was no way to avoid Christ laying down His life for us!**

If you can understand this principle of inevitable consequences for all of God's laws, then you should be able to understand why salvation for any human being would be impossible without the voluntary sacrifice of Jesus Christ, who took **the unavoidable consequences** of our transgressions (i.e. the death penalty) upon Himself.

You see, all of the laws God established have exactly the same consequence for disobedience ... utter destruction. **The only two choices are:** obedience to God's laws and life, or disobedience to God's laws and death. That's what Deuteronomy 30:19 tells us. And therefore, to make salvation for sinners possible, Jesus Christ had to take that death penalty, which all of us human beings have incurred, upon Himself.

It is the establishment of **all** of the laws that God set in motion, that is one of the means for God to correctly predict "the end from the beginning" (see again Isaiah 46:10). This is in addition to God obviously having the power to spontaneously intervene at His own pleasure in anything that is taking place (same verse).

So let's consider some examples of "a cause for every effect".

### **SOME EXAMPLES**

Here are some random examples of cause and effect, and by knowing the causes God can accurately predict the effects.

God can predict the exact path a bolt of lightning will take through the air. There can never be a time when God is watching a thunderstorm and God then says: "I really thought that that last bolt of lightning would have kicked to the right before striking the earth, but instead it kicked to the left. Hmmm, I wonder

why that happened?" Bolts of lightning don't decide for themselves the path they take through the atmosphere, and neither is there some ethereal being called "mother nature" that makes those decisions. Every single inch of the path of a bolt of lightning is based on laws, unless God chooses to intervene and override those laws. And so God can predict the precise path of every single bolt of lightning. There are causes for why a bolt of lightning goes one way and not another way.

There is a cause why we are fat, and there is a cause why we are skinny. There is a cause why we are tall, and there is a cause why we are short. There is a cause why we are sick, and there is a cause why we are healthy. There is a cause why something smells good, and there is a cause why something smells bad. There is a cause for why we feel hot, and there is a cause for why we feel cold.

There is a cause why we are intelligent, and there is a cause why we are less intelligent. There is a cause why we can do something well, and there is a cause why we cannot do something well. There is a cause for why we are strong, and there is a cause for why we are weak. There is a cause why our children are obedient, and there is a cause why our children are not obedient. There is a cause for why we resist a temptation, and there is a cause for why we give in to a temptation. There is a cause for rebellion and there is a cause for willing submission and cooperation, which causes have to do with how we use our minds.

There is a cause why we are financially well off, and there is a cause why we struggle financially. There is a cause why we have a happy marriage, and there is a cause why our marriage is not happy. There is a cause why at work we get on well with our boss and our coworkers, and there is a cause why we don't get on well with people at work. There is a cause why people live to an old age, and there is a cause why people die young. There is a cause why we are blessed, and there is a cause why we are not blessed.

There is a cause why we have peace of mind and contentment, and there is a cause why we are fearful, insecure or discontent. There is a cause for every problem that arises anywhere, and there is a cause when things work out just right. There is a cause why we enjoy some activities, and there is a cause why we don't enjoy some other activities. There is a cause why we are outgoing and extroverted, and there is a cause why we are withdrawn and introverted. There is a cause for every accident that ever takes place, and there is a cause for every health problem we ever incur.

There is a cause for why a plant grows, and there is a cause for why a plant dies. There is a cause for rain in due season, and there is a cause for droughts and storms. There is a cause for famines and for wars, and there is a cause for abundant food supplies and peace. There is a cause for every burden, and there is a cause for every form of stress.

This is what is meant when we say: **FOR EVERY EFFECT THERE IS A CAUSE!**

As Jesus Christ said:

Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. (Matthew 10:29)

The point is that sparrows are really quite insignificant in the overall framework of things. So with this statement Jesus Christ was showing that God is supremely aware of every cause for everything that happens anywhere in His creation, including the most insignificant things. So the next verse says:

But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. (Matthew 10:30)

While this may seem to be extremely insignificant, there is a cause for our hairs increasing or decreasing in numbers. And God is supremely aware of all the causes for everything that takes place anywhere at

any time. And it all functions according to laws that God Himself has established.

Now please note:

I am talking about the matter of acknowledging a cause for everything that happens! It is **not** a case of automatically ascribing guilt or responsibility or accountability for what happens to the person or persons involved!

In plain terms:

For some of the things that affect us we ourselves have provided the cause. For other things that affect us our parents provided the cause. For still other things that affect us people we know provided the cause. For still other things that affect us people we don't know provided the cause. In some cases (e.g. when blessings come our way) we are the beneficiaries of the consequences of good that other people have done. And in other cases we may suffer adverse consequences for wrong things that other people have done.

We have a measure of control over some things that affect us, while we have no control whatsoever over other things that also affect us. Some things happen to us because we were in the right place at the right time, and other things happen to us because we were in the wrong place at the wrong time.

So, for example, there is a cause why we are tall or short, but we ourselves had nothing to do with that cause. Likewise, there is a cause for every accident that takes place, but we ourselves don't necessarily have anything to do with causing a specific accident that has affected us. Someone else may drive his car into us because that driver was drunk or careless, and we may sustain serious injuries from such an accident. In that and many other cases we ourselves have had nothing to do with causing the problems that may affect us.

A bolt of lightning may strike a house, and the house burns down, as happened a few years ago to a house in our community right here, about a mile away from our house. The owners of that house had nothing to do with causing the destruction of their own house, but they nevertheless suffered the consequences of that bolt of lightning striking their house anyway. And there was a cause for that bolt of lightning hitting their house and not some other object, even though none of us are aware of that cause.

If we become sick, that sickness may be due to something we ourselves have done. Or it may be due to something that other people have done (e.g. polluted our environment or exposed us to contagious pathogens). So **the recognition of a cause for every effect is distinct from ascribing responsibility for that cause.**

In many situations the party who is the cause of a specific problem is not necessarily the same as the party that is affected by the consequences of that cause, though that is undoubtedly the case in many other situations. In other words: most of the things that happen to me are a consequence of what I have done or neglected to do. With most, but not all, of the things that happen to me I have had at least some measure of input. I expect that the same is also true for you?

As Solomon put it: "the curse causeless shall not come" (Proverbs 26:2). What we should keep in mind here is that sometimes we ourselves did not provide that "cause"; sometimes, in fact many times, the curse that has come was caused by someone else. But **there still was a cause!**

Thus:

It is quite common for whole families to suffer because of what one member of the family did or did not

do. Likewise, it is quite common for whole families to benefit from good things that happen because of something one member of the family in this situation did or did not do.

The same is true on the national level. Some nations are well off because of something one member of that nation, or a small group of members of that nation, did. And some nations are in far less desirable circumstances because of what one member of their nation did, or what a small group of members of their nation did.

All of us are exposed to the consequences of the actions of other people. In those cases we are not the cause for what happens to us. But those things happen to us nonetheless according to the principle that "there is a cause for every effect".

### **That's how God's creation functions!**

That is what life in the Family of God will be like, that the actions of every member of the Family will have an effect, or a consequence, on the quality of life of every other member of the Family. Nothing happens in isolation. And it is God's intention that everything that every member of the Family does will enhance and edify the life experience of every other member of the Family. That is what is meant by the statement in 1 John 4:16, that "God is love".

And we have known and believed the love that God has to us. **God is love**; and **he that dwells in love dwells in God**, and God in him.

When we say that "God is love" we mean that everything that God does has a good effect on everyone else in existence. And it is God's desire to expand this principle to include everyone who will eventually be a part of God's Family, that the actions of every single individual in God's environment will enhance and edify the existence of everyone else. That is what love is all about! That is what extending God's lifestyle outwards to many other individuals means. (Satan and the demons, who will be banished to the blackness of darkness for ever, Jude 1:13, will be excluded from God's environment, as will also all those who will die in the lake of fire.)

### **TAKE RESPONSIBILITY**

Satan hates to take responsibility for his own actions. His present (and future) miserable state is due entirely to his own wrong actions. But that is not something Satan will ever acknowledge.

It is no wonder that Satan inspires us human beings to vociferously deny responsibility for our problems. "**It's not my fault**" is Satan's battle cry! We spontaneously look for excuses when things go wrong for us. Adam did it ("it was Eve's fault") and Eve did it ("it was the snake's fault") and we've all done it ("I did it **because** ...").

And yes, as I have already indicated earlier, there are indeed many cases where it really was not our fault!

But there is a difference between **something that was done to us** (someone stole something from us, or damaged our car or other possessions, or caused us problems, etc.), and **something we ourselves did** (e.g. our conduct based on acting impulsively or acting on an assumption or acting in response to someone else's actions, etc.).

We are not responsible for someone else's actions. But we are responsible for our own actions, even

when someone else may already have done something wrong towards us to provoke us.

### **We are always responsible for our own actions!**

When we are reviled we almost instinctively revile those who have reviled us, because that is what Satan does. But that is not what Jesus Christ did (1 Peter 2:23), and we shouldn't really do that either. The point is: even when we are provoked by the words or actions of other people, we are still responsible for our own conduct and behavior. Other people's wrong actions don't give us a free pass to likewise react in an ungodly way. Other people's wrong conduct does not justify our wrong conduct.

So here is the point for us:

When we have been involved in some way and things go wrong, then that may still not be our fault. However, in this situation it is foolish for us to start out from the position that "it's not our fault". The final conclusion may well be that it is not our fault, but we shouldn't start from that premise.

The principle of "there is a cause for every effect" should motivate us to look for the cause of the problem or difficulty confronting us at that point in time. In biblical terms this means that we start out by "examining **ourselves**", the principle of 1 Corinthians 11:28 and 2 Corinthians 13:5.

Examining ourselves **first** when there is a problem encourages the approach of seeing "the beam in our own eyes". As Jesus Christ said:

And **why** beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or **how** wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam *is* in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, **first cast out the beam out of thine own eye**; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye. (Matthew 7:3-5)

The obvious reason why Jesus Christ said this is because this happens to be **the most common way that all of us try to solve problems**. We want the other person to do something or to change something, while we don't want to change anything ourselves. That focus makes us oblivious to the beam in our own eyes. And it also makes us oblivious to the fact that there is always a cause for every problem.

So whenever we have job problems, people problems, health problems, financial problems, mental problems, emotional problems, spiritual problems, etc. the approach that Jesus Christ instructs us to take is as follows:

**First we need to look for a beam in our own eyes. First we need to try to establish our part or our own contribution to the problems coming about in the first place. Have we done something or neglected to do something which then created the problems? This means that we need to ask ourselves some pointed questions, which vary depending on the nature of the problems.**

Thus:

If we have job problems, have we been careless or negligent in fulfilling our responsibilities? Have we developed the necessary job qualifications that are required for our job? If we have health problems, have we neglected any of the basic laws for good health? If we have financial problems, have we made foolish financial decisions, buying things we can't really afford, etc.? If we have people problems, have we said or done things that have upset other people or caused them to dislike us? If we have spiritual problems, have we neglected personal prayer and Bible study? If we have mental or emotional problems, do we have our emotions under control or do our emotions control us? Do we allow ourselves



to be easily provoked?

These are a few of the many things we can ask ourselves when things don't go well with us, because there is always a cause when things go wrong. **Cain himself was the cause for his own problems**; but Cain didn't want to see that, and so he thought that his brother Abel was his problem. And so Cain figured, totally illogically, that the way to solve his problem was to get rid of his brother Abel.

### **There is an extremely vital lesson here for us!**

So often we think that the solution to our problems is to get "the other guy" to move on or to go somewhere else or to change in some way or to fade from the picture. But the other guy going somewhere else seldom solves our problems, because very often "the other guy" isn't really the cause of our problems. So often the cause really lies with us, but we are just not prepared to face our own responsibility squarely. Yet God also says to us: if you do well, then you will be accepted.

Now if after asking ourselves some very pointed questions we still don't see any hint of "a beam" in our own eyes, then it probably means that we haven't looked hard enough. And we should probably look still more thoroughly.

After we have examined ourselves and identified our own input to the problems that developed, **then** we can perhaps seek to identify "the motes", i.e. other people's input towards causing the problems. Only focusing on other people's contributions towards creating problems after first identifying our own responsibilities in the situation, creates a far better perspective for the whole situation.

**Character is learning to take full responsibility for our words and actions. And recognizing the principle that "there is always a cause for everything" is a part of the character development process. And we need to get to the point** where we associate everything that happens to us, especially problems, with the correct cause. For many of the problems that come my way I am the major cause; I own those problems. I expect that the same is true for you?

Consider this example from Christ's ministry.

### **SIN NO MORE LEST A WORSE THING HAPPENS TO YOU**

Recall the incident where a man had been paralyzed for **38 years**. At that point the man may well have been in his 50's or 60's. Jesus Christ then healed the man. So the man picked up his mat and walked home (John 5:9). But notice something that happened later.

Look at verse 14.

Afterward Jesus **findeth him** in the temple, and said unto him, Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, **lest a worse thing come unto thee**. (John 5:14)

A question: How many examples can you think of where Jesus Christ, after someone He had healed had departed, made a point to again seek out that person? This is the only instance where Jesus Christ made a special effort to again seek out a person He had previously healed. **Why?**

The expression "finds him" is a translation of the Greek words "heuriskei auton". The first listed meaning of the Greek verb "heurisko" is **"to find after search"** (Theological Dictionary Of The New Testament, page 278). The often overlooked point here is that Jesus Christ went out looking for the man. It was not

a case of accidentally bumping into the man again. Jesus Christ made a very specific effort to find the man again. That is what the verb "heurisko" tells us. Why did Christ make this special effort?

When Jesus Christ healed the man, that healing took place in a very public situation, at the pool called Bethesda, with many other people around. So Jesus Christ did not say anything that was private, that didn't concern other people. However, there was something Jesus Christ felt was extremely important for the man to understand. And therefore Jesus Christ later that same day searched the man out and told him something privately, something the Pharisees didn't need to hear. But it was important for the man to hear this.

I would guess that the last thing in the world that this man who had been paralyzed for 38 years would have thought is: my paralysis is actually due to something that I myself did 38 or more years ago. How many people that you know, who have a major health problem for 20 or 30 or 40 years, will actually freely tell you: "this health problem of mine is due entirely to my own foolish conduct"?

Yes, in cases where a problem is the result of an accident, people may perhaps sometimes acknowledge that their foolish conduct led to the accident. That wouldn't apply in many other cases where someone else had actually caused the accident. But when it comes to sicknesses and diseases, people are far, far less likely to acknowledge responsibility for their own problems. With sicknesses people easily see themselves as unlucky victims.

It seems unlikely that the healed man had ever considered himself responsible for his paralysis.

When Jesus Christ said "**sin no more**", Jesus Christ was not talking about breaking the Sabbath or taking God's name in vain or killing or stealing or coveting or adultery, etc. With this statement Jesus Christ was not referring to any of the ten commandments. Had that been Christ's intention, then He would have made this statement at the time He healed the man; even as Jesus Christ said very publicly to the woman taken in the act of adultery "go and sin no more" (John 8:11). For the rest of His ministry Christ didn't expect to see again the people He had healed, and so He told them whatever they needed to be told at the time when He healed them. But He didn't do that with this man.

The clue here in John 5:14 is that Jesus Christ added a very specific consequence for "sinning again". **This dire consequence** is not a threat of the lake of fire, but a stern warning of a greater physical problem than paralysis. Note also that at no point did Jesus Christ say to this man "your sins are forgiven you". He only said "you are made whole", without implying the forgiveness of any sins. And we should not assume that here in this case any sins had been forgiven.

Here is what I believe was the situation:

- 1) 38 or more years earlier the man, at that time in his teens or twenties, had very likely engaged in some form of conduct or activity that had led to his paralysis. I have no idea what that could have been.
- 2) However, the man had never acknowledged to himself responsibility for his paralysis. Instead he had viewed himself as "an unlucky victim" of circumstances beyond his control.
- 3) Jesus Christ healed the man out of compassion, but knowing that the man had never changed his thinking regarding his health problem. This meant that Jesus Christ took the penalty for the man's wrong conduct (i.e. that penalty being paralysis) upon Himself (see Isaiah 53:5 and 1 Peter 2:24).
- 4) But the sin (probably some physical actions?) that had caused the paralysis had not yet been forgiven. Forgiveness is always predicated on the acknowledgment of guilt, and this man had never acknowledged his guilt to himself, let alone to anyone else. So when he was healed by Jesus Christ, the

specific sins involved had not yet been forgiven.

5) This was a completely different situation from a church member "confessing his faults" (James 5:16) while asking God for healing (James 5:14-15). In the church member's case, **IF** the church member's sins had contributed towards causing the health problem, **THEN** upon this confession those sins would be forgiven (James 5:15). This statement in James 5:15 allowed for the latitude that someone else's sins might in fact have been the cause for the health problem; hence the "if" statement.

6) So we need to recognize a very clear distinction between two things. This is something that was blurred in the Church's booklet on healing, and many church members have never understood this distinction.

**First, there is the transgression of laws that regulate human health. Secondly, there are the consequences of those transgressions, those consequences being health problems. The transgressions and the consequences of those transgressions are not the same thing. In many cases the person who transgressed the health laws is also the one who is affected by the consequences of those transgressions, i.e. by ill health. But in many other cases one person or group of persons transgresses certain health laws (e.g. polluting the air and the fresh water supplies, causing accidents, etc.), and a completely different group of people is afflicted by the consequences of those transgressions (i.e. other people get sick or injured).**

7) By recognizing the distinction between a sin and the consequences of that sin, we should recognize that one of these can be dealt with by God without necessarily affecting the other one.

8) Thus: when a person's own sins caused a health problem, then "confessing your faults" as per James 5:16 leads to a forgiveness of the guilt for the sins that were involved. **Divine healing is distinct from that forgiveness of sins.** So when the church member is healed, then God has done two things: forgiven his guilt, and also removed the consequences of that guilt (i.e. the sickness or disease).

9) When the sins of another person have caused health problems for some member of God's Church, then when God heals the person, God has done only one thing: removed the consequences of someone else's guilt (i.e. the sickness or disease). But God has **not yet forgiven** the sins that caused those health problems, because it is a completely different person or group of persons that needs to have those sins forgiven.

10) Now in the case of this man who had been paralyzed for 38 years Jesus Christ had removed the consequences of that man's transgressions (i.e. the paralysis). But He had **not** forgiven the man's sins that had caused the paralysis in the first place, because the man had never yet acknowledged to himself his own responsibility for his paralysis.

11) **This situation created an urgency for Jesus Christ!** It is one thing to forgive the consequences of sins because those sins were committed by totally different people from the ones that suffer ill health. But it is a completely different situation **when the person with ill health is in fact responsible for his own health problem.** Normally speaking such a person would **not** be eligible for divine healing without some acknowledgment of guilt and responsibility. It was the man's extremely pitiful situation and suffering for 38 years that moved Jesus Christ to compassion, to intervene ahead of any acknowledgment of responsibility for the problem on the part of that man.

12) However, having publicly healed the man, Jesus Christ then as a matter of urgency privately sought out the man and gave him a very stern warning. Christ's statement "sin no more" undoubtedly brought to the man's mind exactly what he himself had done so many years earlier to cause his own paralysis. That was probably the first time the man ever associated whatever it was that he had done with the

paralysis that then afflicted him. Think of Christ's statement "sin no more" as causing an "oh, now I understand" moment in that man's mind. In modern language Jesus Christ said: "**don't you ever do that again!**"! This statement Jesus Christ then followed up with the stern warning "lest you suffer a far worse problem".

13) Jesus Christ's statement in private to this man was intended to stir the man to acknowledge his own responsibility for his paralysis, something that in normal circumstances the man should have done even before God healed him.

14) The warning "lest a worse thing come unto you" is a comparison to the paralysis the man had suffered for 38 years. It is not a reference to the lake of fire. This man wasn't even remotely motivated to become a disciple of Jesus Christ; he promptly went to the authorities to reveal that Jesus Christ was the One who had healed him (John 5:15). So this man was not being offered an opportunity to be in the first resurrection. And since he was also not in danger of the third resurrection to the lake of fire, therefore "the worse thing" can only be a reference to some physical problem that would be even worse than paralysis.

15) We should note that this healing of a health problem, for which the man himself was responsible, even before the man acknowledged responsibility, was **an exceptional case**. Normally that is not what God will do. But God reserves the right to show compassion to people who suffer, sometimes even ahead of those people acknowledging responsibility for their own part in causing their own sufferings. This is also something that God will do for all the people who will be in the second resurrection: heal all their health problems even before they acknowledge any responsibility for those problems. But they will have to acknowledge their responsibilities at some point after having been resurrected!

16) However, we should always work from the premise that God's help and intervention with the problems we face is predicated on us first acknowledging whatever responsibility we may have had in causing our own problems. If for whatever reasons God decides to intervene for us even before we acknowledge our responsibility for our part, that is a bonus blessing for us; but it is not something we should ever expect. The norm is that we first confess our guilt, and then God intervenes for us.

17) Jesus Christ's statement "sin no more **lest** a worse thing come unto you" makes quite clear that in this case the man's own actions had been the cause for his paralysis. He had brought that upon himself! And because Jesus Christ had already healed him, therefore there was an urgency for the man to quickly face up to his own responsibility for his previous health problem, "lest a worse thing would come upon him".

18) This case is unique amongst all the healings Jesus Christ performed in the sense that this is the only instance where the healing was accompanied by a strong warning of more dire consequences for any future relapse into something the man had done many years earlier. And we should recognize the reason for this unusual dire warning; it was to ensure the man would comply with something he normally should have done **before** God would heal him.

To give you an analogy: Let's suppose that someone suffers severe liver disease because of alcoholism. Because the person is suffering, God then out of compassion heals the person's liver and restores the man's health. But at the same time as healing the person God also says: "Now don't you ever misuse alcohol again, lest a far worse problem than your liver disease come upon you. Don't you be like a dog returning to his own vomit." (See 2 Peter 2:22) That's more or less what happened in this incident in John 5.

This incident is a very powerful illustration of the principle that "for every effect there has to be a cause". There was a distinct cause for that man's 38-year paralysis, and Jesus Christ's urgent warning makes

clear that in this case the man himself had in some way been responsible for that cause.

When Jesus Christ gave this man this sober warning, I suspect that Jesus Christ had in mind the principle that He explained in Matthew chapter 12.

### **A PRINCIPLE TO KEEP IN MIND**

Consider what Jesus Christ explained after He had cast out a demon. The scribes and Pharisees were once again very critical of what Jesus Christ had done, accusing Him of doing miracles by the power of Satan (Matthew 12:24). After they had hypocritically asked for a sign (Matthew 12:38), Jesus Christ then explained a principle about demon problems, but which principle has a far wider application than just demon problems.

Notice:

When **the unclean spirit is gone out** of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none. Then he saith, **I will return** into my house from whence I came out; and when he is come, **he findeth it empty**, swept, and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and **they enter in and dwell there**: and **the last state of that man is worse than the first**. Even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation. (Matthew 12:43-45)

Here is what Jesus Christ explained in this context:

- 1) Someone has a problem which is due to demon possession. In this case in Matthew 12 the demon had caused the possessed man to be blind and dumb (Matthew 12:22). But demon problems can manifest in many other different ways as well.
- 2) The demon is forcefully cast out, and at that point the problems are then resolved.
- 3) However, there had been **a cause** for why that particular person had been demon possessed. Casting out the demon does nothing at all for removing the cause for the original demon possession. Casting out the demon only removes the consequence of that cause.

The point is: all problems are always the consequence of some or other cause. And dealing with a problem is not necessarily the same as dealing with the cause of that problem.

- 4) So unless that individual does something to remove, eradicate or neutralize that cause, **the problem is bound to come back**.

**This always happens when we don't deal with and confront the real causes of our problems!**

- 5) When the demon says "I will return to my former house", this refers to the very powerful influence that problems can have over us, somewhat like an addiction. In the case of a demon having been cast out, the demon does his utmost to reinstate the former problems he had been able to impose on the man he had previously possessed.

- 6) When it says that the demon "finds it empty", then that shows that the individual from whom the demon had been cast out has **done nothing** whatsoever to deal with and **to remove the cause** for his original possession. A house that is "empty, swept and garnished" is available for occupation by a new tenant! It is like a "**house for rent**" sign, inviting potential tenants.

7) This is where "there has to be a cause for every effect" enters the picture. A problem is never resolved by simply dealing with the consequences of the problem. That approach will require us to deal with those consequences again tomorrow, and again the next day, and again ... and again. That's what I call "the medicine cabinet approach to dealing with problems".

8) The only permanent solution to a problem is a two-step approach. These two steps can be performed in any order. One step is to deal with the undesirable consequences which the problem created. The other step is to remove and eliminate the cause of the problem. Ideally, this step of removing the cause is done first. However, in practice sometimes the undesirable consequences require our immediate attention, and we can only thereafter focus on rooting out the causes.

9) This world frequently tries to focus our attention on dealing with the consequences, while ignoring the causes. Thus:

If you have a headache or a stomach pain or aching muscle pain, they offer you a pill to deal with the pain. Perhaps the pill even helps to mask or to neutralize the pain symptoms? But the pill does nothing to remove the cause of the pain. And so tomorrow or the next day you again have that pain, and they again offer you the pills. In this approach **the cause is never dealt with**, and you are on an endless treadmill of constantly dealing with undesirable consequences of causes that are never addressed.

10) When Christ said that "the last state of that man is worse than the first", He was pointing out that when the real causes of problems are not addressed and dealt with, then the problems always, always get worse! This is true for every problem you and I ever experience: if we don't face up to and address the real causes, then our problems will always get worse.

11) In this regard the "why ...?" is always more important than the "what ...?" All the destruction which Satan's rebellion against God caused is not nearly as important as the reason and motivation for Satan's rebellion, which motivation was extreme selfishness and vanity and pride. We need to recognize that it is always more difficult to deal with the "why ...?" than it is to deal with the "what ...?". The physical universe that Satan's rebellion destroyed can easily be repaired by God; but the wrong self-centered motivation underlying Satan's rebellion can never be repaired, and therefore Satan can never be rehabilitated.

12) Jesus Christ's warning to the man in John 5 regarding "a worse thing coming upon him" is the same as Christ's statement in Matthew 12:45 regarding "the last state of that man is worse than the first". When the real causes of problems are not dealt with, the problems always become worse.

13) In this parable the real problem was that, after the demon had been cast out, when the demon returns he finds the house "empty, swept and garnished". The man had done nothing at all to prevent the demon from returning; he had not dealt with the cause for why he had been demon-possessed in the first place. The man had not put into practice the principle "**resist the devil** and he will flee from you" (James 4:7). Instead, his mind was just as open and inviting to the demon as it had ever been. That's what "empty, swept and garnished" means.

14) The lesson for us is: Whenever the consequences of a problem for us are resolved, then we must also take action to avoid a repetition of that same problem by dealing with the causes for the problem. In the case of demon-possession the cause is a mind that is "empty, swept and garnished", and therefore that mind must be filled with the truth and armed to the teeth, as explained in Ephesians 6:13-18, and then that mind needs to actively "resist the devil". In the case of other problems we need ask some of the questions I raised earlier to deal with the respective causes.

15) Another very vital lesson for us is this: We need to face the fact that it is far more difficult for us to

face up to the real causes of our problems than it is for us to recognize the consequences those causes produced (i.e. the actual problems we face). **Facing up to the real causes of our problems is a part of real godly repentance**, which should help us to understand why almost universally people refuse to face up to the real causes of their problems, because most people don't ever come anywhere near a godly repentance.

Facing up to the real causes of our problems requires us to change the way we think, to change the way our minds operate. It takes a repentant frame of mind to acknowledge the real causes of our problems when those causes point to us ourselves as being responsible for our problems.

If you can understand this, then that should take some of the frustration out of dealing with people in this world (in business, politics, local debates, readers' points of view in newspapers and magazines, discussions with neighbors, comments on some radio or TV talk-show, etc.) who point-blank refuse to acknowledge the facts you or someone else is presenting, which facts plainly contradict their position. You see, as long as they are not truly repentant (and we can't expect people in the world to be repentant!) it is virtually impossible for them to acknowledge any guilt or responsibility for the problems that their actions, ideas or policies have created or will create. They are all a part of a blinded age over which Satan is "a god" (2 Corinthians 4:4), and they will faithfully represent the views of their "god".

So don't get frustrated with people whose comments just don't make sense.

But you are a member of the true Church of God. And this present life is your opportunity for a part in the coming Kingdom of God. This is your day of salvation. And you and I need to understand very clearly that there is always a cause for everything that happens. And when things go wrong for us, or when we experience difficulties and trials, then we need to very carefully first look for the causes for those trials in our own actions. The man who had been paralyzed for 38 years hadn't done that before Jesus Christ healed him. But you and I are being judged by a higher standard, and judgment is now on us (1 Peter 4:17).

So let's try to keep this principle "for every effect there has to be a cause" in mind, especially when things seem to be going wrong for us. And then let's try to correctly identify that cause, so that we can then deal with it.

Frank W Nelte