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Frank W. Nelte

GOD KEEPS ON TRYING TO GET US TO CHANGE

When God created us human beings, God had a purpose in mind. God intends for us human beings to become immortal members of His very own Family. But before God gives us immortal life, God also needs to have the absolute assurance that we will never rebel against God, that we will always gladly submit our will to God's will.

So God tests our minds and our attitudes. From the time we are called to be in God's Church to the time when we die, we go through a period of **thorough testing**. Basically, God wants to find out if He can really trust us unconditionally, that we will always, under all circumstances, be faithful to God.

In my recent article entitled "**God Holds All Of Us Accountable**" I pointed out that things in fact turned out extremely badly after Adam's creation. In fact, it went so badly that God decided to destroy all human life, except for 8 people, in a worldwide flood, and to start all over again with those 8 people.

After the flood God modified His plan regarding how God would work with human beings. Under the new plan God was only going to "call" a small number of people for an opportunity to be in the first resurrection. All other human beings would receive the opportunity for salvation later via the second resurrection.

In time God called and selected Abraham, and after many tests God had Abraham's descendants grow into the nation of Israel. When God made the Old Covenant with the nation of Israel, **one aspect of that covenant** was that God intended to limit His search for candidates for the first resurrection to the people of Israel.

Towards the goal of still finding almost 144,000 individuals for the first resurrection from amongst the people of Israel, God worked with the people of Israel for **almost 900 years**. During that period of time Israel kept sinking down into idolatry time after time. Therefore God **eventually** divorced both the House of Israel (in 721-718 B.C.) and the House of Judah (in 586 B.C.), by sending them "**out of His house**" (compare to Deuteronomy 24:1) and into foreign captivities.

Those two divorces opened the way for God to look for additional candidates for the first resurrection among all the non-Israelite nations of the world, thereby greatly expanding the potential manpower pool. That additional option was then set in motion with Matthew 28:19, right after Jesus Christ's resurrection. Since that time God has been looking for candidates for the first resurrection from among all people on earth.

So if your ethnic background comes from any non-Israelite nation, then your personal opportunity to have a part in the first resurrection is a direct consequence of God having divorced the nations of Israel. And if this happens to be your situation, then in the words of the Apostle Paul "be not high-minded but

fear” (Romans 11:20).

Okay, so much for a general picture of God’s plan for mankind. Now let’s go back to that approximately 900-year period **before** God divorced Israel.

JESUS CHRIST LABORED TO MAKE THINGS WORK OUT

Right from the start the people of Israel showed that they were always drawn to pagan teachings and pagan forms of worship. In the wilderness they pressured Aaron with “up, **make us gods**, which shall go before us” (see Exodus 32:1). Once they had crossed the Jordan into the land of Israel, they constantly descended into Baal worship and into the worship of all the pagan gods of the nations around them. For example, the father of Gideon had **his own private altar to Baal**, which God instructed Gideon to throw down, before God was going to use Gideon to save Israel from the Midianites (see Judges 6:25-27).

Much later even **King Solomon built pagan shrines** for all his foreign wives right in the area of Jerusalem (see 1 Kings 11:7-8). The point is that Israel’s history is a story of constantly being involved with pagan customs and pagan teachings.

But **God was not yet giving up** on Israel. Let’s look at one example of God trying one more time to get Israel to obey God.

In Ezekiel chapter 12 God instructed the Prophet Ezekiel to act out the process of going into captivity in a foreign land. Notice what God said to Ezekiel.

Therefore, you son of man, **prepare you stuff for removing**, and remove by day in their sight; and you shall remove from your place to another place in their sight: **it may be they will consider**, though they *be* a rebellious house. (Ezekiel 12:3)

God was saying: Ezekiel, prepare as if you were going to be taken into captivity to a foreign land. God acknowledged that Israel was indeed “a rebellious house”. God had known about this rebellious proclivity since the days of Moses (see Deuteronomy 5:29). That is, God had known for a good 900 years that they were rebellious, and that **they had never really changed** in any significant way.

And yet **God was hoping** that they would change. That is clear from God’s use of the expression:

“... **it may be they will consider** ...”.

This expression shows that God was still trying everything possible to get the remaining people of Israel (i.e. others had already gone into captivity) to change. After 900 years of trying to get the people to submit, you and I would surely have given up trying.

But not God!

This tells us something about how God thinks. And this is important for us to understand God. God was in effect saying: okay, I'll show them very graphically what it will be like for them to go into captivity in another country. I know it is unlikely, but **maybe, just maybe, they will understand** and get the message **and change**. If there is even the slightest of chances that the people will respond positively and change, then I will try it.

God **wanted** the Israelites to change, so that God would not have to punish them with captivity in foreign lands. God had been trying to motivate the Israelites to obey Him for centuries, all to no lasting avail. And God was still trying.

This tells us that **God is not a passive observer**. No, God becomes actively involved in wanting to stir up people to change.

Jeremiah, during whose ministry the Babylonian captivity for the House of Judah began, summarized God's dealings with Israel over the centuries as follows:

And **the LORD has sent unto you all His servants the prophets**, rising early and sending *them*; but **you have not hearkened**, nor inclined your ear to hear. (Jeremiah 25:4)

And later God Himself said:

Howbeit **I sent unto you all My servants the prophets**, rising early and sending *them*, saying, Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate. **But they hearkened not**, nor inclined their ear to turn from their wickedness, to burn no incense unto other gods. (Jeremiah 44:4-5)

Every time God sent one of His servants to the people of Israel, on God's part it was with the hope that **"it may be they will consider"**. Maybe they'll change this time.

GOD IS LONGSUFFERING

After Israel had made the golden calf, Moses was furious; and in his anger he had broken the two tables of stone on which God had written the ten commandments. So Moses went again up to God on the mountain. The golden calf which the Israelites had made represented **a huge offense against God**. The golden calf was an enormous insult to the God who had led them through the Red Sea. Therefore a severe penalty from God could have been expected.

But here is how God then identified Himself to Israel. Here is what God said to Moses at that specific time:

And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, **merciful and gracious, longsuffering**, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, **forgiving iniquity** and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear *the guilty*; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth *generation*. (Exodus 34:6-7)

What was God telling Moses in these two verses? God was saying that He was **prepared to work with Israel**, even when Israel would repeatedly disobey God. God was prepared to be merciful, gracious, longsuffering and forgiving, provided Israel would then repent and change away from all their forms of disobedience.

The word “**longsuffering**” means that God would put up with a lot of offenses. The two Hebrew words translated as “longsuffering” literally mean “**slow to anger**”. Where anger is typically our spontaneous response to any disobedience, God said that He was slow in responding with anger when Israel once again disobeyed God.

If I were to seriously insult you, you would most probably be instantly angry with me. We tend to very quickly get angry when we are provoked.

But that's not what God is like. God is longsuffering.

Keep in mind that the episode with the golden calf had just taken place in the preceding days, an event that could have been expected to have evoked a very severe penalty from God. But **God held back His anger**, because God was committed to working with the people of Israel.

So then at a later point God instructed Moses to send the 12 spies to “search the land of Canaan” (see Numbers 13:2). When the ten faithless spies then gave an evil report (verse 32), the people of Israel were filled with fear, and **once again refused to obey God**, to go into the land of Canaan to possess it. In fact, the people were getting ready to stone Moses and Aaron, when God intervened (see Numbers 14:10).

Now notice how things developed from there.

And the LORD said unto Moses, **How long will this people provoke Me?** and how long will it be ere they believe Me, for all the signs which I have showed among them? **I will smite them with the pestilence, and disinherit them**, and will make of you a greater nation and mightier than they. (Numbers 14:11-12)

What is God talking about? Do you understand the significance of these verses?

Right here God was ready to divorce Israel! Right here God was ready to “disinherit” Israel. Right here God is thinking “this is never going to work out right, so once again I'll just have to start over, just like I did after the flood”. This was less than a full year after Israel had left Egypt, and they were not even

in their own land ... and **God is already seriously contemplating divorce** and disinheriting them.

Can you grasp that God was already considering divorcing Israel about 900 years before God finally did divorce Israel? Can you grasp **the magnitude of this occasion**? Israel's fate was in the balance.

God was extremely angry with the people of Israel. In fact, God was so angry that He considered just killing all of them, and starting all over with just Moses. And killing all of them would have been a lot worse than just divorcing them. As we all know, Moses interceded for Israel. Moses then said to God:

Now **if You will kill all this people as one man**, then the nations which have heard the fame of You will speak, saying, Because the LORD was not able to bring this people into the land which He had sworn unto them, therefore He has slain them in the wilderness. (Numbers 14:15-16)

Note! If God was going to “kill all this people as one man”, then there wouldn't be any need for a divorce, would there? Killing them all would have opened the way to give the promises God had made to other people, while still keeping His promises to Abraham, since Moses was also a descendant of Abraham.

Moses understood that all the people of Israel were at that point very close to being killed by God. And subsequently God in fact did kill thousands of Israelites in the wilderness. **It was a very tense situation!**

So Moses continued to intercede for Israel before God. **In this act Moses was in effect fulfilling the primary duty of a priest** ... interceding before God on behalf of a sinful people. Moses concluded his appeal as follows:

Pardon, I beseech You, **the iniquity of this people** according unto the greatness of Your mercy, and **as You have forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now**. (Numbers 14:19)

Moses was saying: please forgive them one more time. At the same time Moses also acknowledged that God had already repeatedly forgiven the people, from the time they had left Egypt.

Here is God's response to this appeal for mercy.

And the LORD said, **I have pardoned** according to your word: (Numbers 14:20)

Once again God did forgive this sin of the people.

And that forgiveness was because **Moses had stood in the breach** and asked God for mercy. This is an important principle we should always keep in mind. When the land is filled with sins, then God is always looking for someone to stand in the breach before God, and to appeal for mercy.

For example, in Ezekiel 22 God describes a society filled with evils. And then God says:

And **I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge**, and stand in the gap before Me for the land, that I should not destroy it: **but I found none**. (Ezekiel 22:30)

Why is God looking for such people?

First of all, that is exactly **the type of person that God is looking to have in the first resurrection!** God obviously knows whether such a standing in the gap comes from a pure motivation, or whether it is a calculated subtle move to in some way advance self. Nobody can fool God in this regard to motivation for such an action. So when the motivation is pure, then that is “a man after God’s own heart”.

You see, **that is exactly the same way that Jesus Christ is!** It is Jesus Christ Himself who “makes up a hedge and stands in the gap” before God the Father as our High Priest in heaven. That is what Jesus Christ is doing right now in heaven, standing in the gap for us, when we sin and fall short. This attribute of intervening for other people is a part of Jesus Christ’s own character. It is a part of who He is. So in the sight of God the willingness of any man or any woman to stand in the gap is **a very precious attribute**.

Secondly, Ezekiel 22:30 also shows that God always prefers to not have to impose the penalties He has already announced. If advance announcements of penalties actually motivate people to repent and change, then God will not impose the penalties which God has already announced. That is also explained in the Book of Ezekiel.

Again, **when I say** unto the wicked, **you shall surely die**; if he turn from his sin, and do that which is lawful and right; *If* the wicked restore the pledge, give again that he had robbed, walk in the statutes of life, without committing iniquity; he shall surely live, **he shall not die**. (Ezekiel 33:14-15)

So even the advance announcement of impending penalties is a part of God’s intense efforts to get human beings to repent and to change. **God will keep working with us as long as there is any hope that we might still change**.

So let’s summarize God’s dealings with people in Old Testament times:

1) **Before the flood** Jesus Christ worked for 1,536 years with rebellious human beings, before deciding to destroy all people exactly 120 years later by means of a worldwide flood. God tried and tried and tried to work with human beings, before eventually acknowledging what **had been obvious to God for centuries** already: that every imagination of the thoughts of man’s heart was only evil continually. But God had always carried on working with man, with the hope that **“it may be they will consider”**.

2) **After the flood** Jesus Christ worked with the people of Israel for about 900 years, before finally

divorcing the nations of Israel, so that the potential manpower pool for calling people to an opportunity to be in the first resurrection could be expanded from just the people of Israel to from then onwards include people from all nations.

Again, God had tried and tried to get the people of Israel to willingly submit their lives to God's laws and commandments. Here too it had been obvious to God for centuries that this was not working out as God had hoped. And here too God kept working with the people of Israel anyway, with the hope that "**it may be they will consider**".

So before the flood the whole system started out with one man who had already disobeyed God (i.e. Adam). **That was a bad start**. And Adam's descendants then continued in the ways of Adam, i.e. in the ways of disobedience to God. That system then produced a total failure, as far as achieving God's purposes was concerned.

So in the modified system enacted after the flood God made two significant changes:

1) Instead of starting out with one man who had already rejected God's rule over his life (i.e. Adam), and then working with that man's descendants, in the system after the flood God started out with **faithful men in three consecutive generations** (i.e. Abraham and Isaac and Jacob). Up to that point in time that had never happened in human history ... that one family line produced faithful servants of God for three successive generations.

This was intended to give this system **a far better start** than the previous system. Instead of the next generations seeing the bad examples of their father or grandfather (i.e. of Adam), the next generations would be exposed to the good examples of their father and their grandfather (i.e. exposed to Abraham's and Isaac's and Jacob's good examples of living by the laws of God).

2) The second modification was that instead of trying to work with all human beings at the same time, God would only work with those people who would be called by God, while reserving all other people to be worked with in the second resurrection. And to increase the likelihood of finding suitable candidates for God to call, God restricted the potential manpower pool to the descendants of those three consecutive generations of faithful men. That is, God restricted Himself to the people of Israel for finding people to call for the first resurrection.

With these two modifications to the original plan, **things worked a lot better** than before the flood. By that I mean that, whereas the period before the flood had produced only three faithful individuals (i.e. Abel and Enoch and Noah), the period after the flood and up to the start of the New Testament produced **anywhere from hundreds to a few thousand** faithful individuals. For that period of time the names of all the faithful individuals are simply not recorded in the Bible.

But while that post-flood period may have produced perhaps a few thousand individuals for the first resurrection (and this is a pure guess on my part, given only to establish some kind of perspective, with no claims to accuracy), **that was still a very long way short of God's target** to have exactly 144,000 individuals available for the first resurrection. The trend was showing that even 2,000 more years would not be enough to provide all the people needed for the first resurrection. And God had established

certain time parameters.

Something needed to be done.

After Jesus Christ's resurrection God again made a change to the system for calling people for an opportunity to be in the first resurrection. And that change involves the first of the above two points, the matter of working with the descendants of the three faithful generations. Here is what God's thinking had been for that specific approach. Here is what God had said about Abraham.

For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him. (Genesis 18:19)

Do we grasp what God is telling us in this verse?

According to this verse, here is what God was thinking:

- 1) I know Abraham's character, that Abraham is absolutely and unconditionally faithful to Me.
- 2) So I know that Abraham is going to faithfully teach his children My laws and My way of life. I know Abraham will not condone any of his children breaking My laws. So his children will then be just as dedicated to My way of life as is Abraham himself.
- 3) That will set up **a chain of faithful generations**, where Abraham's generations "**after him**" will also "keep the way of the Eternal". That was God's thinking.

Understand that God is always positive, always looking for the best outcome. And God will always do His part towards achieving the best possible outcome.

And in this situation God's expectations were indeed correct for the next two generations. Abraham's son Isaac was faithful to God. And then Isaac's son Jacob was also faithful to God.

But this chain broke down in the third generation after Abraham. It broke down with the sons of Jacob, at least with the majority of them.

We need to recognize that God's restriction of only calling people for the first resurrection from amongst the twelve tribes of Israel was based on **this premise** that within the twelve tribes **every faithful father would have at least one faithful son**. It didn't have to be all the children of a faithful man that would then also be faithful to God, although that would have been the ideal situation.

No, once the nation of Israel was well established with twelve distinct tribes, it would have been sufficient if **just one** of the children of every faithful man (or at least of almost every faithful man) would also be faithful to God. That would have ensured that over the centuries there would be an ample reservoir of faithful people, for God to call for a part in the first resurrection.

But it never worked out that way! God's hope, as expressed in Genesis 18:19, was never fulfilled. In fact, quite a number of God's faithful servants didn't have even one of their children turn out to be right before God. Think of faithful men of God like Moses, Samuel, Hezekiah, Josiah, etc. and the sons of those men.

So the hope that a faithful man would have at least one child that would also be faithful to God; and that faithful child would then in due time also have at least one child that would likewise be faithful to God, didn't work out.

While the first two generations after Abraham worked out in producing men faithful to God, very few of the 12 sons of Jacob, and then even less so their children and grandchildren, were committed to the God of Abraham. And by the time of the Judges in Israel, the people were **no different from all the nations around them**, as far as willing obedience to the true God was concerned. That was the time when "every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (see Judges 21:25), with a disregard for the laws of God. The faithful character of Abraham had not been passed on, by faithful instructions and nurturing, from father to son down through the generations.

Israel simply did not turn out as God had hoped back in the days of Abraham.

That is the bitter truth! But nevertheless God worked and worked and worked with the people of Israel.

The reason why God in time divorced Israel was that things did not turn out as God had anticipated. That is why after Jesus Christ's resurrection **God expanded the manpower pool** for people to call for the first resurrection to include people from all nations.

GOD'S DEALINGS IN OUR TIME

God hasn't changed. As already mentioned, God worked intensely with the people of Israel for about 900 years, before deciding to divorce the nations of Israel. And since expanding the manpower pool of potential people to call, God has worked equally intensely for approximately 2,000 years with all the people God has called during that time. That includes working with all the people that have made up **the seven eras** of the New Testament Church of God, as presented in Revelation chapters 2-3.

The messages to the seven eras refer to the way God has worked with the people He has called for the past approximately 2,000 years.

Now the point we need to understand is that **throughout this entire period God has likewise been**

extremely longsuffering. The Apostle Peter addressed people who were critical of Jesus Christ, because His second coming had not yet occurred. Well, it hasn't yet occurred in our days either. So Peter's statement is also relevant for us.

The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness; but **is longsuffering towards us**, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. (2 Peter 3:9)

Since the time when God called you and me into His Church, **God has been longsuffering with you and with me.** We need to understand that. And we need to appreciate that! God is doing His part, and more than His part, to lead you and me into His kingdom. God did not reject us when we took a wrong step, and when we fell short. God didn't reject us when we stopped praying daily. No, God has indeed been longsuffering with us. But we do need to get back to praying daily on our knees before God, and to earnestly seeking God's will in our own personal lives.

Time is running out! And we need to change! We need to commit to overcoming in those areas where we fall short. And in most cases we are not talking about breaking the laws regarding the Sabbath or the Holy Days or not tithing, etc. No, obedience to these laws of God is not the primary issue for us who are already members of God's Church.

For us who are already a part of God's Church:

We are talking about not giving God **our time.** We're talking about us not making the effort to actually seek out regular **contact with God.** We are talking about us **not actually changing our attitudes** away from the attitudes that enslave the people of this world. If our attitude on many things is not any different from the attitude of our neighbors who are not in God's Church, then **something is not right!** If we are still enslaved by a spirit of fear, then again something is not right! The things we are here talking about all refer to "overcoming".

"Overcoming" is not about Sabbath-keeping and tithing and keeping God's Holy Days. Those things are all a part of the "entry-level" into true Christianity! Overcoming has to do with what we do after we have already started to keep God's Sabbaths and His Holy Days, etc. Overcoming deals with things over and above **basic obedience** to God's laws.

Overcoming has to do with practicing all of **the additional laws of God**, laws which Jesus Christ spelled out especially in Matthew chapters 5-7. Overcoming has to do with giving God our time in prayer, Bible study and fasting. Overcoming has to do with learning to control our minds, to not entertain the wrong thoughts of lusting, coveting and plain selfishness. Overcoming has to do with **controlling our minds on God's Sabbath.** God clearly tells us that on His Sabbath days we are to ...

turn away our foot **from** the Sabbath, *from* doing **our pleasure** on God's Holy Day and ... not doing **our own ways**, nor finding **our own pleasure**, nor speaking **our own words** (see Isaiah 58:13).

If we really seek to apply these things, then we find that controlling our minds on God's Sabbath Days isn't always easy, is it? These are all some of the things that require overcoming. So to take the Sabbath as an example:

Simply keeping the Sabbath is not about overcoming. Overcoming is about **how** we keep the Sabbath. Overcoming is about controlling our thoughts on the Sabbath.

In keeping the Sabbath, our focus should not be on restrictions, on what we are not supposed to think about on the Sabbath. Rather, overcoming is about **coming to a personal understanding** of what we should be focusing our minds on, as far as the Sabbath is concerned. It should not be a case of someone else (e.g. our minister) telling us what we should be thinking about on the Sabbath. It is a case of **us ourselves coming to discern what God would want** us to focus our minds on.

Overcoming is never a case of us doing what someone else tells us to do. Anyone who has been in God's Church for longer than a year should not be asking a minister "what am I supposed to think about on the Sabbath?" Someone like that should really read Isaiah 58:13-14, and then figure out for himself/herself how we are to use our minds on the Sabbath.

Look at these two verses. Then if you can't figure out for yourself how to apply these verses (and you've already been in God's Church for more than one full year, right?), then asking a minister how to apply them does nothing for your mind! **You figure out for yourself how to apply these two verses.** It is your mind that these two verses are testing, not the minister's mind. These verses don't test thoughts that someone else puts into your mind. God wants to know how you use your own mind, not how well you do what someone else tells you to do.

Let me repeat that:

God wants to know how you use your own mind, and not how well you do what someone else has told you to do!

That (doing what someone else has told you to do) has nothing to do with overcoming. In this situation you're not using your own mind!

You never develop godly character by faithfully doing what someone else tells you to do, because then you are not using your own mind. You're simply following orders. Following orders does not develop godly character.

Oh sure, you can seek advice and counsel on many things. That is a good thing to do. But it is when you yourself figure out **how** to apply God's instructions in your own life, and in your own circumstances, that then godly character is developed within you. You already know all the basic laws, because you've been in God's Church for more than a year.

Now you need to figure out the nitty-gritty details on your own, depending on your own circumstances and your own understanding. You do that **by using your own mind**, by thinking about God's instructions, and asking yourself: is this what God would like me to do in regard to this specific law and these specific circumstances? You can't possibly develop your own mind without actually using it.

It is a cop-out to expect the minister to think for you! And that is certainly not how you will overcome. God has told you personally "ask ... seek ... knock" ... and you will be given the correct answers (see Matthew 7:7-8). **Christ did not say** "ask your minister, and he will tell you everything that you must do". No, you personally are expected to ask God for understanding. And that process will develop godly character in you.

Let's consider the Greek verb that is translated as "**to overcome**" in the New Testament. This Greek verb is "nikao", and it really means "**to conquer**". This verb has to do with **being victorious in some way**.

Now we don't conquer the Sabbath or the annual Holy Days; we don't conquer tithing or unclean meats, etc. because we cannot possibly be "victorious" over any of these laws of God. So none of God's laws are the issue when we talk about "overcoming" or "conquering".

What we are expected to "conquer" or "overcome" is how our own minds naturally and spontaneously work!

It is our own natural minds that are spontaneously hostile to God, and spontaneously unwilling to submit to the laws of God (see Romans 8:7). It is these spontaneous pulls of our own minds that we need to conquer (or overcome).

Yes, people may already be keeping the Sabbath and God's other laws, but their minds will influence **how they will keep all of God's laws**. How people keep God's laws will reveal to God whether or not they have conquered their carnal mind's tendencies.

No Sabbath-keeper in our age has ever started out by keeping the Sabbath as it should be kept! Why is that?

In Old Testament times Sabbath-keeping was a matter of obeying the letter of the law. **Today God requires us to keep the spiritual intent of the law**. That is on a higher level than only keeping the letter of the law. That is a level from which no Sabbath-keeper has ever started out. It is something that must be achieved over time, something that requires further development of the mind.

So how can we keep the spiritual intent of the law?

The only way we can keep the spiritual intent of the law (using the Sabbath as an example) is by us individually interacting with our own minds with that law. **We have to think about everything** we say and do and think about on the Sabbath, and then reach our own personal conclusions, as to what is

desirable before God, and what is not. We evaluate everything in our personal Sabbath circumstances against Isaiah 58:13. It makes no difference what other people may do. Overcoming (conquering) is then the result of us using our minds to reach conclusions that resist the pulls of the carnal mind of Romans 8:7.

In other words, when we overcome, it means that **our minds are being developed** in the right way. We have grown in how we apply the Sabbath command in our own circumstances. And that growth was achieved by us personally thinking through God's instructions and then reaching our own conclusions ... rather than us simply doing what someone else told us to do.

To repeat: following orders does not develop our minds, and it does not develop godly character in us. That is the whole issue with all of God's laws, and not just with the Sabbath law.

God specifically gave His laws as **statements of principles**. And we are required to use our minds to apply all those principles in our own circumstances. And when we do that correctly, then we are developing godly character.

In my previous article entitled "God Holds All Of Us Accountable" I gave the example of God instructing Adam not to eat the fruit of the tree of the perception of good and evil (see Genesis 2:17). Eve had not yet been created at that point in time. Adam then later told Eve that they were not only to not eat that specific fruit; **they were not even to touch it** (see Genesis 3:3).

Now God hadn't actually said that! Rather, Adam had correctly applied the principle inherent in what God had said, and he had then drawn the correct conclusion that "don't eat it" **obviously** implied "don't even touch it". In this process Adam's mind had started to develop in the right way. That had been a very first small step towards developing good character, which positive step regrettably was later erased with the act of eating that fruit in spite of this knowledge.

But this illustrates the process all of us have to use. Look at God's laws, and then recognize the obvious intentions underlying those laws. And those obvious intentions are invariably in conflict with the carnal human mind's desire to establish restricted applications.

Anyway, enough about overcoming. The point in our context here is:

God requires us to overcome, and in that process **God is also extremely longsuffering with us!** As long as we don't develop a wrong, resentful attitude towards God and His way of life, so long God will work with us. We fall short and we make mistakes. And God will continue to work with us. Through the Prophet Isaiah God tells us:

Come now, and **let us reason together**, says the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. **If you be willing and obedient**, you shall eat the good of the land: (Isaiah 1:18-19)

As long as we don't get into a wrong attitude towards God, God will continue to work with us for the rest of our lives. As long as our attitude is right, all problems can be worked out ... that's what "let us reason together" tells us.

So yes, God is indeed longsuffering with you and with me. **Time ran out** for the people before the flood. And **time ran out** for the people of Israel in the Old Testament. And **time is running out** for us in God's Church today, because as the Apostle Paul explained:

And that, knowing the time, that now *it is* high time to awake out of sleep: for **now is our salvation nearer than when we (first) believed**. (Romans 13:11)

The time when God will intervene in this world's affairs is fast approaching. All around us evils are escalating at a staggering rate. That downward spiral into evils and perversions is intensifying on an almost daily basis.

WHAT ABOUT OUR FRIENDS?

What about **our friends and relatives** who have left God's Church during the past 20-30 years? And what about our **unconverted spouses** and unconverted adult children? Is God also longsuffering with them? Or has God given up on them?

As long as there is even the slightest chance that "**it may be they will consider**", God will try to lead them to repentance and to change. God will work with anyone who may still repent, if circumstances were right. By this I don't mean some deathbed repentance, a repentance in desperate straits when all has clearly been lost. By referring to "circumstances being right" I mean circumstances **where the person clearly still has choices available**, where the person is not forced to repent because there is no other option.

I don't know what such circumstances would have to be for different people. Yes, there may well be stressful circumstances, but without the person having a gun held to his head and being told "repent or else". I'm thinking of perhaps difficult circumstances like the ones the prodigal son faced.

You know the parable. When the prodigal son was totally broke, he evaluated his own situation realistically as follows:

And **when he came to himself**, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! **I will arise and go to my father**, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before you, (Luke 15:17-18)

Now it doesn't have to be a lack of money and the prospect of starvation. Different things can cause different people "**to come to themselves**". The man in this parable didn't have a wrong or resentful attitude towards his father. He had just been plain stupid, but not hostile in any way. And for him "to

come to himself" it took the loss of all of his wealth.

The point we need to keep in mind is that God knows exactly what is most likely to have any specific person "come to himself". And if that person does not have any wrong attitude towards God and towards God's Church, then **God will try to motivate that person "to come to himself"**. That's an expression of God's mercy.

For example:

Do you know anyone who has left God's Church and who has since then had to endure major trials? If so, **those trials are an expression of God's mercy**, because they are intended to motivate the person to change and to repent. The trials that came upon the prodigal son worked ... they did indeed motivate him to repent and to change.

Now understand something:

The parable of the prodigal son is just that, a parable. It didn't actually happen. But what this parable does is this: **it shows us how Jesus Christ thinks**. Christ made up this parable to reveal His own thinking to us. You follow? Jesus Christ was in this parable amongst other things showing **why God will give some people trials**. The man in this parable repented, and that is the response God hopes we will have when trials come our way. Trials are to motivate us to repent.

However, there is also one specific circumstance where God will not continue to work with someone. And that specific circumstance is when people who have left God's Church have **a totally wrong attitude**.

For example, as far as people who have left God's Church are concerned:

God will not work with people who are **bitter**.

God will not work with people who are **resentful**.

God will not work with people who **deliberately** break His laws.

God will not work with people who **insult** Jesus Christ and who seek to discredit Christ's status and position in God's plan.

God will not work with people who **attack** the Church of which they were once members.

God will not work with people who **reject** a truth of God which they used to understand correctly.

All these wrong attitudes are expressions of the mind of Satan. They describe how Satan thinks and reasons. They describe how Satan responds to the truth of God. These things are all expressions of an

attitude of “enmity against God” (Romans 8:7). And these things describe **an attitude that will not change**, because Satan can never change his mind on any of these issues. And it is various aspects of his attitude that we are talking about.

God will not work with people who used to be in God’s Church, and who have since then developed an attitude of enmity against God. So if you know anyone to whom any of the above six points apply, then there is no hope that “they will come to themselves”.

But if someone who has left God’s Church is like the prodigal son; i.e. the person doesn’t have any of these specific attitudes, if that person is simply ignorant or foolish or shallow in understanding, or even weak in holding fast to a commitment to God, **then there is still hope**. Then there is still the possibility that if God brings “**a prodigal son type of trial**” on the person, then there is still the possibility that the person “may come to himself” and change.

As long as there is still a glimmer of hope that someone will change, God will work with that person, because God doesn’t want anyone to perish. And if that person might be motivated to change, then **God knows exactly** what type of trial is most likely to generate for that person the motivation to change.

That is what is meant by God being longsuffering. God will work with any of us as long as there is still a chance that we might repent and change. But God will not work with anyone who has gone beyond that point. As Jesus Christ said:

Wherefore I say unto you, **All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men:** but the blasphemy *against* the *holy* spirit **shall not be forgiven unto men**. And whosoever speaks a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaks against the holy spirit, **it shall not be forgiven him**, neither in this age, neither in the age to come. (Matthew 12:31-32)

This once again shows how longsuffering God is. If there is still hope that the person could still repent, then God will work with that person. But “to speak against the holy spirit” is an expression of **a hostile attitude towards God**. That is Satan’s attitude and Satan’s way of thinking. And that has gone too far. **That will never be forgiven**, because that satanic attitude can never change. And God does not work with an attitude that comes from Satan.

This situation will certainly apply to all those people who shortly before Jesus Christ’s return will have a **Laodicean attitude**. The attitude of “spiritually speaking I have need of nothing” (see Revelation 3:17) says “**I don’t need to change in any way**”. That too is an anti-God attitude. When Jesus Christ says to these people “I will spew (i.e. vomit) you out of My mouth” (Revelation 3:16), then that represents **a total and irreversible rejection**! Anything that is vomited out can never be restored. Vomiting something out represents **a finality of contact with such people**. Vomit is never taken back.

So, in conclusion, **God is very longsuffering**, and He has forgiven and will forgive very many sins and shortcomings on our part, provided that we are willing to change. As long as there is any hope that we will repent and change, **God will work with us** towards achieving such a change.

But when there is **an attitude problem**, with the wrong attitude directed against God Himself, then God will not work with such a person. God is simply not prepared to establish any kind of relationship with anyone who has a resentful attitude towards God. Now before we originally came to repentance, God gave us the opportunity to see our own hostility towards God, and to change away from that hostility. When we did that (i.e. get rid of that hostility), then God opened our minds and we came to repentance and submitted our lives to God.

But if after having repented, and after having received God's holy spirit, after "having tasted the heavenly gift" (see Hebrews 6:4), we then develop a hostile attitude towards God, then all hope is lost. **There are people in our age who have done that.** And that is a fearful thing (Hebrews 10:31).

We need to guard against any such wrong attitude entering our minds. As long as we in sincerity and truth seek to change before God, God will always continue to work with us.

Frank W Nelte