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Frank W. Nelte

UNDERSTANDING THE MIND OF GOD

The Church of God has made many doctrinal changes since the death of Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong. In many cases people disagreed with these changes when they first heard about them. However, after having been exposed to the new ideas for a while, many people then come to accept them. Pasadena urges members to give themselves time to assimilate the new teachings, convinced that with time most members will accept the new teachings as correct ... and that certainly seems to be the case for many people.

But are the changes really correct? How can you know? For that matter, WHICH changes are correct and which ones are not correct?

It is quite common today for ministers in the Worldwide Church of God to publicly admit, in front of the congregation, that they don't really fully understand the Church's new teachings and that they still have reservations in some areas. It is no wonder that the members are confused and become scattered ... like sheep without a shepherd to show them the way. If ministers admit they don't understand what the Church teaches, how can the average member be expected to understand what is right and what is wrong?

There is a way through all this confusion, a way to know which teachings are right and which ones are wrong. That way is to come to understand the mind of God!

OBEDIENCE TO GOD'S LAWS

Many of us came into God's Church because we were challenged on some point or other of obedience to God's laws. We came to see that God very clearly tells us to OBEY His commandments, and so we started to keep the Sabbath, etc.. To the question: "WHY do you keep the Sabbath and the Holy Days?" we replied:

"Because God says so, that's why!"

That answer is fine. Nothing wrong with it. But it is incomplete!

It is fine to START OFF with this attitude. It is true that in most cases obedience must PRECEDE understanding. Mr. Armstrong's observance of the annual Holy Days for several years, before he ever saw any significance in these days, is a prime example of this. But it certainly should not stay there! God also wants us to understand WHY He wants us to keep His laws. There are REASONS why God expects us to conduct our lives in a certain way, and God wants us to understand these reasons.

PLEASING GOD

In order to have our prayers answered by God, we must do two things. John explained this in his first letter. These two things are:

1) Obey God ... keep His commandments;

2) Do those things that PLEASE God.

And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight. (1 John 3:22)

Now a person can make an effort to keep God's commandments once he learns what those commandments are. But "pleasing God" goes a step further! There is no specific list of things that, collectively, amounts to "pleasing God".

There is one vital prerequisite for being able to please God!

What does a child have to know before he can please his parents? What does an employee have to know before he can please the boss? What do we have to know about anybody whom we want to please?

We have to know how their minds work! How they think!

YOU CANNOT REALLY PLEASE GOD IF YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND THE MIND OF GOD!

If you don't understand the mind of God, then you don't know WHY God wants you to do certain things and not do other things. You don't really get the true picture. Instead you are only going to look for God's approval for the things YOU really want to do or to have.

RITUALISTIC OBEDIENCE

You've heard this term used. What does it mean to you? What is "ritualistic obedience"? Is it only something people in Old Testament Israel did? Or is it something that people in the Church today still do?

"Ritualistic obedience" is obedience where the only reason is "because God says so"! That applies to Sabbath observance, Holy Day observance, tithing, observance of dietary laws, etc.. Any obedience that does not understand the mind of God is still only on the level of being "ritualistic".

Don't let anyone confuse you in this regard!

People sometimes like to apply the term "ritualistic" to obedience that is exact, precise and meticulous. But that's not what "ritualistic" is. That's what Satan would want you to believe it is, so that you take a "more relaxed" approach to obeying God.

People apply this to de-leavening their homes before the Days of Unleavened Bread. Those who are conscientiously and diligently exact in removing leaven are referred to as "ritualistic". The same goes for Sabbath observance: those who refuse to go even slightly past sunset with any non-Sabbath activity are being "ritualistic". Or people who are strict in insisting that certain activities are not appropriate for the Sabbath are considered "ritualistic".

But that is not true!

It is the people who don't understand the mind of God and who, as a result, take a more "relaxed"

approach to keeping God's laws, that are in fact showing nothing more than "ritualistic obedience"! Obedience without understanding God's mind!

Listen!

Jesus Christ made very clear that obedience to God needs to be exact and meticulous. This is what He pointed out to the Pharisees ...

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier [matters] of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: THESE OUGHT YE TO HAVE DONE, AND NOT TO LEAVE THE OTHER UNDONE. (Matthew 23:23)

The chances are that none of us in God's Church today have ever been SO METICULOUS as to actually TITHE on the minute quantities produced in our herb-gardens. Yet Christ said to these Pharisees:

"That's right! You should be tithing on every form of increase!"

The Pharisees were ritualistic because their MOTIVE was to just fulfill the letter of the law. They didn't want to give more than a tithe. And the point is: we should ALWAYS have the attitude of wanting to do MORE than God requires! Where God tells us to go one mile, we should strive to go two miles.

Applied to tithing this means: we should give offerings that far exceed all the little increases we may normally overlook (such as the seeds produced in our tiny herb-gardens) in calculating our tithes. Applied to delevenering our homes this means: we do the most diligent job we can in removing leaven ... without becoming fanatical and taking furniture and appliances apart. Applied to Sabbath keeping this means: we totally avoid infringing on God's time and in engaging in inappropriate actions or conduct on the Sabbath.

It is not a matter of being ritualistic; rather, it is a matter of going above and beyond the call of duty and UNDERSTANDING what God is looking for and WHY! There is a vast difference between being conscientiously meticulous, not only in obeying God, but even in going above and beyond what God requires ... and in obeying the letter of the law in a ritualistic way.

The obedience God is looking for is one that is based on understanding the mind of God ... what it is that God wants us to do in EVERY area of our lives. Once we understand the mind of God, God wants to know if we are WILLINGLY in agreement with the way He thinks.

God does not want us to remain ignorant of His ways.

GOD WANTS US TO UNDERSTAND HIS MIND!

We have often quoted Isaiah 55.

For MY THOUGHTS [are] not your thoughts, neither [are] your ways MY WAYS, saith the LORD. For [as] the heavens are higher than the earth, so are MY WAYS higher than your ways, and MY THOUGHTS than your thoughts. (Isaiah 55:8-9)

God's "ways" are an expression of His "thoughts"; i.e. God's "ways" reveal the mind of God, how God thinks. These verses are not intended to imply that we cannot understand God's mind, not at all.

In these verses God tells us that we, by nature, think differently from the way He thinks. We think selfishly ... concerned about our own interests and our well-being. God doesn't think that way at all.

In this section of Scripture God is actually urging us to seek to understand Him. The two previous verses explain this ...

SEEK YE THE LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: (Isaiah 55:6)

God wants us to "SEEK" to understand Him and His ways. In the next verse He tells us the things we must do if we want to understand how He thinks.

Let the wicked FORSAKE HIS WAY, and the unrighteous man HIS THOUGHTS: and LET HIM RETURN unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. (Isaiah 55:7)

First of all, we have to STOP SINNING! That is what God means by "let the wicked forsake his way". If we don't stop doing what is wrong, we cannot proceed to the next stage. Wrong behaviour and wrong conduct are A BARRIER to changing our ways of thinking.

Once we have made an effort to stop sinning, then we need to determine to change THE WAY we think, as well as change WHAT we think ... from thinking selfishly (the "get" way) to thinking selflessly (the "give" way). That's what God means by the unrighteous man "forsaking his thoughts".

Those two things are the components of real repentance, which God refers to as "let him return unto the LORD". True repentance opens up the opportunity to really understand God's ways.

Paul encouraged Christians to make the effort to understand God's will, which is an expression of the mind of God.

Wherefore be ye not unwise, but UNDERSTANDING what the will of the Lord [is]. (Ephesians 5:17)

It takes effort on our part to understand the will of God. That's what we saw in Isaiah 55:8. And God expects us to put out that effort to walk with Him, to be on HIS wavelength of thinking instead of on our own.

WHY IT IS IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND

People who lack understanding make wrong decisions and wrong assumptions. For example, the man who claimed that he had killed king Saul THOUGHT that David would reward him for this news (see 2 Samuel 1:2-16). He didn't understand the mind of David, who himself had consistently refused to kill Saul or to allow his men to do so!

Similarly, Baanah and Rechab also THOUGHT that David would reward them for killing Ish-bosheth, the son of Saul (2 Samuel 4:5-8). They too didn't really understand the mind of David.

Similarly, David's servants THOUGHT David would really go into shock once the child born to Bathsheba had died (2 Samuel 12:18-23). They too didn't understand why David broke his fast once the child had died.

These are all examples from the life of a man who did understand the mind of God. His actions were

foreign to them, just as God's ways are foreign to the natural mind. David's way of thinking and behaving was influenced by his understanding of the mind of God.

David was "a man after God's own heart" because David understood God's mind and did his best to live by THE INTENTS of God's ways. God discerns the intents of our hearts (Hebrews 4:12) and He wants us to strive to understand the intents of HIS mind. The righteous men of old who "walked with God" had learned to understand the mind of God. Abraham was called "a friend of God" because he too sought to understand God's mind.

David frequently pondered on God's plan and purpose for us human beings. For example:

When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained;
WHAT IS MAN, THAT THOU ART MINDFUL OF HIM? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?
(Psalm 8:3-4)

David was looking for God's point of view. And that desire, coupled with an earnest attempt to live up to God's purposes, made David "a man after God's own heart". Clearly, God wants us to earnestly strive to REALLY understand His way of thinking. And God has put the same desire within us ... we too really long to be understood by other people. Like Job, who felt "if only there was someone who really understands me" (freely paraphrased). We all want to be understood correctly.

And God wants us to understand His mind.

A fervent seeking to really understand God, together with genuine and unselfish obedience leads to greater understanding.

As the writer of Psalm 119 said ...

I HAVE MORE UNDERSTANDING than all my teachers: for thy testimonies [are] my meditation. I UNDERSTAND MORE than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts. (Psalm 119:99-100)

The reason he had better understanding than his teachers and "the ancients" was because he pondered over God's precepts, laws, testimonies, ordinances and commandments ... not just wanting to know WHAT God says, but desiring to understand WHY God says these things. God's creation reveals the mind of God.

For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, BEING UNDERSTOOD by the things that are made, [even] his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse:
(Romans 1:20)

Creation reveals a great deal about God. For example, anyone who thinks for one moment that GOD created the world of the dinosaurs does not understand the mind of God! Those creatures simply are not the products of the mind of God ... they are the manifestations of OTHER minds ... ponder this one for a while.

LET'S GO BACK TO THE BEGINNING

In the beginning, before the creation of this universe and before the creation of the angels, there were only two Beings. Today we know them as God the Father and Jesus Christ. Both of them constantly emanate light and energy and brilliance greater than a million suns! They had the form and shape we

call "human". There never has been darkness in the presence of God (1 John 1:5).

These two Beings were immortal and eternal. They enjoyed living and they enjoyed each other's company. By profession they were Creators. They both were of the same mind. That frame of mind they had was that both of them were determined to always put the well-being of the other one ahead of the well-being of self. That is their very nature. This way of thinking ... the way they inherently ARE ... they called LOVE! And so we are told that "God IS love" (1 John 4:8,16).

They both are agreed that ONE is in charge and the other WILLINGLY and PERMANENTLY submits to this leadership. This is the basis of their life-style. The one in charge we know as "God the Father".

There were no laws to regulate their conduct! There was no NEED for any laws. Their conduct was regulated by the way their natures inherently are, i.e. by love, an unconditional concern for the other.

They decided to do two things:

1) create a perfect, beautiful environment in which to live and exist;

2) reproduce themselves by creating other beings just like themselves with whom to share the relationship that the two of them already had, and to share with them this beautiful environment they were going to create. That relationship which they planned to extend to those they would create they called "FAMILY"!

Being perfectionists, they worked out a great master plan to achieve these goals PERFECTLY. The first thing they decided was, if not the exact then the approximate size of the family they wanted to create, the number of other beings they were going to share their very existence with. However large the family they would create (perhaps in the region of 100 billion?), there was going to be a limit, a maximum number.

Christ pointed out that all major projects require planning ahead. This is also true for God ...

For which of you, intending to build a tower, SITTETH NOT DOWN FIRST, AND COUNTETH THE COST, whether he have [sufficient] to finish [it]? (Luke 14:28)

So before starting to implement the process of reproducing Themselves, these two Gods worked out a perfect plan.

The PURPOSE for creating other beings like themselves was so that they could develop and enjoy a meaningful relationship with EVERY SINGLE MEMBER OF THIS FAMILY ... reproducing and enhancing the relationship the two of them ALREADY enjoyed. It is not a matter of an endless stream of mortal human beings being changed into spirit beings ... on and on and on for the millennia to come.

People who have looked at Isaiah 9:7 ("of the increase of His government there shall be no end") and reasoned that this implies an endless stream of beings joining God's Family, have not considered God's purpose for creating human beings in the first place and they don't understand the mind of God. The only way they understand "increase" is an ever-growing number of more beings. But that is not what God has in mind.

God controls reproduction and in that way controls the total number of human beings that are born. In Psalm 127 we read ...

Lo, children [are] an heritage of the LORD: [and] the fruit of the womb [is his] reward. (Psalm 127:3)

Let's look at another Scripture ...

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

What does this tell you about God?

This is not an empty statement by Jesus Christ! He meant every word He said! Now obviously, God is not overly concerned about the number of hairs on the head of every human being on Earth, a number that keeps changing with every second that passes. So WHY did Christ make this statement?

Christ said this to illustrate how SUPREMELY God is in ABSOLUTE CONTROL of every single facet of creation ... down to the level of the number of hairs. Such control boggles the human mind. NOTHING in His creation ever escapes God ... no word spoken, no deed done, no virus or bacteria, no thought harboured, not a hair that falls to the ground. God is aware of it all and He controls it all. That is the control Christ was illustrating.

Having decided on the size of the family they wanted to create, God the Father and Jesus Christ next decided on the size of the living space they were going to create for this family. The size of the universe reflects the scope of God's intentions. There are reasons why God created the stars and the planets with their respective sizes ... they reflect God's plans for the future. The size of the universe is in some way connected with the ultimate size of God's Family.

Currently we have an ever-expanding universe. In graphic terms we might say that it is "fleeing away in every direction" ...

And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, FROM WHOSE FACE THE EARTH AND THE HEAVEN FLED AWAY; and there was found NO PLACE FOR THEM. (Revelation 20:11)

This is a description of an expanding universe in which nothing has a fixed place or position. It is also a universe that is currently in a state of decay and corruption ... everything is running down (Romans 8:20-24). The current universe is the training ground for achieving God's purpose of building His Family. When that goal has been achieved, then God will create a "new heaven" and a "new" earth ...

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for THE FIRST HEAVEN AND THE FIRST EARTH WERE PASSED AWAY; and there was no more sea. (Revelation 21:1)

The "new" heaven and earth will be a universe that never runs down, one that will never need maintenance work. It will be a maintenance-free universe ... a suitable dwelling place for the Eternal God and His Family.

Also, the decision as to how big God wanted His Family to ultimately be influenced the size that God made this planet Earth! The planet Jupiter has about 1500 times the volume of this Earth; some other planets are smaller. The size of this Earth is perhaps a clue as to the ultimate size God's Family is going to be?

The WHOLE Family of God will live on THE NEW EARTH ... that will be home-base. Those in the first resurrection will live in the New Jerusalem with God the Father and with Jesus Christ. Those who become a part of God's Family anytime after the first resurrection will live in other magnificent cities on the new Earth.

Regarding the New Jerusalem, we are told:

And the city lieth foursquare, and the length is as large as the breadth: and he measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs. The length and the breadth and the height of it are equal. (Revelation 21:16)

These measurements are absolutely enormous ... 1500 miles (or 2400 Km) square at the base and also 1500 miles high. The surface area at the base is over 8 times the size of the State of Texas, or almost two-thirds the size of the continental USA. From the top of that city 1/4 of the circumference of the present Earth would be visible.

I suspect that the reason why the New Jerusalem is so big is because it must be large enough for "family reunions" ... when every single member of God's Family, plus all of the righteous angels, appear in the presence of the Father at the same time!

The other cities will most likely be considerably smaller ... they are not where THE WHOLE FAMILY "GETS TOGETHER"! God groups His family into "nations". Those in the first resurrection will be known as "ISRAEL" and they will be grouped by God into 12 groups of 12000 each. The word "Israel" means: "as a ruler to have power with God". That is the meaning GOD attached to the name when He gave it to Jacob ...

And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: FOR AS A PRINCE HAST THOU POWER WITH GOD and with men, and hast prevailed. (Genesis 32:28)

That is a perfect description of those in the first resurrection ... those who "have power with God" ... they rule WITH Jesus Christ.

And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and WE SHALL REIGN ON THE EARTH. (Revelation 5:10)

The rest of those in the Family of God will make up groups, known as "nations", though not necessarily in a physical sense. Once people have become a part of the Family of God, the physical, ethnic heritage of those who entered the Family later will be no more significant than the physical heritage of those in the first resurrection. Consider this: since the names of the 12 tribes of Israel will apply to those who are in the first resurrection, it means that those who are actually descended from those PHYSICAL tribes and then enter the Family of God after having experienced the second resurrection, will become a part of a nation with a different name than the tribe they physically descended from. Those names are already taken ... reserved for those in the first resurrection.

Anyway, the other "nations" will all regularly come into the New Jerusalem.

And THE NATIONS OF THEM WHICH ARE SAVED shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it. (Revelation 21:24)

Having decided on the size of the family they wanted to create and on the size of the environment they will live in, they next decided on a time-frame to achieve their goals. God plans perfectly and He sets specific goals that He will achieve. The time-frame they decided on consisted of two parts, as we'll see in a moment.

To help them achieve their goal of reproducing themselves, they decided they needed helpers ... assistants, a work force. So BEFORE embarking on reproducing themselves, they FIRST created a work force of helpers. Because they knew in general terms the total number of human beings they would bring into existence, they also knew how many such helpers would be required. The majority of these helpers are known as "angels", which means "messengers". This is a clue as to HOW these helpers would fit into

achieving God's goal of reproducing Himself.

That is part of perfect planning ... ensuring that the right helpers are available at the right time.

But to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool? Are they not all MINISTERING SPIRITS, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation? (Hebrews 1:13-14)

In Revelation chapter 5 we have a vision where Jesus Christ receives the revelation from God the Father. It is an awesome ceremony which is witnessed by ALL OTHER SPIRIT BEINGS (except Satan and the demons). ALL the righteous spirit beings (i.e. angels, elders, living creatures, etc.) acknowledge Christ's position as next under the Father. Now the point is this: there are no righteous angels in existence who did not witness that momentous event. And here is an indication of the number of angels present.

And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was TEN THOUSAND TIMES TEN THOUSAND, AND THOUSANDS OF THOUSANDS; (Revelation 5:11)

In our terms we would say that the number was in the region of "one hundred million plus". John was not recording an exact figure, but something to give us a general indication. So it seems possible that the total number of righteous angels is somewhere between one hundred million and two hundred million. Since one third of the angels sinned in following Satan (Revelation 12:4), this figure represents only two thirds of all the angels that God created. This would mean that God created perhaps a total of about two hundred million to three hundred million angels, in very general terms.

At one moment there were just two beings, God the Father and Jesus Christ; and then (however long God took for creating the angels) these two were surrounded by two hundred million or more other beings. This gives us some idea of the SCOPE of God's plan.

God explained His plan to these angels and their role in achieving this plan. God also explained to the angels THEIR (the angels') ultimate place and destiny in this plan. But before the angels could be used in the roles for which God had created them, they needed to be tested to see if they would always be faithfully loyal to God. This is where the two parts in the time-frame God had devised tie in.

God had planned a time-frame in which He would test the angels BEFORE using them as "ministering spirits". That time-frame was based on however long it takes for created spirit beings, with an independent free will, to come to have a permanently fixed character that God can always depend on. The length of that time-frame is not really revealed.

Once the "ministering spirits" had been tested and in the process increased their own "angelic potential" (parallel to "the incredible HUMAN potential"), then God had determined another time-frame for the actual process of reproducing Himself through mortal human beings. Because both these parts involved individuals exercising their own free wills, God undoubtedly built a certain amount of flexibility into the plan.

HOW GOD CREATES

God has given us human beings fantastic abilities. We dig metals out of the earth and produce cars and planes and thousands of other items. We have been given the ability to "create" all these things, not out of nothing, but out of the building blocks God has made available to us. Where there was no car before, there is now a car, etc..

Consider how we create things. Let's take a motor car as an example:

We carefully design the car and test it. When we are happy with the product we have produced, we then set up a system for producing multiple copies of that car.

We set up a factory to produce thousands of cars, modelled after the one we originally created. This is far more efficient than having to design every car anew.

That's efficient by human standards. But that is not the way God creates.

GOD CREATES BY SETTING PROCESSES IN MOTION!

Carnal human beings, refusing to see God in the picture, can see these processes and interpret them as "evolution". When God creates a prototype, He places within it the "SEEDS" for perpetuating the process, while at the same time containing the potential for considerable scope for variety, yet always remaining within the same "type".

God created one pair of each kind of animal and within each pair He placed the potential to produce MORE animals of the same kind. The same is true for plants and for human beings. We see the same principle in the expanding universe. This process glorifies God.

The same is true on the SPIRITUAL LEVEL! At repentance God gave us His Holy Spirit. It was "the earnest", the first installment. From then on God expects US to use what He has given us, to perpetuate the process by producing the fruits which are listed in Galatians chapter 5.

Herein is my Father glorified, THAT YE BEAR MUCH FRUIT; so shall ye be my disciples. (John 15:8)

We see the process all around us. God sets something in motion and we are supposed to keep it going by using what God has made available.

This is God's way of creating. It is far more efficient than anything man has ever devised. By observing the world around us, we can also understand how God is going about His spiritual creation.

THE LAW OF GOD

In the beginning there were no laws ... only two Beings with identical natures. These two Beings were not created by any laws; they CREATED all laws! The nature that both of them had was one of outgoing concern for the other. This nature they called "LOVE". This nature guaranteed peace and happiness and as long as they were alone, there was no need for any laws.

When they decided to create other beings with completely free minds, they knew that they could not instantly create this same nature within these beings. It would have to be developed within these beings by their ACTIVE PARTICIPATION in the process. Such development would require time.

Therefore the need for laws arose. The very first law they established and the most important of any of the laws they have ever created was a formal statement of their nature.

THEIR NATURE BECAME THE FIRST LAW!

It became the first law for beings who did not yet have that nature. Jesus Christ explained this.

Master, which [is] the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy

God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. THIS IS THE FIRST AND GREAT COMMANDMENT. (Matthew 22:36-38)

This is the nature God inherently has ... one of total concern for His creation. God doesn't need laws to regulate HIS conduct ... He creates laws to regulate the conduct of His creation.

It is the "first" commandment because it was created by God when He (actually "They", God the Father and Jesus Christ together) first created other beings ... the angels. Also it is "first" because it had in practice existed all along in the form of their very nature. It is the "great" commandment because every other law and commandment is nothing more than an expansion and elaboration of this "first" commandment. It is the foundation for ALL other laws.

However, once they had created other beings --- perhaps three hundred million of them --- then they needed one more law. This second law was needed in order to extend THE PRINCIPLE of the first law to these other beings. Jesus Christ stated that second law as follows ...

And the second [is] like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. (Matthew 22:39-40)

And the second [is] like, [namely] this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these. (Mark 12:31)

This second law was only needed because God created other beings, i.e. "neighbours". It is second because, unlike the first law, it had not existed all along. It is second because the other law takes preeminence over it. No other commandments or laws are greater than these two.

Notice also that Christ was asked, which is the great commandment (singular) and in His answer Christ gave these TWO commandments and tied them together, as a package. These two form the foundation for ALL other laws. This is absolutely vital to understand when we talk about the mind of God!

Before Adam's creation these were the only two laws (in the area of conduct and behaviour) in existence! There were no other laws to regulate the conduct of the angels! And once we have progressed to the time of the new heaven and the new Earth, these will again be the only two laws that will exist for all eternity, as far as regulating conduct is concerned. All the other laws we have at this time will have faded into obscurity. At that time the human beings who have become sons of God will also have the very nature that God calls "love". That first commandment will have become our very nature! This means that the second commandment will then also be embodied in our very natures.

Brilliant powerful spirit beings (the angels) did not need to have these two principles spelled out in the form of so many do's and don't's. The eternal laws of God are only positive ... they have no "you shall not ..." clauses attached. They don't focus on the negative behaviour we are not to engage in. God's eternal law is only positive.

It is also called "the royal law" because it is the law of the supreme King!

If ye fulfil THE ROYAL LAW according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well: (James 2:8)

The law is also "spiritual".

For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. (Romans 7:14)

The law of God was made by God for spirit beings! It didn't focus on physical things and wasn't intended to have a physical focus. The physical focus in this current dispensation is only a very temporary thing. And even then, once we have God's Spirit, we are expected by God to strive to understand that spiritual focus ... we have referred to this as "the spiritual intent of the law".

The law is also "holy" ...

Wherefore the law [is] holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good. (Romans 7:12)

It is holy because God is in it. It is really nothing more than a statement of the very nature of God ... that makes it "holy". It is a statement of the way God is!

These are the only two laws by which God expected all the angels to live. They are the two laws that were broken by Satan and the demons.

Having created the "helpers" for achieving His plan and having made the two laws that would regulate their existence, God was ready to move on to the next phase of His plan.

THE PHYSICAL CREATION

Having prepared a team of helpers to assist in the achievement of His plan, God then set about creating the physical universe ...

In [the] beginning God created the heavens and the earth. (Genesis 1:1)

The indication seems to be that the whole universe was created at the same time; i.e. the earth was created when the universe was created. The indication is also that this event was witnessed by all the angels God had created and that they enthusiastically sang and shouted for joy.

Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding. (Job 38:4)

... When THE MORNING STARS sang together, and ALL THE SONS OF GOD shouted for joy? (Job 38:7)

"All the sons of God" is a reference to all the angels, including those who later sinned and became demons. "The morning stars" is a reference to the angels God had put in key leadership positions over this vast army of angels. How many "morning stars" there were is not revealed. IF there were only "three", as has been suggested, then it would mean that three angels sang and about three hundred million then shouted for joy. I would not be surprised if it turns out that "the morning stars" comprised a group that was larger than three.

In the book of Revelation we are given more insight into the circumstances around God's throne. There we see that there are at least 24 created spirit beings called "elders" who "SIT" on seats in the presence of God and they have crowns of gold on their heads ...

And round about the throne [were] four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold. (Revelation 4:4)

Anyone to whom is accorded the privilege to actually SIT in the presence of God the Father is obviously in a key leadership position ... that should be self-evident.

Further, there are another four beings called "beasts" or "living creatures" in the presence of God's throne ...

And before the throne [there was] a sea of glass like unto crystal: and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, [were] four beasts full of eyes before and behind. (Revelation 4:6)

From the book of Ezekiel we can see that "the living creatures" are also called "cherubim".

Also out of the midst thereof [came] the likeness of four living creatures. And this [was] their appearance; they had the likeness of a man. (Ezekiel 1:5)

The rest of chapter 1 gives a description of these four "living creatures". In chapter 10 these same beings are described, but there they are called "cherubim" ...

And [one] cherub stretched forth his hand from between the cherubims unto the fire that [was] between the cherubims, and took [thereof], and put [it] into the hands of [him that was] clothed with linen: who took [it], and went out. (Ezekiel 10:7)

Verse 15 makes very clear that these "cherubim" were the same beings as "the living creatures" he had seen in chapter 1 ...

And the cherubims were lifted up. This [is] the living creature that I saw by the river of Chebar. (Ezekiel 10:15; see also verse 20)

Now in the book of Ezekiel we have visions of a mobile throne that Jesus Christ has, and there are four "living creatures" in attendance. In Revelation 4 we have a vision of the throne of God the Father, and there are also four "living creatures" in attendance. When Adam and Eve were put out of the Garden in Eden, God placed one or two (?) cherubim at the entrance of the Garden ... ("cherubim" = plural, but "flaming sword" = singular)

So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life. (Genesis 3:24)

Before his rebellion, and before God sent him to this earth in charge over one third of all the angels, Satan had also been "an anointed cherub" or "living creature" ...

Thou [art] the anointed cherub that covereth; and I have set thee [so]: thou wast upon the holy mountain of God; thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire. (Ezekiel 28:14)

When God instructed Moses how the Ark of the Covenant should be made, it included two cherubim of gold with their wings spread over the mercy seat.

And he made two cherubims [of] gold, beaten out of one piece made he them, on the two ends of the mercy seat; (Exodus 37:7)

The word "archangel" is only used twice in the Bible, both times in the singular! See 1 Thessalonians 4:16 and Jude 1:9. In the latter verse (Jude 1:9) Michael is called "the archangel". He is called this because He is in charge of the angelic army of God. There is no indication that any other spirit being is ever called an "archangel". Gabriel is nowhere referred to as an "archangel", though Gabriel stated that when it came to really understanding the mind of God, only Michael could do this as well as he, Gabriel.

But I will shew thee that which is noted in the scripture of truth: and [there is] none that holdeth with me

in these things, but Michael your prince. (Daniel 10:21)

Anyone who feels that the Bible talks about more archangels than one must prove this from the Scriptures. But the word "archangel" is never used apart from the two verses I have referred to above.

Further, since Ezekiel chapters 1 and 10 and also Revelation 4 give us a description of the cherubim, it is quite clear that Gabriel, who appeared to Daniel (Daniel 8:16; 9:21), to the father of John the Baptist (Luke 1:19) and to Mary (Luke 1:26) is not a cherub. Gabriel doesn't look like a cherub, but like a man (Daniel 9:21). When they manifest themselves, it seems unlikely that God gave the angels the option to appear in any one of a variety of forms and shapes ... that would be confusion.

Anyway, the above comments are some of the reasons why I feel that "the morning stars" in Job 38 very possibly refers to more angelic beings than three.

SATAN COMES TO THIS EARTH

The original creation that the angelic host witnessed was perfect as far as it went. But God had created it with a great deal of scope for development and enhancement. That development and enhancement God instructed the angels to carry out ... doing that would be their time of testing.

God had created them as free moral agents and developing the creation further over a period of time, in line with God's stated objectives, would show God that they were willingly submissive to His rule over them and that they genuinely tried to understand God's mind and act in accordance with God's intentions. On the other hand, if they acted motivated by self-interest, then this would also become obvious over a period of time. All angels had to be tested before God would proceed to use them for the purpose for which He had created them ... to assist in this process of God reproducing Himself.

God had created this universe without there being life on any planet. There was no flora and no fauna. The scope for development that God built into this physical creation was to eventually develop both of these throughout the entire universe.

God had explained His plan to all the angels ... that He was going to build His family through the process of first testing created beings on the physical, material level before changing them into spirit beings by means of a resurrection, or rebirth. One third of the angels were going to be used specifically to watch over and guide this process ... as guardian angels for these frail mortal human beings.

To test this group of angels themselves, before using them in this capacity, God sent them to this Earth to PREPARE it for this next phase in God's plan ... the creation of human beings by God! The angels' mandate was to create plant and animal life that would be ideal for supporting human life. God gave them creative powers to be able to carry out these instructions. They would have to use their minds, and in so doing they would be forming character. Very likely God gave them some kind of time-frame for this assignment. That time-frame was dependent not so much on how long such a project should take as on how long God knew was required for testing the character of angels that had been created with a free will.

This one third of the angels was sent to this Earth under the leadership of the one we know as "Satan", the adversary. His original name is nowhere revealed in the Bible. (The name "Lucifer" in Isaiah 14:12 is a mistranslation, as I have explained in another article.)

It seems clear that the other two thirds of the angels were also tested by God at the same time, though

not on this Earth and probably under somewhat different conditions. Since they are referred to as the "holy" angels of God (Revelation 14:10), it means they have already proved and demonstrated their loyalty and submission to God.

Having previously been trained for some time at the very throne of God (Ezekiel 28:14), Satan was knowledgeable of God's will and intentions. But he became vain (Ezekiel 28:17) and he desired to sit on God's throne (Isaiah 14:13-14). And Satan managed to persuade all of the angels under his leadership to join him in rebelling against God.

What did he do?

He was supposed to create on this Earth an environment of PEACE and BEAUTY in which human beings could learn God's ways and enjoy their physical lives in the process. Satan knew that "God is love" and that God's way is cooperation and selfless service. But Satan decided that COMPETITION is a better way, because he (Satan) wanted to compete with God. He also hated the idea of serving beings that would one day exceed him in power and in might.

So Satan created the most inhospitable environment for human life imaginable! Instead of beautiful meadows and lush, rolling hills filled with fruit orchards, he created marshy swamplands with drab vegetation that would not provide food for human beings.

Instead of gentle lambs and bunny-rabbits and butterflies, Satan created the world of the dinosaurs. Survival of the fittest. Let's see if God can make His plan to create mortal man work in this environment! It was a totally hostile environment!

In addition, Satan invented the "get-way" of living; i.e. I will give you something or do something for you IF you will give me something or do something for me. He called it "TRADING". He invented "trading".

God has never traded. Trading is foreign to God's nature. Trading focuses on getting. And God never will trade!

Can you imagine God saying:

- I will give you rain IF YOU GIVE ME ...;
- I will cause food for you to grow IF YOU GIVE ME ...;
- I will give the life of My Son IF YOU WILL GIVE ME

Don't misunderstand: many of God's blessings are conditional on obedience (1 John 3:22), but that is not trading. Satan invented trading, which focuses on what we get in return for what we give. Trading produces selfishness, which, in turn, produces violence.

Notice what we are told about Satan ...

By THE MULTITUDE OF THY MERCHANDISE they have filled the midst of thee with VIOLENCE, and thou hast sinned: therefore I will cast thee as profane out of the mountain of God: and I will destroy thee, O covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire. (Ezekiel 28:16)

Satan developed a society (with his one hundred million or so angels) which was based on trading, ostensibly as an incentive to produce more. Satan certainly gained a lot of "merchandise" with which he tried to enhance his own prestige.

Thou hast been IN EDEN THE GARDEN OF GOD; EVERY PRECIOUS STONE [WAS] THY COVERING, the sardius, topaz, and the diamond, the beryl, the onyx, and the jasper, the sapphire, the emerald, and the carbuncle, and gold: the workmanship of thy tabrets and of thy pipes was prepared in thee in the day that thou wast created. (Ezekiel 28:13)

But the result was competition and violence. And Satan and the demons created the most violent episode in the history of this planet ... the age of the dinosaurs!

There was no beauty in the creatures they created. They were pure fighting machines ... vicious teeth and claws and armour-plating, and hardly any brains. The only purpose of their existence was to kill or be killed. Jesus Christ tells us that Satan was a murderer "FROM THE BEGINNING".

Ye are of [your] father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was A MURDERER FROM THE BEGINNING, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for HE IS A LIAR, and THE FATHER OF IT. (John 8:44)

The very first society Satan ever established was filled with a spirit of murder and destruction. That "beginning" was long before Cain killed Abel.

When you consider a dinosaur, there is NOTHING there that reflects the mind of God ... they were ugly and mean! Dinosaurs reflect the perverted state of the mind of Satan! Satan certainly "CORRUPTED" the wisdom he had been given.

Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty, THOU HAST CORRUPTED THY WISDOM by reason of thy brightness: I will cast thee to the ground, I will lay thee before kings, that they may behold thee. (Ezekiel 28:17)

God did not intervene the moment Satan started to do things the wrong way. Instead God allowed things to proceed towards their natural conclusion. Satan persuaded all the angels under his control to follow him in rebellion against God ... an example of the devastating effect a bad leader can have on others. Eventually Satan was ready to rise up in rebellion in order to, as Mr. Armstrong used to say, "knock God off His throne". Of course Satan was defeated and cast back down to this earth, an event which Christ described as follows.

And he said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven. (Luke 10:18)

But as a result of this rebellion the physical universe was thrown into a state of destruction. This Earth was covered with water and enveloped in thick fumes that prevented any light from penetrating to the Earth. Sin produces darkness! And Satan and the demons were confined to this earth.

Satan and all the demons broke the two great laws God had given them. The competitive world of the dinosaurs reflected the competitive spirit that had become the dominant aspect of the minds of Satan and of all the demons.

Instead of preparing this planet for human habitation, Satan had caused its destruction. It lay in ruin, totally unfit to support ANY form of physical life, a mute tribute to Satan's name in the Greek language ... Apollyon, which means "Destroyer".

And they had a king over them, [which is] the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in the Hebrew tongue [is] Abaddon, but in the Greek tongue hath [his] name APOLLYON. (Revelation 9:11)

So God adapted His plan to take these new conditions into account. Nothing and nobody can stop

Almighty God from doing His will and from achieving His purposes.

SATAN'S CHANGED CIRCUMSTANCES

Whatever time-frame God had planned for the phase of testing the angels, that was observed and completed. In Genesis chapter 1 we then have the account of the re-creation week, when God reversed the destruction Satan's rebellion had caused and created the type of environment that Satan and the demons should have created in the first place.

Several things can be learned from this. For one thing, God showed that the project for which He had given Satan perhaps thousands of years (or longer?) could have been done by God Himself in just a few days. God had allocated a certain amount of time for preparing this Earth for human habitation, not because that much time was "needed" to do the job, but because that much time was needed to adequately test the angels themselves!

Even though Satan and the demons had rebelled against God, God determined that He would STILL use them in the process of bringing man to salvation. That is the purpose for which God had created them in the first place and God's will is going to be achieved.

So God confined Satan and the demons to this Earth except for when God's purpose would require their presence, e.g. Satan's presence before Christ in the book of Job chapters 1-2. And even then we see Satan's confinement ... in both instances he had been walking all over this Earth (Job 1:7; 2:2). Peter referred to this same confinement (1 Peter 5:8).

God also severely curtailed Satan's powers and abilities. His vanity had corrupted his wisdom (Ezekiel 28:17). But it was more than just his "wisdom" that became perverted through sin. Satan also LOST his "perfect beauty" (Ezekiel 28:12), something he desperately wants human beings not to know. His beauty is gone ... forever a thing of the past!

Even on the human level the way we think influences the way we look. As young children we have the faces of innocence. And as we become old, character is etched into our faces. How we have lived is revealed in our appearances. As Isaiah 3:9 says ...

The shew of their countenance doth witness against them; and they declare their sin as Sodom, they hide [it] not. Woe unto their soul! for they have rewarded evil unto themselves. (Isaiah 3:9)

AND GOD DESIGNED IT THIS WAY!

As we age our faces and our bodies reflect how we think and what we have done. It is because our appearance does make a statement about how we have lived, that we try to use make-up to make a different statement, one we think is more favourable. But make-up cannot hide bad character for very long.

Satan is very much like an aged one-time beauty-queen, who has become an alcoholic and a drug-addict. It shows! Given the dimmed lights of a night-club and generous quantities of make-up, Satan can still appear to many people as an "angel of light".

And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. (2 Corinthians 11:14)

Satan tries hard to disguise himself as "Lucifer", a name that NEVER has applied to him at any time, but

he'd like mankind to believe that it was his name. But when you drag him out into the bright sunlight and remove all the disguise he has put on, he is now nothing more than a miserable-looking "great red dragon" ... not unlike some of the dinosaurs he created and ruled over.

And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads. (Revelation 12:3)

And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth: and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born. (Revelation 12:4)

Now Revelation 12 is a vision, and I don't mean to imply that Satan has to be literally a dragon with seven heads. However, Satan had been a "cherub" (Ezekiel 28:14) and "cherubim" are pictured in Ezekiel 10:14 as having four faces. In Revelation 4 they are pictured somewhat differently again. It seems unlikely that he has the form of a man, which is the form of God.

Consider also when Satan tempted Adam and Eve in the Garden in Eden. WHY did he choose to speak to them through a snake? Why not a more noble animal? Why not through a lion or a horse or an eagle? Why did he select a snake? Perhaps the snake looked attractive to Satan? Why would that be? There is a reason for everything ... we just don't understand them all.

At any rate, we should understand that with God beauty is not a permanent unchangeable attribute. With God beauty in an individual is a reflection of what that individual IS! With God beauty will never remain in someone with a rebellious and hostile attitude. The two don't go together. When a spirit being loses the attitude of submission to and reverence for God, then that spirit being also loses any beauty he may have had. And that is the case with Satan.

THE CREATION OF MAN

In six days God created on this earth an environment suitable for the next phase of His plan ... to test and train mortal human beings so they could eventually be changed into His sons and daughters.

There are reasons WHY God, in the process, created the weekly cycle. Very likely it has some symbolical connection with what went before. We'll see that the laws God gave to mankind CERTAINLY are closely linked to what went before! Also, some of the animals God created at that point, point back to what went before. So I suspect that the length of time God chose to take for creating the environment for man also has some significance. Be that as it may.

Because of the nature of the job He had in mind for them, God had created the angels as immortal beings. God had guaranteed them immortality. It is not a question of God not being able to destroy rebellious angels. There is nothing that God cannot do (excluding a contradiction of terms!) apart from instantaneously creating His holy righteous character within another being. However, there are many things that God WILL NOT DO! And one thing God will never do is break His word! It is because God had given the angels immortality unconditionally, that the punishment for those who rebel is not eternal destruction, but some form of banishment and restraint. The exact details of this punishment have probably not yet been determined since the final "charge sheet" against Satan and the demons cannot be compiled until all the wicked have been burned up in the lake of fire.

God then created human beings physical (made out of matter) and mortal (able to die). We were created physical for the express purpose of testing! God could test us and to those who pass the test God offers THE GIFT of eternal life. Those who fail the test, showing God that their free wills are not submissive to God, will be permanently blotted out of existence. They will be as though they had never ever existed in

the first place.

For as ye have drunk upon my holy mountain, [so] shall all the heathen drink continually, yea, they shall drink, and they shall swallow down, and THEY SHALL BE AS THOUGH THEY HAD NOT BEEN.
(Obadiah 1:16)

Because God was dealing with beings to whom He had given independent free wills, He had designed His great master plan in such a way that it included the potential for modifications as needed. God was prepared for EVERY possible course of action these free minds (first on the angelic level and later on the human level) would decide to choose.

Remember, we saw earlier that God creates by setting processes in motion. These processes are then regulated by laws. So when God created man and was ready to test him, God was again prepared to set different processes in motion, depending on how man responded to the tests.

TESTING MANKIND

God determined that He would test mankind in the very areas where Satan had failed. Satan had broken the only two laws God had given. In so doing Satan had demonstrated that he was opposed to the very nature of God. So God would now test mankind on the very same laws.

God also decided that those who themselves had failed the test should be the very ones to implement the testing. Those who should have become the "guardian angels" ended up becoming the most hostile and critical taskmasters imaginable. They would do their utmost to find faults with humanity. Satan is "the accuser" (Revelation 12:10).

God also determined that this testing by the accuser would be done in a certain time-frame. So God mapped out 6000 years for Satan to test mankind by tempting, lying and deceiving. Then God would take the next 1000 years to work with mankind in the total absence of Satan. This time-frame is reflected in the 7 days of the Re-creation Week. Possibly it also has some connection with what happened before the creation of man?

GOD'S LAWS AND COMMANDMENTS

At the time God created Adam and Eve, He also created the 10 commandments. But do we understand WHY God formulated the 10 specific points that He did formulate?

THE 10 COMMANDMENTS GIVE US AN INSIGHT INTO THE SPECIFIC WAYS IN WHICH SATAN BROKE THE 2 GREAT LAWS!

Therefore it was inevitable that Satan would also tempt human beings in these very same areas. These areas are a reflection of Satan's mind and God wants to know that we will reject them (and therefore reject Satan's mind) with all our being.

God's law is a statement of two great principles, which spirit beings can readily understand. For physical human beings God expanded these two principles with a specific focus on the areas where Satan had transgressed. Let's look at the 10 commandments more closely now.

THE FIRST COMMANDMENT

I [am] the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me. (Exodus 20:2-3)

The reason this is first is because Satan's overriding intention had been to take over God's position and become the one that all other beings should worship.

THE SECOND COMMANDMENT

Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness [of any thing] that [is] in heaven above, or that [is] in the earth beneath, or that [is] in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God [am] a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth [generation] of them that hate me; And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments. (Exodus 20:4-6)

Why would God have anticipated that human beings might possibly conceive of the idea of creating "symbols" to worship? This commandment tells us something about what Satan had done before Adam's creation! It was Satan who had created symbols and representations to worship, and therefore God knew that Satan would inspire the same thing again.

THE THIRD COMMANDMENT

Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain. (Exodus 20:7)

The reason for this commandment is because Satan had taken God's name in vain before the angels he ruled over. This is one of the tactics Satan uses in an attempt to destroy someone. With this commandment God anticipated Satan doing the same thing again with mankind. God can read Satan like an open book.

THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT

Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee. (Exodus 20:12)

Satan had dishonoured the One who had given him life, God! Thus God knew that Satan would also inspire disrespect for parents ... that's the nature Satan had revealed in his actions.

THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT

Thou shalt not kill. (Exodus 20:13)

We have already talked about the violent world of the dinosaurs that Satan created, a world in which killing was a dominant feature! We also saw in John 8:44 that Satan was "a murderer from the beginning". God knew Satan would inspire human beings with a spirit of murder.

THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT

Thou shalt not commit adultery. (Exodus 20:14)

Satan knows God is building A FAMILY! A family is founded on fidelity and mutual trust. Adultery

destroys the family. Satan destroyed "the family" of the angels by leading one third of them into rebellion. (In the book of Job the angels are referred to as "the sons of God" in Job 1:6.) God knew Satan would do his utmost to destroy the family.

THE EIGHTH COMMANDMENT

Thou shalt not steal. (Exodus 20:15)

Satan had invented trading, buying and selling, for the purpose of getting more of what he really wants for self. But everything belonged to God all the time ... and in his desire to get more for self he was stealing. By inspiring mankind with a "get"-attitude, God knew Satan would inspire stealing. Satan was a thief himself ... he tried to steal God's glory!

THE NINTH COMMANDMENT

Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour. (Exodus 20:16)

Satan is "the father of all lies" (John 8:44). Satan had obviously lied to the angels. And God knew he would inspire human beings to lie.

THE TENTH COMMANDMENT

Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that [is] thy neighbour's. (Exodus 20:17)

Satan's sins had started with coveting. He had coveted God's throne and God's position. Coveting is a part of Satan's nature. And so God knew he would inspire human beings to covet.

The reason for all 9 of these commandments we have looked at is found in what Satan had done before the creation of man. These are specific ways in which Satan had broken the two great laws of God. Thinking and acting in these wrong ways had become a part of Satan's nature. It was therefore inevitable that he would also tempt mankind on all of these specific points. The way God worded these commandments is a specific response to the ways in which Satan had sinned!

This brings us to the fourth commandment ...

THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT

Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day [is] the sabbath of the LORD thy God: [in it] thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that [is] within thy gates: For [in] six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them [is], and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it. (Exodus 20:8-11)

The other commandments can be explained by logic and reason. You can't really argue with "don't kill and don't steal", but with this one the carnal human mind can argue: WHY the seventh day? Does it really make a difference? How do you know the cycle of the week hasn't changed? etc..

With this commandment we have to accept God's word. We have to do it "because God says so" (as we said at the start of this article). Satan had argued with God. He argued with God in Job chapters 1 and 2. Satan felt he had a better way than God. And so Satan inspires human beings to argue with God on this

point.

This commandment requires us to submit to God THE WAY we think. Actions alone are not enough. Doing the right things with the wrong frame of mind doesn't achieve anything with God. Obedience must be from the heart. And this commandment is a way of testing this.

God spelled out His spiritual law in these 10 statements for the benefit of mortal human beings. These are simply 10 specific areas of application. But these 10 commandments will only exist as long as there are physical, mortal human beings. The Sabbath, for example, was made for mortal man.

And he said unto them, The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath: (Mark 2:27)

The Sabbath was made when man was made. It was not made for spirit beings, whose existence is not patterned on 24-hour day cycles. When there are no more mortal human beings, when the new heavens and the new earth have come about, then there will not be any seventh day "sabbath days" ("sabbath" means "cessation from work"). However, the whole Family of God will regularly come together before God the Father in the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:24).

People who imagine the whole Family of God observing the Sabbath for all eternity are still locked into a ritualistic way of thinking. The Sabbath was created for a specific purpose in the physical training phase of God's plan. It wasn't an end in itself; it was to be a tool towards achieving God's purposes. It was to have a limited existence.

ADAM AND EVE TESTED

Satan had sinned without another being tempting him to do so. Satan was not deceived when he sinned. When God had created Adam and Eve, He determined to test them in the very areas in which Satan had sinned. God determined to give Satan access to these two human beings.

For a start, God selected a specific area of testing, one that many people today would not view as anything major ... taking a piece of fruit from someone else's tree without permission to do so. The less serious a transgression seems to be, the easier it is to get people to engage in it ... it is easier to talk people into stealing a piece of fruit off a tree than to commit murder. By making the issue one of taking or not taking a piece of fruit off a tree, God was making it easier for Satan to succeed.

God knew that, given enough time, it was highly likely that sooner or later every human being would sin. Even if they did first take of the tree of life and receive God's Holy Spirit, it was still almost certain that, sooner or later, every human being would sin. (Comment: I say "almost certain" to make allowance for Job.) So when God left them and allowed Satan access, the question was NOT "will Adam and Eve ever sin?".

The real question was:

"Will they sin in a specific, short and very limited period of time? Will they sin the very first time they are tempted by Satan or will they show at least SOME resistance to Satan's temptations?"

If they had shown some resistance to this very first temptation, THEN God would very possibly have given them access to His Spirit. God only gives His Spirit to those who show that they really WANT it! After receiving God's Spirit, God would very likely have allowed Satan to continue to tempt them throughout their lives and at times they would have sinned and at other times they would have "resisted

the devil". Such continual exposure to temptations and trials would have helped to develop in them the character God is looking for, the character that eventually comes to see that we should ALWAYS strive to resist Satan.

We saw that God creates by setting processes in motion. God was prepared for both possible responses from Adam and Eve. When they sinned, God set in motion the process whereby mankind as a whole is cut off from the help of His Holy Spirit. If they had not sinned AT THAT SPECIFIC POINT IN TIME, then God would very likely have given them access to His Spirit and a different process would have been set in motion. But it was highly likely that thereafter they would on occasion have sinned.

God knows that, even with His Spirit available to them, it is impossible for any of His servants to go through a lifetime of not sinning. A life of being PERMANENTLY free from sinning is only possible once we are born of God as spirit beings. The down-payment of God's Spirit is not enough to achieve a sinless state. Notice:

Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and HE CANNOT SIN, BECAUSE HE IS BORN OF GOD. (1 John 3:9)

The reason it is then impossible to sin is because God's law, as expounded in the two great laws, will then have become our very nature, which nature is called "love".

However, irrespective of which decision Adam and Eve made, God's plan of putting physical, mortal human beings through a lifetime of testing and trials in order to learn through the things we suffer (compare this with Hebrews 5:8) and thereby to grow towards perfection (verse 9) would still have been set in motion. It was a choice of two different routes to the same destination, and God required Adam and Eve to choose the route for all humanity.

Jesus Christ never sinned. Yet there were things He LEARNED.

Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him; (Hebrews 5:8-9)

If Christ, who had been God for past eternity, could learn from a life of tests and trials and, as a result, grow in perfection, how much more can we human beings with no past existence grow in character through successfully facing trials, even if there were no initial sins to start with (i.e. if Adam and Eve had not sinned initially)? An initial resistance of temptation is not enough to develop godly character; such resistance must be a life-long commitment.

Today, through repentance, faith and baptism God gives us access to the tree of life, the Holy Spirit. As long as we are still physical, we are still going to sin, as John pointed out ...

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. (1 John 1:8)

But in the process we should be learning to resist temptations. Obedience to God should become habitual.

MAN'S TIME ON EARTH

When Adam and Eve sinned, God in effect sentenced mankind as a whole to 6000 years of being cut off from God, except for those God would specifically call for His Work.

Revelation chapter 14 tells us that there will be exactly 144000 people in the first resurrection. They are the firstfruits to God and to the Lamb.

These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, [being] THE FIRSTFRUITS UNTO GOD AND TO THE LAMB. (Revelation 14:4)

In the first resurrection all the firstfruits are together. There are no second-class firstfruits with God. God is very meticulous about everyone in the first resurrection being together! No one, not Abraham or Moses or David or anyone else, goes ahead of all the others in that resurrection. And ALL those who meet Christ in the clouds in that first resurrection will be WITH JESUS CHRIST! None will be asked to go off to the side somewhere while Christ establishes His government on Mount Zion with only 144000 "special" firstfruits, pictured in Revelation 14:4. There simply are no other firstfruits besides those 144000.

Notice 1 Thessalonians chapter 4 ...

For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that WE which are alive [and] remain unto the coming of the Lord SHALL NOT PREVENT [GO AHEAD OF] THEM WHICH ARE ASLEEP. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive [and] remain shall be caught up TOGETHER WITH THEM in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so SHALL WE EVER BE WITH THE LORD. (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17)

There's no hint at segregation here ... you know, first-class firstfruits who get to be on Mount Zion WITH Christ, and second-class firstfruits who didn't receive an invitation to be there and who therefore hide somewhere in obscurity because they are not allowed to be WITH Christ when He is on Mount Zion. Such a scenario is utterly absurd! Yet there are people in the Church who think that God has other firstfruits who are not included in the group in Revelation 14:1-4.

Talk about not understanding the mind of God!

God will establish a PERFECT government. Perfection is not achieved when you take a "perfect number" like 144000 and then ADD to that some great multitude that CANNOT BE NUMBERED! Besides destroying the perfection that was inherent in the number 144000, it would also imply an INCREDIBLY VAST BUREAUCRACY!

It is easy to prove that the "innumerable great multitude" is not a part of the first resurrection at all! That group actually pictures all those who join the Family of God through the second resurrection and through the millennium! To understand this correctly all you have to do is read what Revelation 7:9-17 actually says, WITHOUT ANY PRECONCEIVED IDEAS!

Briefly, notice the following points about this multitude:

A) Verse 9: they comprise EVERY NATION AND LANGUAGE AND ETHNIC GROUP. Many languages and ethnic groups have died out. Such a group can only be made up by means of a resurrection!

B) The REASON they could not be numbered at John's time (they obviously 'can' really be numbered, mathematically speaking) is because human beings have been given free moral agency and therefore God did not know 2000 years ago (or even today) how many people will actually come to repentance and then become a part of His Family.

What God CAN know in advance is how many there will be in the FIRST resurrection, by the number He specifically 'calls' for this purpose. Replacements are only called by God if and when someone called 'bombs out'; therefore we need to make our calling AND election sure and not let anyone take the crown of rulership that God has called us for (Revelation 3:11).

What God also CAN know in advance, if He so chooses, is the total number of human beings that will ever be born, since He fully controls "the fruit of the womb". The "great multitude" will obviously be somewhat smaller than that.

Basically, the things God controls are the things He can know in advance. By having given us free choice and free moral agency, God has basically said: "I don't control whether you willingly submit to my rule over your life or not. You yourself control that!" And so the exact size of that "innumerable great multitude" will only be known at the end of the 100-year period.

C) Verse 9: Notice that this group "STANDS BEFORE THE THRONE (OF GOD THE FATHER) AND BEFORE THE LAMB"! That cannot possibly take place until God the Father has come to this Earth with the New Jerusalem! Notice also that they "STAND", but those in the first resurrection will SIT (Matthew 8:11; Revelation 3:21; etc.). "Sitting" pictures ruling. "Standing" does not picture ruling. No group can "stand" before the throne of God unless they are immortal spirit beings.

D) Verse 10: They are thanking God for SALVATION, not for rulership.

E) Verse 14: The "great tribulation" they have come through is not a reference to what we like to refer to as "the great tribulation"; it is simply a reference to the miserable life they had lived in their first lives, before the millennium, the consequence of the decision Adam and Eve had made (see Genesis 3:16-17). It was miserable compared to what God will provide in the millennium and in the 100-year period.

F) Verse 15: They are pictured as "serving" God, not as "ruling with" Jesus Christ.

G) Verse 16: The emphasis here is that THEIR NEEDS ARE ALL MET. Everything they need will be provided for them. Nowhere in this description is there a hint that they will RULE with Christ and those in the first resurrection.

H) Verse 17: Compare this description with Revelation 21:4, which talks about the time of the New Jerusalem.

If we can just let go of our biased and preconceived ideas, then we'd be able to read these verses for what they actually SAY, without reading our ideas INTO them! But if we approach this section with a "WE KNOW ..." attitude, then we are forced to INTERPRET everything in terms of what we feel we already "KNOW" ... and then we can't be helped to understand.

Anyway, coming back to man's time on Earth: God is using the first 6000 years of man's existence to prepare EXACTLY 144000 people to rule with Christ during the following 1000 years. It is for these exactly 144000 people that Christ is "preparing positions" in His government. He knows precisely how many positions to "prepare".

In my Father's house are many mansions: if [it were] not [so], I would have told you. I GO TO PREPARE A PLACE FOR YOU. (John 14:2)

Consider how many people will have lived on Earth by the time Christ returns. The following figures are certainly not exact, but they serve to give a general idea:

A) in the approximately 1500 years from Adam to the Flood, perhaps 1000 to 2000 million;

B) in the approximately 2500 years from the Flood to Christ's first coming, perhaps in the region of 10000 million;

C) in the approximately 2000 years since them, perhaps 40000 to 50000 million.

So by the time of the first resurrection there may have been as many as 50000 million people on Earth, perhaps even more? So in the course of 6000 years God has selected only 144000 out of perhaps 50000 million people ... that's 1 out of every 350000 or 3 out of every one million! That represents about 0,0003% of humanity. Thus 99.9997% of mankind have been blinded to God's plan and purpose. That's how many people Satan has managed to keep deceived ... 99.9997% of all who have ever been born.

During the millennium Satan is bound and Christ and the 144000 will rule over physical mortal human beings. Depending on the number of people at the start of the millennium, by the end of the 1000 years there may be another 50000 million or so human beings. Quite a LARGE number of them will also respond to Satan's attitude when Satan is given the chance to influence them.

And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: THE NUMBER OF WHOM [IS] AS THE SAND OF THE SEA. (Revelation 20:7-8)

And these rebels will then simply be devoured by fire from heaven. That will be their particular "lake of fire".

And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: AND FIRE came down from God out of heaven, and DEVoured THEM. (Revelation 20:9)

After that the second resurrection takes place, when that group of perhaps 50000 million or so, who had lived and died before the millennium, will be given their first real chance to understand what life is really all about and why God created them. They will have 100 years of physical life, living in families. But none of them will then have any children. No further additional human beings will ever be born! Their chance for begetting children was in their first life.

THE PURPOSE for that lifespan for those in the second resurrection is to give them a fair chance to "choose life" (like Deuteronomy 30:19), a chance they have never really had before. The purpose of their lives then is NOT to bring additional human beings into existence.

THE PURPOSE for the second resurrection is NOT to allow people to achieve the things they missed out on in their first life; becoming architects or engineers or skilled craftsmen or have children. The purpose is to give THEM an opportunity for salvation, not to give them the opportunity to create other human beings who will then also have an opportunity for salvation. The fact that they, in practice, WILL achieve certain things during those 100 years is a by-product of the process ... but it is not the purpose for which they will be given a second physical life.

Try to understand THE PURPOSE for which God planned this 100-year period for those in the second resurrection.

So God's plan for reproducing Himself and creating a family is achieved in three distinct stages. Paul explained this in the book of Corinthians.

For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But EVERY MAN IN HIS OWN ORDER: CHRIST the firstfruits; AFTERWARD they that are Christ's at his coming. THEN [cometh] THE END [ONES], when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. (1 Corinthians 15:22-24)

When Jesus Christ delivers up the kingdom to God the Father, that's when all opposition has been "put down". There will never again be opposition to God! That refers to the time when God the Father comes to the new Earth (Revelation 21:1-3). The Family will be complete then!

The three stages Paul mentions are:

Stage 1 = Christ brought the sacrifice and became the first of the firstfruits;

Stage 2 = those who are in the first resurrection;

Stage 3 = the end ones ... those in the millennium and in the 100-year period.

After "the end" no further additions are made to the Family. It is "the end" ... the Family will be complete, just as God planned.

Those in the millennium and those in the second resurrection will live under identical conditions. Christ will be ruling and Satan will be bound. They are tested under identical circumstances and so they form one group before God. Before God they are all on a par.

That will complete God's plan of salvation.

THE NEW HEAVEN AND THE NEW EARTH

The universe is in a state of decay, the consequence of sin. This Earth is also in a state of decay. During the millennium Jesus Christ will restore this Earth to make it ideal for sustaining human MORTAL life. The Earth will even then still only be the training-ground in which potential sons and daughters of God are "exercised" (cf. Ecclesiastes 3:10).

God took a calculated risk in giving all the angels free moral agency, even as He did in creating man. But God was prepared to deal with any damage that might result from these beings making wrong choices. The sins of the demons marred the universe, even as the sins of man have marred the Earth.

God decided to deal with the damage only once His plan to reproduce Himself had been completed. After the second death and the lake of fire that plan HAS been completed.

Of the two things God the Father and Jesus Christ decided to do, they will have achieved the second one ... to create a Family! THEN God sets about achieving the first point ... creating a perfect, beautiful environment in which to live and to exist for future eternity.

And I saw A NEW HEAVEN and A NEW EARTH: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was NO MORE SEA. And I John saw the holy city, NEW JERUSALEM, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. (Revelation 21:1-2)

The new Earth will NEVER be destroyed by sin! Bringing the New Jerusalem down from heaven to the new Earth is an indication of God's commitment to permanence. God will never take a chance on that

being destroyed ... it is something God has planned for a long time, something even Abraham looked forward to (Hebrews 11:10).

As Revelation 21:1 tells us, the present earth and the present universe will PASS AWAY! The Greek verb "parelthen", the second aorist active indicative of the verb "parerchomai", which is used here, means: "to go past, to pass away". The indicative mood means that this is a simple statement of FACT ... the old universe will indeed have passed away! [I discuss this subject in more detail in one of my other articles.]

The new heaven is one free of decay and corruption. It will never run down and never need maintenance work by God. God's power will sustain it forever. Improved on, further developed and enhanced, yes ... but it will never run down! This means that there will never again be mortal human beings who have the ability to sin, and thereby the ability to cause damage and destruction. There will never be the need to once again create another "NEW" heaven and Earth, because the existing one has once again become contaminated by sin.

Satan and the demons will be banished and restrained in "the blackness of darkness forever" (Jude 1:13) in some location that is separate from God's environment. They will not be able to ever exert any influence.

Paul explained that, figuratively speaking, the whole universe is waiting for that time when the plan of salvation has been completed and the bondage of decay is changed for permanent beauty in the presence of God's Family.

Because the creature [creation] itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption [decay] into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. (Romans 8:21-22)

At that time every person who has become a part of God's Family will have the same NATURE that God has, which is called 'love' and of which the two great laws are merely an expression. Those two great laws will be a part of the very being of every member of the Family. Their natures will guarantee that they will always apply these two great laws in every area of their existence, just as God the Father and Jesus Christ would apply them. These God-beings will not have any need for any other laws to regulate their lives. They don't need to have things spelled out for them as to how they should behave!

They will have a way of life which is predictable and which will incorporate regular and frequent contact with God the Father and with Jesus Christ. That's the very purpose for which God created them in the first place ... to have other beings to share His existence with and to interact with in positive and enjoyable ways.

Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence [is] fulness of joy; at thy right hand [there are] PLEASURES FOR EVERMORE. (Psalm 16:11)

The relationship that God the Father and Jesus Christ have enjoyed for past eternity will have been extended to multiple billions of other beings.

There'll be no trading, no buying and no selling, no "I'll give you this IF you give me that ..." type of dealing. God is "give". That is His nature and that will then be our nature!

Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and HE THAT HATH NO MONEY; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, BUY WINE AND MILK WITHOUT MONEY AND WITHOUT PRICE. (Isaiah 55:1)

That is God's nature. God gives without charging a price. God is not looking for a return. The "fruit" God is looking for in this present age is not something He gets either. The "fruit" God desires is to see His holy righteous character developed in each one of US. It is for the purpose of then being able to GIVE us eternal life.

WHY GOD CREATED US PHYSICAL AND MORTAL

We started off by referring to the doctrinal changes that have been made since Mr. Armstrong's death. One major change is the claim that we will not become "Gods" as Mr. Armstrong taught.

I have said we need to understand the mind of God. We need to understand the REASONS why God has done the things He has done. The very fact that God created us as physical, mortal beings PROVES that God's intention is to reproduce Himself through human beings! Nothing less warrants the efforts and trials and suffering and deprivations required by this physical creation and this physical life-experience!

Listen!

Two thirds of all the angels God created "made good". They are now holy spirit beings in the presence of God. Some of them even SIT, with crowns on their heads, in the presence of God the Father (Revelation 4:4). You simply cannot get higher than that, other than also becoming God yourself.

During the millennium ideal conditions will prevail for physical human beings. Christ will rule and Satan will be bound. Yet even then many people will still latently be hostile to God's ways. It is for the precise purpose of exposing this latent hostility that God will release Satan at the end of those 1000 years for a very brief period of time.

That period of time will be too short for Satan to influence people who are not already on his wavelength. The only ones Satan can influence in that brief period are the ones who are already latently in opposition to God's laws. Satan's release merely acts as a catalyst to openly reveal their, until then, hidden hostility.

God says that the number of these people who were never really converted, IN THE MILLENNIUM, is "as the sand of the sea" (Revelation 20:8). That may very well be close to a third of all human beings alive then ... but even if it is less than a third, God is telling us that it is an incredibly large number! The point is that even under the ideal conditions for mortal man, God still reveals in advance that an incredibly large number will reject God's ways. So the success-rate, even under conditions of Christ's rule on Earth, is perhaps not much different from the success-rate with the angels?

Remember God's nature! It is "love", an outgoing concern for His creation. THE ONLY REASON why God would engage in an activity filled with suffering and dangers (Christ had to die an agonizing death; billions of people have been brutalized; billions have suffered from sicknesses and diseases, from famine and starvation; etc.) is because WHAT WILL BE ACHIEVED IS SO MUCH GREATER than anything God has ever created before!

Anything less than creating God-beings would not warrant the death of Jesus Christ. WHY would God the Father possibly put Jesus Christ through the whole exercise if at the end of it all you still have nothing more than spirit beings on a level LOWER than God? Why not just create more angels, test them and keep the two thirds who turn out right?

At this point I am not even listing all the Scriptures that support this truth that we will be Gods. If you really understand the mind of God, then they will also readily come to your mind without any prompting from me.

THE ANIMALS GOD CREATED

It is clear that none of the animals that God brought to Adam to name (Genesis 2:19) were aggressive. Yet we do have wild, aggressive animals in our world today. In the millennium the animals will once again not be aggressive. We all know Isaiah 11:6-9. Lions, snakes and wolves will be just as harmless as lambs.

So why aggressive animals today? And some are clearly designed for fighting ... just look at the teeth of a crocodile.

The animals God has created reflect the conditions we find ourselves in. Specifically, God created vicious, aggressive animals because there are vicious and aggressive invisible spirit beings around us ... Satan and the demons. The physical world around us reflects the spiritual reality in which we find ourselves. The animals also reflect to a certain degree what happened before the creation of man.

If Satan had never sinned, then God would never have created a single species of aggressive animals. In fact, Satan would have been responsible for creating all the animals on this Earth and they would all be peaceful, with none "hurting or destroying" anywhere on Earth (see Isaiah 11:9).

During the millennium there will not be any vicious spirit beings out there to get at humanity (Satan will be bound) ... AND THAT IS WHY all the animals will also not hurt or destroy. It will again be a reflection of the spiritual reality of that time period.

There is a specific reason why some animals today are vicious and aggressive. But it certainly is not God's desire to have a creation in which some beings, motivated by self-interest, kill other beings. That is foreign to God's nature.

Right, so now we understand the mind of God at least somewhat better than before. So how does that help us?

APPLYING THIS UNDERSTANDING

You are in the Church of God. And you find yourself faced with a steady stream of doctrinal changes. Slowly but surely your foundation is being eroded from under your feet. How can we know which changes are right?

If we understand the mind of God, then we realize that God works in PRINCIPLES, not in do's and don't's. God expects us to make the effort to understand WHY He wants us to do some things and not do other things.

If we are not going to make the effort TO PLEASE GOD, then a life-time of ritualistic obedience will achieve absolutely nothing in the sight of God. God wants to know that with our MINDS we are seeking to understand His mind. Do we seek to understand the purpose for God's instructions to us? Do we REALLY want to know what will please God? Or are we just like so many teenagers today?

Examples: A teenage girl may know that her parents don't really LIKE the clothes she desires to wear,

but so what? She may know they think her make-up is ghastly, but who cares? A teenage boy may know his father hates to see him grow his hair so long, but dad's always been old-fashioned, right? The teenager may know the parents disapprove of smoking and premarital sex, but what's the difference as long as they don't find out? The teenagers may know that the parents dislike their loud music intensely, but so what? The teenagers may know the parents worry when they stay out late at night, but that's just too bad.

DO WE APPROACH GOD LIKE THIS KIND OF TEENAGER?

Are we just looking for God's APPROVAL for what we really want anyway? Do we want God's approval for the clothes we want to wear, the make-up we want to wear, the music we want to listen to, the hair-style and hair-length we want to have, the type of parties we want to go to, the activities we want to engage in? Then we are like the man who said: "I don't feel the Bible really makes a case AGAINST make-up ... therefore as far as I am concerned it is okay to use."

Is that how we feel?

If we do, we're no better in obeying God than the teenagers described above are in pleasing their parents! (Obviously there are very many teenagers who are not like that at all. This is not an attack on teenagers.) And we might as well stop keeping the Sabbath and the Holy Days ... because, UNLESS we really seek to please God from the heart, our ritualistic, mechanical obedience will get us nowhere with God!

Anyone who is looking for the Bible "making a case" against something before he will not do the thing in question is OBVIOUSLY not seeking the mind of God! "Making a case" is only interested in "what do I absolutely HAVE TO DO", and not at all in "what would God ideally LIKE ME TO DO".

Seeking to understand God and to please God goes a whole lot further than looking for approval for what we really want to do anyway. Remember Christ's words, that if all we do is what we HAVE TO DO, then we are still only UNPROFITABLE servants to God.

So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, WE ARE UNPROFITABLE SERVANTS: WE HAVE DONE THAT WHICH WAS OUR DUTY TO DO. (Luke 17:10)

If we are like a teenager who really DOES want to please his or her parents, then we take the approach:

WHAT WOULD GOD LIKE ME TO DO? I KNOW GOD DOESN'T SAY ANYWHERE DIRECTLY THAT I CAN'T DO THIS, BUT IS IT REALLY WHAT GOD WOULD DESIRE THAT I DO?

Never mind what God will ALLOW us to do. Is it really what God wants us to do? Would God PREFER if we don't do it? Those are the questions a converted mind will ask.

Balaam also thought that he was pleasing God. But he really only wanted God's approval for what he WANTED to do. Take careful note of this account, because God is not a respecter of persons. THIS IS HOW GOD WILL DEAL WITH US IF WE REALLY WANT SOMETHING THAT ISN'T GOOD FOR US!

Notice the account.

Balak, the king of Moab offered Balaam a huge amount of money if he would curse Israel. Balaam really wanted the money! But when Balaam consulted God ...

And God said unto Balaam, THOU SHALT NOT GO WITH THEM; thou shalt not curse the people: for

they [are] blessed. (Numbers 22:12)

God's will is pretty clear: God said DON'T GO!

But Balak increased his offer and sent more messengers to Balaam. Now Balaam KNEW God's will already! But he really wanted all that money. And so he said to these messengers ...

Now therefore, I pray you, tarry ye also here this night, THAT I MAY KNOW WHAT THE LORD WILL SAY UNTO ME MORE. (Numbers 22:19)

Maybe God will let me go ... so I can GET all that money! He wasn't really looking for God's will. He was only looking for approval for his own will! So notice God's response ...

And God came unto Balaam at night, and said unto him, If the men come to call thee, RISE UP, [AND] GO WITH THEM; but yet the word which I shall say unto thee, that shalt thou do. (Numbers 22:20)

Those were the words he had longed to hear. BUT WAS THIS GOD'S WILL? No, it wasn't! But Balaam wasn't interested in God's will; he just wanted approval for his own will.

So Balaam hardly slept and in the morning he was off to get his hands on all the money Balak was offering him! (Verse 21)

Notice the next verse!

AND GOD'S ANGER WAS KINDLED BECAUSE HE WENT: and the angel of the LORD stood in the way for an adversary against him. Now he was riding upon his ass, and his two servants [were] with him. (Numbers 22:22)

DO WE UNDERSTAND THE MIND OF GOD?

We could ask the question: "How could God possibly be angry with him, when God Himself had said 'rise up and go with them'?" Was it fair for God to be angry?

We need to understand this because God deals in exactly the same way with us!

When we really sincerely want to know God's will on something, God will let us know. But if we are not happy with the answer God gives us, then it clearly shows that our desire is not really for knowing God's will; our desire is really to have approval for our own will. Therefore if we ask God AGAIN because we weren't happy with the answer we received the first time round, God may just give us the answer we want ... AND THEN BE ANGRY WITH US WHEN WE DO WHAT WE WANTED APPROVAL FOR!

This incident with Balaam is recorded to show us how God's mind works! Understand this! You and I are no different from Balaam when we seek God's approval for something we have already set our hearts on!

Oh yes, we may SAY: "All I want to know is what God REALLY says about this matter". But if we have ALREADY set our hearts on one particular answer, then we don't really want God's will ... we are really hoping to receive approval for our will.

WE CAN NEVER PLAY THIS SORT OF GAME WITH GOD!

For the word of God [is] quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the

dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and [is] a discerner of THE THOUGHTS AND INTENTS OF THE HEART. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things [are] naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do. (Hebrews 4:12-13)

If "the intents" of our heart are to get approval for our will, God may just give us that approval ... and then punish us!

Let's continue with Balaam's story. God had sent an angel "with his sword drawn in his hand" ...

Then the LORD opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand: and he bowed down his head, and fell flat on his face. (Numbers 22:31)

The reason for the drawn sword?

And the angel of the LORD said unto him ... BECAUSE [THY] WAY IS PERVERSE BEFORE ME: (Numbers 22:32)

Yet a carnal mind could ARGUE that up to that point Balaam was only following God's instructions ... God had said: GO! But God didn't see it that way! God saw it as selfish and "perverse"!

Knowing that he could already have been killed by God, Balaam was now a little subdued and admitted that he had sinned.

And Balaam said unto the angel of the LORD, I HAVE SINNED; FOR I KNEW NOT that thou stoodest in the way against me: now therefore, IF IT DISPLEASE THEE, I will get me back again. (Numbers 22:34)

However, if you read this verse carefully, you can see that he only admitted to having sinned in the matter of hitting his donkey three times ... "because I didn't know that You were standing in the way to kill me".

Don't be fooled by the words "I have sinned"! He is still not confessing to the REAL problem ... his greed for money! Are we sometimes like this when we are in deep trouble? You know, confessing to some minor point while still totally unrepentant about the real problem?

God is not fooled!

The question "IF it displease you, I will get me back again" makes very clear that Balaam was still totally unrepentant, in spite of using the words "I have sinned". Can we understand this? Right at the very start God had told him very clearly not to go. When he did go, God nearly killed him in three different places. What do you mean ... "IF IT DISPLEASE YOU"??

Would we ever approach God this way about something we really want when deep-down we know better? Oh sure we would! That's why we need to understand the mind of God!

Balaam went along to Balak and three times he blessed Israel, just as God instructed him. Obviously Balaam's own heart wasn't in these three blessings, because he then advised Balak to send his women into the Israelite camp to get Israel to sin and in that way incur God's wrath.

Behold, these caused the children of Israel, THROUGH THE COUNSEL OF BALAAM, to commit trespass against the LORD in the matter of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the LORD. (Numbers 31:16)

He may still have received some money for this perverse advice, but he also lost his life for it.

And they slew the kings of Midian, beside the rest of them that were slain; [namely], Evi, and Rekem, and Zur, and Hur, and Reba, five kings of Midian: BALAAM ALSO THE SON OF BEOR THEY SLEW WITH THE SWORD. (Numbers 31:8)

Balaam's greed and perverse advice (to destroy a people through lust) went down in history. He is mentioned three times in the New Testament; so we should learn from his example.

Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran GREEDILY AFTER THE ERROR OF BALAAM FOR REWARD, and perished in the gainsaying of Core. (Jude 1:11)

Which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of BALAAM [the son] of Bosor, who LOVED THE WAGES OF UNRIGHTEOUSNESS; (2 Peter 2:15)

But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of BALAAM, who TAUGHT BALAK TO CAST A STUMBLINGBLOCK BEFORE THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL, TO EAT THINGS SACRIFICED UNTO IDOLS, AND TO COMMIT FORNICATION. (Revelation 2:14)

Would we ever get caught up in the "error of Balaam" ... seeking approval for our own will instead of really seeking God's will? These three New Testament references make clear that God wants us today to learn from the events in Numbers chapter 22.

We MUST make the effort to understand God's thinking! We MUST actively seek to understand God's mind and God's standards.

Nobody claims that we are supposed to understand everything about the mind of God. Obviously many things are just beyond our very finite scope.

The secret [things belong] unto the LORD our God: but THOSE [THINGS WHICH ARE] REVEALED [belong] unto us and to our children for ever, that [we] may do all the words of this law. (Deuteronomy 29:29)

But many things ARE revealed and God wants us to strive to understand His mind, how He thinks and acts. If we really, with our whole heart, seek to understand God's mind, God will surely guide us and reward our diligence!

Frank W. Nelte