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THE RIGHT AND THE WRONG TYPES OF OBEDIENCE

In God's Church we understand that God has given us His laws to show us how we are to live our lives. It is clear that God expects us to obey all of His laws. Obedience to the laws of God is a cornerstone of the teachings of the Church of God. Obedience to God's laws forms the foundation for a Christian life.

We can all readily quote 1 John 5:3.

For this is the love of God, that **we keep his commandments**: and his commandments are not grievous. (1 John 5:3)

We also know that God answers our prayers because we obey Him.

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)

We can also quote the words of the prophet Samuel to King Saul.

And Samuel said, Hath the LORD *as great* delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, **to obey *is* better than sacrifice**, *and* to hearken than the fat of rams. (1 Samuel 15:22)

We further know that without obedience all our other good actions are of no value before God. As Jesus Christ explained:

And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and **do not the things which I say**? (Luke 6:46)

In other words: why do you call Me "Lord" if you don't obey My laws?

So **the necessity of obedience to the laws of God** stands beyond question. But sometimes we don't understand that obedience per se is not really what God is looking for. It is not just "any old obedience" that is acceptable to God. God is in fact looking for a very specific type of obedience. This is something that many people have never fully understood, and people in the world's religions most certainly don't understand.

For example:

The religion of **Judaism** has **613 mitzvot** (commands) that are enjoined upon Jews, though many of these mitzvot apply only to priests, while others apply only to men, and others again apply only to women, and still others apply only to a king, and some apply only to people in the land of Israel, and still others apply only to people who own a vineyard. In fact, there has never at any time been a religious Jew who could possibly have applied all 613 mitzvot in his own life, even if he had wanted to do so, because many of the mitzvot could not possibly apply to him.

A great many of the mitzvot apply to the sacrificial system, which is not in use today as there is no Temple and no Aaronic priesthood. I have a copy of these 613 mitzvot, as they were enumerated by Rambam (i.e. Moses Maimonides), and I have carefully examined all of these 613 laws. Basically they

are a list of **365 "don't's"** and **248 "do's"**, aimed at circumventing the need for people themselves to understand biblical principles correctly and to then apply those principles in their lives. It is a system that says: you don't have to think for yourself; just **do all the things we tell you to do**. There is no need for you to do any thinking for yourself. Most of the mitzvot are in fact superfluous statements, designed to make observers look very righteous.

For example: one mitzvah says that Jews are to fast on Yom Kippur, and the very next mitzvah says that Jews are not to eat or drink on Yom Kippur. The next mitzvah says that Jews are not to work on Yom Kippur. And the next mitzvah says that Jews are to rest on Yom Kippur. Here four different mitzvot make a show of keeping one single law. Each of the annual Holy Days has at least one mitzvah which commands "rest" and another mitzvah which commands "not to do work". Most of the other mitzvot are in a similar vein ... they are just for show, to make an impression regarding how many supposedly distinct laws an observant Jew obeys.

Furthermore, in our world today an observant Jew is only able to potentially apply 194 negative mitzvot and 77 positive mitzvot ... for a number of reasons the remaining 342 mitzvot have no application in our world today. So much for a religious Jew supposedly being responsible for all 613 mitzvot.

Anyway, while they are supposedly based on the Old Testament, the 613 Jewish mitzvot assuredly do not represent what God is looking for in your life, irrespective of whether ethnically you are a Jew or a non-Jew.

However, there is a form of obedience which is very desirable to God, and then there is also a far, far less desirable form of obedience. Do you understand the difference between these two forms of obedience?

Here I am not talking about people who **accidently keep some of God's laws**, or even about people in some of the world's churches who keep some of God's laws (e.g. the Sabbath) while at the same time still holding fast to certain other teachings that are clearly ungodly. No, here I am talking about people who attend the Church of God, and who understand that obedience to all of God's laws is without question required of us.

So let's ask the question:

IS OUR OBEDIENCE TO GOD SPONTANEOUS OR IS IT CALCULATED?

What is the difference between spontaneous obedience and calculated obedience? Specifically, what might be the problems with one of these two types of obedience? For the answers to these questions we need to step back a little.

GOD'S PURPOSE

God's purpose in creating the Family of God is to have every member of that Family voluntarily embrace the exact same way of thinking that defines the mind of God the Father and the mind of Jesus Christ. When Jesus Christ said: "I and My Father are one" (John 10:30), He was saying: the Father's mind and My mind are identical in the way they work. We use the exact same way of thinking, that way of thinking being the definition of "love", an outgoing concern for the well-being of others. **The word "love"** is primarily a term that **identifies God's way of thinking**, how the mind of God works.

When Jesus Christ later, in talking about all of us in the Church of God, said: "that they all may be one,

as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You, that they also may be one in Us ..." (John 17:21), He was basically saying: I want all of the people in My Church **to use their minds in exactly the same way** that We use Our minds.

One of the most important purposes for God's laws for us in this age is to openly expose to God exactly **how our minds work**. Ultimately the Sabbath is not going to be important one way or the other, because on the New Earth in the New Heaven there will not be any sunsets and there will not be any 24-hour days and there will not be any Sabbath days. Our response to the Sabbath commandment in this life reveals our attitude towards God. But the Sabbath, to take just one law as an example, has never been an end in itself; it has always been a means towards an end, that end being to show God how our minds respond to God.

To state this quite plainly: God wants to know if His way of thinking can become **natural and intuitive for us**, like the intuitive use of our own hands in turning our thoughts into actions; or if His way of thinking remains foreign and strange to us, like trying to use an artificial hand to accomplish a certain task.

As an example:

When we want to make a plain sandwich it is intuitive for our one hand to pick up a knife and then, while the other hand holds down a loaf of bread, cut a slice from that loaf of bread, and then use a knife to spread some butter on the slice of bread. The whole process is intuitive and spontaneous. At no stage do we have to think: now what must I do next to get my slice of bread with butter on it?

By contrast, if we had lost our hands in an accident and now had two artificial hands, all the required actions to obtain a slice of bread with butter on it would have to be very calculated. In using our artificial hands nothing would be spontaneous and intuitive, even if the end results (i.e. a slice of bread with butter on it) would end up being more or less the same.

Likewise: while **the outward end results** (i.e. Sabbath keeping, outward obedience to God's laws, etc.) may be more or less the same, in order to achieve those results we should ask ourselves: has God's way of thinking become spontaneous to us, like using our own hands, or does God's way of thinking remain very calculated and artificial for us, like trying to accomplish a task with artificial hands?

It is God's explicit intent that His way of thinking will become intuitive for us, that we will spontaneously respond to any situation the way God would respond to that situation. About 40 years ago Mr. Herbert Armstrong coined the expressions "the way of give" and "the way of get". It is God's intent that our minds come to spontaneously think "the give way" and intuitively put up a resistance to thinking "the get way".

To state this plainly:

Before God there is a big difference between obedience that results from "the get way of thinking" when compared to obedience that is the result of "the give way of thinking". The latter type of obedience will be intuitive, while the former type of obedience will be mechanical and calculated.

Now obedience that is mechanical and calculated is acceptable to God as long as we are still in the learning stages, like a very small child still acquiring control and coordination over all the muscles in his arms and legs. But once the child has grown and developed coordination and control over all the muscles in his body, THEN all his movements (walking, running, sitting, using silverware to eat in an appropriate way, etc.) must be intuitive. Likewise, once we have lived true Christianity for a while, then God's way of thinking must also become intuitive for us.

And if at the end of our lives our obedience to God is still only calculated and mechanical, then we have failed!

Let's take a closer look at God's interactions with people in the Bible.

GOD TESTS FOR SPONTANEITY

Let's consider what God did with the very first human being, Adam.

God created Adam so that for a short period of time, a few hours, Adam was totally alone, as far as human company is concerned (Genesis 2:20). At this stage God already spelled out very clear responsibilities for Adam. First of all God spelled out that Adam was never to eat the fruit of the tree of the perception of good and evil (Genesis 2:17). Then God gave Adam charge over this earth, evidenced by God bringing all the animals to Adam for Adam to give them names (Genesis 2:19-20). Adam was given a measure of control. God expected Adam **to use his mind from the very start**, even before God created Eve.

Only after that did God create Eve from Adam's DNA. That was on the first Friday, Day #6. Very possibly Adam and Eve then had three more days of interactions with God, to some degree being taught and instructed in how they were to live their lives. The Day of Atonement is the 10th day of the month, and perhaps that is to indicate to us that it was on that very first 10th day that God allowed Satan to have access to Adam and Eve for the purpose of testing them.

Now here is a point we need to consider.

When we know that we will have to take a test, then we do our best to prepare as much as possible for that test. In our school and work situations we typically know in advance when we will have to take a test. And our preparations are typically aimed at getting us through the test, without any consideration for whether or not those preparations will still benefit us into the future, long after the time of that test. We take practice SAT tests to prepare us for doing well when we have to take the real test.

Do you remember any of the questions from the biology or geography or history or physics or chemistry or SAT tests that you took in high school many years ago? Do you still remember the correct answers to those questions? Or have you long forgotten the answers you crammed for all those examinations? Let's face it: we didn't cram because we wanted to learn something for the rest of our lives. No, we crammed because we wanted to pass a test. That's all.

But **a test that we can cram for is of no value before God**! The answers we provide for those sorts of tests are very mechanical, and calculated to help us get good marks.

Tests that we can cram for will never reveal WHO WE REALLY ARE! They can only reveal what we are able to mechanically regurgitate!

So as far as God was concerned:

It was **not** God's intention **to prepare** Adam to pass the test he would shortly face! If that had been God's intention, then God might have said: "look, Adam, there is a fellow named Satan, and tomorrow he is going to pitch up here in some form of disguise, and he will try to turn you against Me, by trying to get you to eat the fruit of the tree that I have told you not to eat. Thus I want you to be prepared when he

confronts you, so that you know how to resist him." Or words to that effect.

But that is not what God wanted!

God's focus was not on trying to prepare Adam for passing a test. God's focus was on finding out how Adam would **spontaneously** use his mind in tempting circumstances. Yes, certainly, God was **hoping** that Adam would spontaneously resist Satan's temptations. But God was not willing to do anything to turn His own hope into reality, because any form of preparing Adam for Satan's attempts to get Adam to sin would have been contrary to what God really needed to find out.

Understand this!

GOD'S PRIMARY PURPOSE FOR ALL THE TESTS TO WHICH HE EXPOSES US IS TO FIND OUT HOW OUR MINDS WILL SPONTANEOUSLY AND INTUITIVELY RESPOND WHEN WE SUDDENLY AND SOMEWHAT UNEXPECTEDLY HAVE TO CHOOSE BETWEEN PUTTING SELF FIRST OR PUTTING GOD FIRST!

The most important tests we will ever face are aimed at exposing how our minds will spontaneously respond to unexpected circumstances, irrespective of whether or not those situations also involve the potential breaking of any specific laws of God.

Can you understand this?

Even when a situation doesn't involve the potential of directly breaking a specific law of God, **it may still be a test** for us as to whether we will put self-interest first or whether we will respond the way God would respond in those circumstances. Not all our tests revolve around breaking or not breaking God's laws. But all such situations are included under the umbrella instructions that we are to love God with all our heart, soul and mind (see Matthew 22:37), and that we are to seek first of all the kingdom of God (see Matthew 6:33).

For example: We can interpret the instruction to love our neighbor as we love ourselves (Matthew 22:39) **selfishly** (e.g. "see, it's quite okay for us to love ourselves") **or** we can interpret this instruction **from God's point of view** (i.e. this is not at all an instruction to love ourselves; it is simply an acknowledgment that we will do so anyway, and THEREFORE we must be willing to AT LEAST do the same for other people). The same law but two completely different perspectives. And most people will spontaneously choose the selfish perspective. You know that, right?

It is specifically situations that don't involve the obvious transgression of specific laws of God that reveal to God whether our thinking has come to be spontaneously like the way God thinks, or whether our obedience is still only mechanical and very calculated.

Mechanical, calculated obedience does not really perceive how God's mind works, and therefore it also does not perceive how to do the things that will be "pleasing in the sight of God" (see 1 John 3:22). Calculated obedience simply cannot grasp why it (calculated obedience) is not pleasing to God.

To get back to Adam:

The test God gave Adam and Eve (i.e. God went away and Satan pitched up) was completely unexpected. Adam and Eve didn't have time to "go home and think about it", as we might do after listening to a persuasive car salesman. Adam and Eve were forced to make an immediate decision. This test exposed how their minds would work spontaneously. And that is how God always tests people!

Yes, some of our tests involve making very calculated right decisions to keep the Sabbath and the Holy Days, to not eat unclean foods, to tithe, etc. We have time to think about it, and we then make very calculated decisions to live by all of these laws. For different people this process of making some calculated decisions may take days or weeks or months or even years. But those are not our major tests! In most cases **those are only our initial tests**, somewhat like entrance exams.

It is only after we have put all of the laws of God that we understand into practice in our lives, that we are ready to face the most important tests of our lives.

The most important tests are not about whether or not we will obey the laws of God. Did you know that? The most important tests we in God's Church will ever face start out with the premise that we are already keeping all of God's laws to the best of our ability. With the most important tests obedience to the laws of God is taken as a given (e.g. think of Abraham, Daniel and Job, etc.). And so the most important of all the tests we will ever face are aimed at testing **THE MOTIVATION for our obedience** to God; such tests are aimed at exposing the thoughts and the intents (i.e. the motivations) of the heart (see Hebrews 4:12).

The test Adam and Eve faced exposed that the motivation for their obedience to God up to that point in time had not progressed to the point of seeking to do the things that are pleasing in the sight of God. Given the right circumstances they would still put self-interest ahead of God. That is what their eating of the forbidden fruit demonstrated.

At any rate, can you see that God was testing how Adam and Eve would SPONTANEOUSLY respond when tempted to think selfishly?

CONSIDER KING DAVID

There are a number of instances in David's life that reveal David's spontaneous responses to unexpected situations.

Let's start off with the time when his father sent David to take some food to his brothers in King Saul's army. When David saw the giant Goliath taunting the army of Israel, David SPONTANEOUSLY responded with "for who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God" (see 1 Samuel 17:26). David didn't have any idea regarding how to deal with Goliath; David didn't have some kind of plan up his sleeve. David was simply spontaneously indignant at the way Goliath insulted the armies of God. And this spontaneous response by David was an expression of David's faith. David's response revealed that David spontaneously expressed faith and courage. We all know the rest of this story, how God helped David to kill Goliath.

Next, let's consider the time when King Saul was hunting David in order to kill him. When King Saul was looking for "a country toilet" he went into a cave alone, not knowing that David and his men were hiding in that very cave. So David was presented with the totally unexpected opportunity to kill Saul while Saul was helplessly "covering his feet" (see 1 Samuel 24:3). David literally caught Saul "with his pants down".

When his own men urged David to kill Saul, David SPONTANEOUSLY refused to do so, though he went so far as to cut a corner off Saul's robe (1 Samuel 24:4). We all know this story also, where David once again in faith went out and revealed himself to Saul, risking the possibility that Saul, who was totally irrational, might kill him. This incident again revealed to God how David's mind spontaneously reacted to specific circumstances. Specifically, it revealed a staggering degree of faith on the part of David.

Let’s face it, neither you nor I would in those circumstances have had the faith and courage that David had. We easily squirm when we face far, far less dangerous trials, including simple things like being afraid to use God-ordained physical correction when our young children are disobedient to us, etc., never mind voluntarily revealing ourselves to our mortal enemies.

This opportunity for David to avenge himself on the man who wanted to kill him came up once again when Saul hunted David with 3,000 men. We know how David together with Abishai went down into the middle of those 3,000 sleeping soldiers (see 1 Samuel 26:7), and once again David refused to kill Saul. This incident was another example of the staggering degree of David’s SPONTANEOUS faith in God.

At another time a rich man named Nabal responded very contemptuously to David’s deferential request for some food supplies (see 1 Samuel 25:5-11). Nabal’s offensive response infuriated David and so he set out with his men to kill Nabal and all of his household (see 1 Samuel 25:21-22). Such a massacre would have been a gross violation of God’s laws, and it would have been a serious blot against David’s character. Simply because someone spoke contemptuously to David’s men, that did not justify David in wanting to kill all the males that pertained to Nabal’s household.

So in the heat of anger David had made a wrong decision! We know that Nabal’s wife Abigail intervened and pleaded with David to not kill anyone. In her speech to David Abigail stated that God had "withholden" David from shedding blood and from avenging himself (1 Samuel 25:26). Abigail continued to reason with David, saying that when David would become king this incident would not be a blot on his kingship. She said: "this shall be no grief unto you, nor offense of heart" because David would **not have** "**shed blood CAUSELESS**" (1 Samuel 25:31). Once again David SPONTANEOUSLY accepted this good advice and held back from killing anyone. As David said to Abigail: "blessed be your advice, and blessed be you, who has kept me this day from coming to shed blood, and from avenging myself with my own hand" (1 Samuel 25:33).

There was no justification for his clearly wrong intentions. Instead, David spontaneously accepted the good advice he was offered. David didn’t calculate and deliberate about the pros and cons of Abigail’s advice. There was no negotiating. No, David responded instantly. This instant response revealed a part of David’s character, a very positive attribute in fact. And David learned something from this incident.

Many years later a Benjamite named Shimei cursed David very offensively (2 Samuel 16:5-6). There is no question that these insults hurt King David very deeply, because he still recalled these insults when he was on his deathbed, instructing his son Solomon to deal with Shimei (see 1 Kings 2:8-9). However, when Abishai asked David for permission to kill Shimei (2 Samuel 16:9), David spontaneously refused to take personal revenge on Shimei; he refused to shed blood because a man had offended him personally (2 Samuel 16:10-12). David’s response was once again SPONTANEOUS, and it was an expression of faith that God would help David if he refused to take personal vengeance.

The point we need to keep in mind here is that in all of these instances there wasn’t very much time to think and to plan ahead. In all of these cases David responded spontaneously, and his spontaneous responses were the right ones. In modern speech: they were right on the money!

To state this in plain terms:

David was a man after God’s own heart (Acts 13:22) because **David’s spontaneous responses** to unexpected or provocative situations were almost always the correct ones, the way God would have wanted David to respond in those situations. Put another way, that’s how "God’s heart" would have spontaneously responded in those situations.

Can you understand this?

It is not a question of David never having sinned. He sinned just like you and I have sinned. But the important point is that when David was confronted with difficult choices, he mostly made the right choices. And when David had made a wrong choice, then later he never tried to justify that wrong choice.

How often have you and I done something that wasn't quite right, and when we were then confronted with the facts **we have insisted on justifying ourselves**? We do that all the time, don't we? We foolishly buy something we can't really afford, or we say something we should not have said, or we damage something, or we don't carry out an instruction we have been given, etc., etc., and then when we are confronted about these things the very first thing we do is try to justify ourselves! That's the way it is most of the time, isn't it? Our spontaneous responses in such situations reveal how our minds work.

But that is not what David did! He didn't spontaneously justify himself.

So now let's look at the case of David committing adultery with Bathsheba. We all know the story. God sent the prophet Nathan to David to confront him with his guilt. After Nathan had told a parable, he then confronted David with the words "**you are the man**" (2 Samuel 12:7), and for the next five verses he let David have it from both barrels! At the end of this barrage of being scathingly rebuked the very first spontaneous words out of David's mouth were "**I HAVE SINNED AGAINST THE ETERNAL**" (2 Samuel 12:13). No defense, no justifications, no explanations, just a plain clear and unqualified admission of guilt.

Is that how we respond when our sins are pointed out to us? What our, or for that matter David's, specific sins happen to be is in most cases not nearly as important as **how we respond when those sins are pointed out to us**. Unqualified admission of guilt is the correct response before God, but all too often we try to explain that it isn't really all our fault, that other people are also at fault, that we aren't really as bad as it might look.

Don't for one moment think that your sins and my sins are somehow less serious before God than the sins of David. They are not! And before God it is enormously important how we spontaneously respond when we are confronted with our own sins and shortcomings. How we spontaneously respond in those situations reveals to God how our minds work.

Getting back to David: he later made one more wrong decision. Satan provoked David into "numbering Israel" (see 1 Chronicles 21:1). David wanted to know the precise number of men he could potentially call upon for military service. Joab could see that this was foolish, that it amounted to tempting God (1 Chronicles 21:3), and so Joab tried to dissuade David from going ahead with this census. But in this case David did not accept the good advice that Joab had offered, and the numbering went ahead.

This whole project displeased God, as Joab had correctly anticipated, and so God then "smote Israel" (1 Chronicles 21:7). As soon as this happened David immediately responded with "**I have sinned greatly** because I have done this thing" (1 Chronicles 21:8). Based on this quick response from David, God sent the prophet Gad to David to tell David to **choose one of three penalties** (1 Chronicles 21:10).

All the penalties were severe: either **3 years** of famine, or **3 months** of being destroyed by enemies, or **3 days** of pestilence and destruction from God (1 Chronicles 21:12). All three options meant that many people would die.

Now picture God confronting you and me with our sins and then telling us: alright, you are now repentant, but I still need to punish you for what you have done. So I want you to choose one of the following three penalties for yourself. So tell Me which of these three penalties do you want? Can you see the extremely painful decision we would have to make in such circumstances?

How would you have chosen in David's circumstances? This was once again a major test for David? Was David going to make a calculated decision to choose what would have been the least painful for David himself? Was he going to reason: let's see now, what is my best option for damage control? Do I choose the option that will cause the people to suffer more, or do I choose the option where I myself will have to suffer more? What is my best option?

David had minutes, not hours, to make a decision. This incident once again exposed whether or not David would put self-interest first, above the well-being of his people.

And in this instance David also spontaneously made the best decision. As we are told:

And David said unto Gad, I am in a great strait: **let me fall now into the hand of the LORD**; for very great *are* his mercies: but let me not fall into the hand of man. (1 Chronicles 21:13)

David had freely admitted that he had sinned, and he fully accepted whatever penalty God was going to impose on him. And he wisely chose to receive a penalty that would only involve God dealing with Israel, rather than people from other nations being involved in punishing Israel.

David's response showed that David relied completely on God. None of us have ever had to make a difficult choice like this, have we?

Consider also one other point:

David had ordered a census to determine the total number of potential soldiers in the nation. Now to conduct a census does not violate any of the ten commandments directly, does it? After all, Israel was numbered even during the days of Moses (see the Book of Numbers). So what was the problem with this particular census?

How is it that when David was confronted about this matter he spontaneously responded with "I have sinned greatly because I have done this thing"? Would we in those circumstances have responded the same way, or would we have said "what's wrong with me taking a census"? Do you understand **WHY** David so freely acknowledged "I have sinned greatly"?

The answer to this question goes to the heart and core of the issue about the two distinct ways of using our minds. The calculated mechanical obedience says: what's possibly wrong with taking a census? The spontaneous intuitive obedience says: I know that I have sinned greatly.

The calculated mechanical obedience looks at the outside, at the observable facts. And outwardly there is no sin involved in taking a census. So this mechanical obedience will not even perceive that any sin is involved in this action of taking a census.

The spontaneous intuitive obedience looks at the inside, at the thoughts and intents of the heart. This type of obedience looks at **the motivation underlying this census**. And the only reason David was able to say "I have sinned greatly" is because David was freely acknowledging that the motivation for why he wanted this census conducted was very wrong.

This census wasn't the problem one way of the other! The only problem was David's motivation for ordering this census!

David's motivation was the "great sin" in this instance. David's motivation was to find out just how great an army he would be able to assemble. He was looking to human might. This motivation revealed a reliance on human strength, as if David would somehow be able to achieve more if his army was greater.

All his life David had displayed an unwavering reliance on God. At no stage had it bothered him when the enemy had the greater army. David's attitude had always been "the LORD is on my side (and) I will not fear what man can do to me" (Psalm 118:6). And having a smaller army than his enemies had never been a problem, because David had relied on God for help.

When the Scripture tells us that Satan **provoked** David to number Israel (1 Chronicles 21:1) we need to understand that Satan provoked David to look to human strength, and thereby to depart somewhat from looking to God for help. The idea is: the bigger my own army, the less I need to rely on God. But recall how God reduced Gideon's army from around 32,000 men down to only 300 men (Judges 7:2-7). Satan had tempted David to look to human strength to fight his battles, and David had succumbed to this temptation.

So David made no attempt to hide that his motivation had been a sin against God. He acknowledged that he had done the wrong thing, again without trying to justify his own actions.

To summarize: David was a man after God's own heart because David spontaneously made the right decisions. This revealed that David's mind spontaneously put God first.

Now let's look at the Apostle Paul.

PAUL'S SPONTANEOUS SUBMISSION TO GOD

Initially Paul was a very zealous Pharisee who persecuted the fledgling Church of God. We know the story regarding how Paul was traveling to Damascus, when Jesus Christ knocked him off his donkey (see Acts 9:4). Paul then heard a voice saying: "why do you persecute Me?". To this question Paul replied: "who are You, Lord?". Jesus Christ then replied:

"I am Jesus whom you persecute" (Acts 9:5).

Now consider the situation. This is the very first contact Paul has ever had with God. He has just been accused of persecuting the Son of God. He is on a mission to capture more church members so they can be killed. So what does Paul do? Does he justify himself? Does he try to explain THE REASONS for why he was persecuting the members of God's Church? Does he try to present any kind of excuse for his conduct up to that point in time?

What is Paul's spontaneous response to this situation?

The very first words out of Paul's mouth in response to being confronted were: "**Lord, what do You want me to do?**" (Acts 9:6). The rest of this story doesn't affect our purposes here.

Talk about spontaneous obedience! **Within two seconds** Paul had made a commitment to which he held fast for the rest of his life! Within those two seconds Paul had come to **a total and complete repentance**! For the rest of his life he never wavered from that commitment of "Lord, what do You want me to do?". Within those two seconds Paul's mind changed for ever!

I doubt that there is any other example of an individual changing from open hostility to the truth of God to unconditional repentance as fast as did the Apostle Paul. There was nothing ambivalent in Paul's response from the very second that God called him. Compare that to us taking days or months or even years before we make the commitment "Lord, what do You want me to do?".

We need to understand that this is the type of spontaneous obedience that God is really looking for in the people He has called into His Church. I suspect that Paul's spontaneous zeal and obedience were one of the reasons why God gave Paul one of the best understandings of the mind of God amongst all the apostles. I further suspect that if Paul had not been so spontaneously 100% responsive to God, if Paul's response had been only mechanical and calculated, then God would not have given Paul the "visions and revelations" which God did give to Paul (see 2 Corinthians 12:1). I am convinced that Paul was also a man after God's own heart (like Acts 13:22), who dedicated the rest of his life to trying "to fulfill all of God's will" (same verse).

Our spontaneous responses to unexpected circumstances and situations reveal the degree to which we are committed to trying to use our minds the way God uses His mind, trying to change from thinking the way of get to learning to think the way God thinks. **Calculated responses don't reveal commitment.** Only spontaneous responses can do that.

And the Apostle Paul is probably the most powerful example of a spontaneous 180 degrees turnaround, from fighting against God to unconditional submission to God.

We could look at other examples of spontaneously thinking the way God thinks. For example, when Phinehas spontaneously took a spear and killed a man and a woman in the very act of fornication (Numbers 25:7-8), God showed very strong approval for what Phinehas had done (Numbers 25:11-13). Phinehas had spontaneously and very clearly expressed his commitment to God.

But now let's look at another group of people.

CALCULATED OBEDIENCE DURING THE MILLENNIUM

When Jesus Christ returns and the first resurrection takes place, then Jesus Christ will establish the Kingdom of God over this whole earth. The keeping of all of God's laws will be enforced worldwide, to the point that if people intend to break any of God's laws, they will hear a voice behind them saying "this is the way, walk you in it" (Isaiah 30:21).

Apart from one major rebellion, prophetically predicted in Ezekiel 38-39, all people on earth will abide by the laws of God for 1000 years. After those 1000 years Satan is then released for a very short time (Revelation 20:7-10) and he rounds up a huge army of multiple millions of individuals who will openly rebel against God. I personally suspect that the rebellious army Satan will round up may exceed one billion people, "the number of whom is as the sand of the sea" (Revelation 20:8). All those rebels are then destroyed by fire that will come down from God in heaven. And then the second resurrection takes place.

That's the basic picture of what lies ahead. So let's ask some questions.

How is it possible that in a very short period of time Satan is able to motivate multiple millions of people, if not a billion or more, to openly rebel and fight against God, people who themselves in many cases will have lived for more than 100 years under the perfect rule of Jesus Christ and the rule of the 144,000 individuals in the first resurrection?

Here are people who will enjoy **perfect health**, people who all speak **one language** worldwide, people who have kept the **Sabbath** and the annual **Feasts** and **Holy Days** all their lives, people who have never known the concept of money, people who have never known any false religion, people who have always had **abundant crops** and who freely shared their physical blessings with others in their own

communities, people who had their every need met by instantly **answered prayers** (Isaiah 65:24), people who have **no fears** of lions and leopards and other formerly dangerous animals (Isaiah 65:25), people who **have seen Jesus Christ** in Jerusalem and who have seen many of the 144,000 individuals in the first resurrection. These are people who have for many, many decades and even centuries had perfect teachers, because their teachers will have been resurrected sons of God.

In other words:

How is it possible that people who for decades and even for centuries have lived in a perfect society with perfect laws and with perfect rulers, and who have never in their lives experienced any unfulfilled physical needs, people who have never known hunger or pain or suffering or sickness, people who know that God exists and that God is dealing with them very directly ... how is it possible that such people can within a few weeks abandon everything they have known all their lives, and instead rebel against the God who has looked after them all their lives?

How can they suddenly be so dumb and so stupid and so moronic that they believe that they could actually fight against God and win? In those circumstances only an absolute idiot could possibly believe that he could overcome the God who has taken care of him all his life!

Before we look at those people at the end of the millennium, let's start by looking at the human mind.

DID YOU KNOW THIS ABOUT THE HUMAN MIND?

There is not really much difference between the minds of angels and the minds of human beings. Yes, the minds of angels have a far greater capacity than the minds of human beings, but in type they are essentially the same.

By this I mean that God created the minds of angels so that they would be totally independent, with a totally free will. There was nothing that would compel angels to adopt God's way of thinking, the only way of thinking that was in existence at the time God created all the angels. Likewise, there also was nothing to pressure them to reject God's way of thinking.

They had the total freedom, if they wanted to do so, to invent a new way of thinking, one that would be based on selfishness. And while two thirds of all the angels freely and willingly embraced God's way of thinking, one third under the leadership of Satan "created" a new way of thinking, one that conflicted with and competed with God's way of thinking. They invented using their minds to think "the get way". And they rebelled against God.

God then did exactly the same thing with human beings. He gave human beings the same type of minds that He had given to the angels, minds that are totally free and independent, free to submit to their Creator and also free to rebel and to compete with their Creator, should they (like Satan) decide to commit their minds to also think "the get way".

Now consider this:

NOBODY, NO HUMAN BEING AND NOT EVEN GOD, CAN FORCE YOU TO THINK A CERTAIN WAY!

God and also human beings who have power over us can force us to DO certain things. But they cannot force us to THINK a certain way! Our minds are under our own control. And currently the most powerful

influences on our minds are Satan’s pressures to try to keep us thinking "the get way" all our lives.

Satan can pressure us, but he cannot force us to think his way. God COULD pressure us to think "the give way", but God has committed Himself that He will not do that! Pressuring us to think His way would work against the very thing that God seeks to achieve in our lives. And that is why God will never do that. During the millennium God will force people to comply with certain conduct and outward ACTIONS, but He will never force people to THINK a certain way.

Nobody can ever force you to change your mind. You have the ability to resist any and every pressure that is exerted upon your mind. That is what is meant by "a free will".

Now here is the point:

Even when Jesus Christ pours out staggering blessings upon people in the millennium, when He has the opportunity to work with them for hundreds of years, when He provides perfect living conditions for people and answers all their prayers, even then Jesus Christ cannot get SOME people to accept His way of thinking! There is in fact NOTHING that Christ can do to persuade those particular people to change their way of thinking, nothing at all!

So what chance do you think some puny little human minister has to get people to change their minds and to freely adopt God’s way of thinking. With all the sermons and Bible Studies and visiting and articles and serving people day and night, etc. ... with all that a minister STILL does not have a snowball’s chance in hell of ever changing the mind of even one single person! And that applies even to your favorite minister.

DID YOU KNOW THAT?!

Do you really understand Romans 8:7?

Because **the carnal mind *is* enmity against God**: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. (Romans 8:7)

The multiple millions who rebel at the end of the millennium exemplify Romans 8:7. No preaching and no teaching and no amount of blessings can eradicate that enmity in their minds. There is only one way in which that enmity in the human mind can be erased.

The only way that enmity against God can be rooted out of the human mind and replaced by a different spirit is for that person himself or herself to ACTIVELY DECIDE TO CHANGE!

No sermon or article or example has the power to make anyone change their way of thinking.

HOWEVER ...

Over the past approximately 2000 years very many people **HAVE CHANGED** their way of thinking, after hearing the Apostle Peter preach on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:37), after hearing the Apostle Paul, and after hearing many other ministers preach since then (see Romans 10:14-15), right down to Mr. Armstrong and on to our time today.

So how do we explain that? People change after hearing Peter and Paul, but they don’t change after hearing Jesus Christ during the millennium. How does that work?

The key for why people change their way of thinking, be it in apostolic times, or be it today, or be it

during the millennium, is always the same. The key is never the speaker and the message people hear or read. The key is always SOMETHING IN THEIR OWN MINDS! The key is always that there **FIRST** must be "**a willing mind**"! Without people having a willing mind even Jesus Christ is not able to persuade people to change their way of thinking to "the give way".

While Paul was speaking about a different subject (he was talking about free will offerings), the principle he presented in 2 Corinthians 8 also applies to our approach to obedience in general.

For **if there be first a willing mind**, *it is* accepted according to that a man hath, *and* not according to that he hath not. (2 Corinthians 8:12)

It is always "the willing mind" that is the key, not the speaker we happen to hear, even if that Speaker was Jesus Christ Himself. And we ourselves decide whether our minds are "willing" or not.

God said the same thing in the Old Testament. As God said:

Come now, and **let us reason together**, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. (Isaiah 1:18)

Here is God inviting us to reason with Him. What follows is the key to a right relationship with God. Are we ready to look at God's reasoning?

If ye be **willing** and **obedient**, ye shall eat the good of the land: (Isaiah 1:19)

Unless there is first a willing mind, the obedience isn't going to be of the right type. We ourselves have full control over whether our minds are going to be "willing" or not. And that has nothing to do with whether we hear good sermons or poor sermons. And if we refuse to have a willing mind, then everything else will be meaningless.

But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken *it*. (Isaiah 1:20)

We ourselves are the ones who decide whether our minds will be willing, or whether we will refuse to use our minds God's way.

On his deathbed King David instructed his son Solomon along the same lines.

And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and **serve him with a perfect heart** and **with a willing mind**: for the LORD searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts: if thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but **if thou forsake him**, he will cast thee off **for ever**. (1 Chronicles 28:9)

The most important aspect in serving God is to do so with a willing mind. A mechanical calculated obedience does not come from a willing mind; a calculated obedience is the expression of **a selfish mind**, because a calculated obedience **weighs up all its options** before making a decision. Selfishly motivated obedience is of no value before God. And even during the millennium some people will have nothing more than a calculated obedience.

Let me try to illustrate this attribute of the human mind's unwillingness to change.

THE EXAMPLE OF POLITICS

Yes, I personally hate to see our political leaders deliberately destroy the country. And if I had the ability to stop foolish policies I would certainly try to stop those policies. But the following example has nothing to do with any personal loyalties or preferences. The principle in the following example applies to both sides of the political spectrum.

Here in the U.S. we are currently in the middle of some very emotionally-charged electioneering. The accusations and the innuendos are flying "fast and furious" in both directions. Daily there are political discussions on the radio and on TV. And here is the fact that always strikes me so vividly in these discussions.

This is how it typically goes:

The first person will present some or other facts which expose a clear problem in the position which is represented by the second person, and he will then ask the other party: now is that the right thing to say or do, or is it the wrong thing to say or do? What do you say to the facts I am presenting to you?

The second person then point-blank refuses to comment on the facts that have been presented, and instead either ignores those facts completely, or else tries to discredit those facts, or else tries to present other facts that are supposedly equally bad or even worse, but apply to the views held by the first person.

The first person then tries again to force his opposite number to acknowledge the problem he is pointing out.

The second person again refuses to squarely face the facts presented by the first person, and instead digs his heels in, and defends the views of his candidate.

And on and on and on it goes. The candidate of either party could be intending to burn down the whole country, and the people in these debates would still defend their particular candidates, even if they have to claim that "burning down the country" is the best possible course of action in these circumstances. They would in effect defend Nero's right to fiddle while he was burning down Rome. Nothing will get them to acknowledge facts they don't like.

Now don't misunderstand.

Here in this context I am not concerned with which political position is right and which position is wrong. My personal views on this matter are not germane to our discussion in this article.

My only concern here is the vivid illustration of the human mind's utter unwillingness to face facts it simply doesn't like, and its desperate attempts to twist and distort the facts it doesn't like!

Heated political debates and exchanges are probably one of the most vivid ways to see **the carnal mind's enmity in action**! The carnal mind will simply refuse to look at facts it doesn't like, facts that it knows will call its (the carnal mind's) position into question. Simple objective facts can never force a hostile mind to acknowledge those facts. That's why I think of certain people in these heated discussions as "**hypocrites on steroids**"; facts never make an impression on those people. They will deliberately ignore or twist the facts.

The point for us to understand is this:

The human mind, that in the political arena refuses to admit clear facts that it doesn't like, will do exactly the same thing in its interactions with God! So when we look at a heated political debate, we can see how those same minds would respond to God, i.e. unless they come to a real repentance (which literally means "to change the way they think"). It is not far fetched to see that type of mind under pressure responding to God with a mechanical and calculated obedience.

All the people that rebel against God at the end of the millennium will still have exactly the same type of mind which today in the political arena vehemently resists all the facts it doesn't like.

So let's move on.

DO YOU WANT TO PLAY THE "BLAME GAME"?

In the past two decades it has become rather commonplace for some people in God's Church to blame others for all their problems. It is the Church's fault that things didn't turn out well for them. Their problems are the fault of the teachings that the ministry supposedly forced down their throats. They find fault with the things Mr. Armstrong taught the Church. And especially **they find fault with the ministry**. Every problem they have ever had is because **the ministry was bad**. And obviously, it is the minister's fault that their children didn't stay in the Church.

For example: I know that there are some people who feel that it is my fault that their children did not remain in the Church. If only I had said or done things differently, so they believe, then their children would surely still be in God's Church today. I also know that many other people blame other ministers, men who happened to have been their pastors at some point, in the same way, that if these men had done things differently, then their children or parents would supposedly also still be in the Church.

All the people who rebel at the end of the millennium will be somebody's sons or daughters. And that attitude would blame Jesus Christ for not having done things differently, so that their sons and daughters would not rebel at the end of the millennium.

That would be the same old "blame game" attitude.

Over the past 20+ years a large number of people have left the Church. Many children of church members have left, and many parents of church members have left. And in most cases the reasons why all these people left the Church are not because their ministers handled things the wrong way. Yes, over the past 50 years the ministry has not always done things in the best possible ways. And I have written some articles that discuss those things in some detail.

But the main reason why so many people have left the Church during the past quarter of a century is because **their obedience to the laws of God had never grown past the stage of being mechanical and calculated**. For those people obedience to God's ways had never become spontaneous and intuitive.

One of the proofs that this was the case for those people is the "**tell me what to do**" attitude so very many of the people who have left God's Church used to have!

Yes, in the 50's and 60's and 70's the ministry in many cases actually encouraged this approach, of members looking to their pastors for almost all the major decisions in their lives. But for the past 30 years that approach has been fairly rare in the majority of church circumstances, though today some smaller groups still actively enforce this approach. However, if today people choose to belong to a group with

that type of controlling approach, then it is really their own fault, since there are numerous other Church of God groups around that don't encourage that type of approach at all.

Furthermore, there have always been people in the Church who of their own initiative adopted a "tell me what to do" attitude towards the ministry. And a "tell me what to do" attitude is the clearest proof that such people have never progressed to the point where their obedience is intuitive and spontaneous. If somebody has to "tell me what to do" regarding obedience to God, after I have been in God's Church for longer than a decade, then my obedience is obviously only mechanical, without my own mind taking a stand in the matter one way or the other.

The "Ethiopian eunuch" who was baptized by Philip (Acts 8:37-39) never had a chance to ever ask a minister "tell me what to do" regarding all the decisions that he had to make for the rest of his life. He had to figure out all the answers by himself.

The "tell me what to do" approach demonstrates **an absence of commitment**. I am neither committed to do "A", nor am I committed to do "B"; rather, I will do either "A" or "B" depending on what you tell me. But I myself don't have a personal commitment for either option.

David had the option to kill or not to kill Saul. If David had taken a "tell me what to do" approach, then all his men would without hesitation have said "kill him". There is a very important lesson in this.

People who, for whatever reasons, have approached the ministry with a "tell me what to do" attitude can never claim diminished responsibility for the decisions they made! Saying "**I just did what the minister told me to do**" is never, never a justification for a wrong decision! We are just as responsible for the decisions we make when we do what the minister told us to do, as we are when we make those same decisions without any input from the ministry.

Eve's responsibility was not diminished because she did what Satan told her to do. Adam's responsibility was not diminished because he did what Eve asked him to do (to also take a bite). Had David killed Saul, his responsibility would not have been diminished simply because he would have done what his men told him to do. King Saul's responsibility in not killing Agag and the best of the animals (1 Samuel 15:9) was not diminished simply because Saul did what the people told him to do. We always remain accountable for all our actions, whether we act independently, or whether we act on input and advice from others.

A "tell me what to do" approach towards the ministry is one of the worst possible positions for any mature church member to be in, because that position stands for a lack of personal commitment and understanding.

To make this quite plain:

There is absolutely nothing that I can do to make my wife or my children or my parents or my friends change their way of thinking! No sermon or article or discussion or reasoning can make people change their way of thinking. Likewise, **there is absolutely nothing you can say or do** to make your wife or husband or parents or children or friends change their way of thinking.

[**COMMENT:** There is a big difference between "seeking good advice from a multitude of counselors", and coming to someone with a "tell me what to do" attitude. Seeking good advice is always to be encouraged, while the "tell me what to do" attitude is always to be discouraged. Good advice is something we carefully evaluate, and then accept because we can see its merits. My comments here are not intended to apply in any way to people seeking good advice.]

If our parents or spouses or children do change **their way of thinking**, our right examples may perhaps have had some influence. But the primary reason why they changed their way of thinking was not our good example! The primary reason why they changed their way of thinking was because they DECIDED to voluntarily change their way of thinking. There was something in their minds that took note of the good examples we hopefully set. That "something" had to be in their minds first, and they themselves had to provide that "something".

The exact same thing applies to people who are called by God. Many are called but few are chosen (Matthew 22:14). The call is heard by many people. But the only ones who are chosen are those who had that "something" in their own minds at the time they were exposed to that call.

So understand this!

Nobody will get into the Kingdom of God without himself or herself providing that "something".

COMING BACK TO PEOPLE IN THE MILLENNIUM

People during the millennium will be taught and instructed by Jesus Christ and by the 144,000 in the first resurrection. And they will not have a choice as to whether or not they will abide by all of God's laws. Obedience to the laws of God will be enforced. So during the millennium all people will obey God's laws.

And they will genuinely smile and be cheerful, happy to generously share their bountiful blessings from God with other people. And yet, when Satan is loosed after those 1000 years, many of them will equally readily follow Satan and seek to fight against God. Think of this: people who are genuinely friendly and kind and helpful on one day suddenly change their whole attitude to one of resentment against God, and they join Satan in that vast rebellious army of Revelation 20:8.

We've seen exactly the same thing in our age, haven't we? Many of us personally know some people who used to be so kind and generous and helpful back a few decades ago; and once the Tkach administration assumed power and began to introduce heresies, they seemed to change; and then it wasn't long before they disappeared altogether.

Think about that!

At the end of the millennium how can people who have been so nice and kind all their lives suddenly become so hostile towards Jesus Christ and towards the way of life that has been established under Jesus Christ's rule? How can that happen?

Listen!

I obviously cannot prove this, but I suspect that all these people who rebel at the end of the millennium don't really understand their own minds!

They don't understand that they have never made a real and unconditional commitment to God. If you tell them that this is the case (that they have never made a total commitment to God) **they will be speechless**. They will be stunned if you tell them this. The reason is this: IN THEIR OWN MINDS they have always been obedient and faithful to God. They cannot see that **there was something missing in their relationship with God**, something that they themselves should have provided, but didn't provide!

I suspect that their attitude is basically like the man in the parable who came to the wedding without a wedding garment (see Matthew 22:11). Notice how the confrontation between God and that man proceeded.

And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? **And he was speechless**. (Matthew 22:12)

This individual cannot see that he is different from the majority of people around him. He cannot perceive that everyone else is wearing a wedding garment, but that he doesn't have such a garment. In his own mind he is just like everyone else around him.

BUT IN THE EYES OF GOD HE IS NOT!

Applying this scenario to people during the millennium, this individual has no idea that most of the people around him have a completely different way of thinking from the way he uses his mind. Outwardly he obeys God's laws just as all the other people around him do. But the other people obey God intuitively, based on the give way of thinking. He, on the other hand, obeys God mechanically based on the get way of thinking.

To him these two ways are the same. Or, to state this another way: he cannot actually perceive that there is a different way to use his mind, from the way he himself thinks. He cannot perceive the give-way of thinking.

And so he cannot understand that before God there is a huge difference between obedience based on God's way of thinking, and obedience based on the natural human mind's way of thinking. His attitude is: I am doing everything You tell me to do, so what is the problem? He cannot understand that obedience based on an ungodly motivation is worthless before God.

And no matter how you try to explain this to him, he is just not going to get it! Jesus Christ and those in the first resurrection try throughout the entire millennium to help people to understand this distinction. But Revelation 20:8 shows that even so a vast number of people will simply never get it.

So I suggest that you **go easy on playing the blame game!**

When you understand that even Jesus Christ Himself and all those in the first resurrection are unable to persuade a vast number of people from ever accepting God's way of thinking, no matter what Jesus Christ may do, then you would be wise to back off from assuming that the rest of your family left the Church because of what the minister or the Church did or didn't do. If you are "willing" to see it, you should recognize that in all likelihood those from your family who left the Church had never at any time progressed to the point of obeying God intuitively and spontaneously. In all likelihood their obedience had never been more than mechanical and calculated.

We should understand that **people who are in the stage of mechanical and calculated obedience to the laws of God are ALWAYS at a high risk of leaving the Church**. If the right circumstances come about, then people in this group will leave! And the reason they will leave has nothing to do with the circumstances that supposedly trigger their leaving. Their leaving has everything to do with their own state of mind which is expressed in their calculated and mechanical obedience. Their risk of leaving the Church does not diminish until they in their own way of thinking make the transition from calculated obedience to spontaneous and intuitive obedience.

And if your relatives (parents, spouses, children, etc.) who have left the Church were in this category of calculated obedience, then it was only a question of time before something would be the trigger for them

to leave the Church. You should also understand that as our children grow up in the Church, during their youth and young adulthood they will almost always still be in the calculated obedience category, though there may well be some exceptions to this.

When I say that most young people in the Church are still in the calculated obedience category, I do not mean to imply that their keeping of the Sabbath and Feasts and Holy Days and tithing, etc. may not be based on a firm resolve. They may well be very sincere and have a strong commitment towards keeping the Sabbath, etc., even while their obedience is still mechanical. To consider just one example, it is in deciding what activities are appropriate for the Sabbath and what activities are not appropriate for the Sabbath, etc., that it becomes clear that their thinking has not yet progressed to the stage of their obedience being intuitive. They are still in a learning and maturing stage.

Regarding people who have left God's Church (i.e. including our own relatives who have left), the Apostle John explained: they went out from us **so that it might become obvious** that they were not of us (see 1 John 2:19). Because if they had been of us, John tells us, they would undoubtedly have continued with us.

Can you see that **the Apostle John makes the same point** I am making, that the cause of their departure lies somewhere in their own minds, and not in the physical outward factors that we usually prefer to focus on? And if we are honest, then we need to face up to the fact that very often people seek to justify why other members of their family have left the Church ("they were treated badly by the ministry", etc.). We all need to beware lest we ourselves succumb to this very destructive way of thinking.

I understand that many people, who blame the Church or the ministry for their relatives having left the Church, will not agree with the things I am saying here. Where their own close relatives are concerned, people very easily assess everything in quite subjective terms.

My responsibility is to present an objective assessment. And that is what I am doing in this article. I am trying to explain things; I am not necessarily looking for agreement. Whether or not you will agree depends largely on YOUR way of thinking, and, as already stated, I have no power whatsoever to change your way of thinking, be it right or be it wrong.

In other words, if your thinking is already based on intuitive obedience to God, then the things I say will not change that. And if your thinking is still based on calculated obedience, then the things I say will also not change that. It is your own mind that is always in full control of the way you choose to think. And your mind also has the power to decide to change the way you think. But what I am saying is that unless our thinking progresses to the point of spontaneous and intuitive obedience to all of God's laws, we are not going to be in the Kingdom of God.

So let's see if we can get a clearer picture regarding these two fundamentally opposite ways of using our minds in the process of obeying the laws of God.

CALCULATED AND MECHANICAL OBEDIENCE

Outward acts of obedience to the laws of God are clearly not enough to enable us to distinguish between spontaneous intuitive obedience and mechanical calculated obedience. Outward acts of obedience do not really reveal the inner motivations of the heart.

But God's Spirit can discern the inner motivations (Hebrews 4:12). God's Spirit can distinguish quite

clearly between spontaneous obedience and calculated obedience.

So here are some points we might consider:

1) For most people our relationship with God starts out with mechanical obedience, the exceptional example of the Apostle Paul notwithstanding. We come to understand some of the laws of God, and we try to figure out in our minds how we will be able to incorporate those laws into the way we are living our lives. We go through thought processes like: will my boss give me time off for the Sabbath and for the Feast?; how will I manage if he doesn't give me time off?; since I am already in debt, how will I manage if I have to tithe?; what will my spouse say if I want to now keep the Sabbath?; how will my in-laws react if I no longer keep Christmas and birthdays for the kids?; etc. For some people this stage of reaching a commitment takes only days or weeks, while for many others it may take a year or longer.

2) Once we have reached some kind of commitment, we want to diligently obey all of God's laws, but we are still somewhat insecure. And so we constantly seek guidance from the minister and from more mature church members. In this stage the "tell me what to do" approach is quite common, an expression of our eagerness and zeal to do everything right. And that is quite fine at this stage of our lives in God's Church.

3) This is the stage of needing "milk" to help us grow and develop. But this "needing milk" stage should only be a transitional phase. **We must move on to "strong meat"** (see Hebrews 5:12-14), a stage that is identified by a far greater sense of discernment (Hebrews 5:14).

4) After a few years in the Church most of us have settled into a certain lifestyle. We understand the basic teachings of the Church. We are no longer so insecure, and we are no longer seeking constant input for everything we do. We have read the Bible, and when we now do personal Bible study it is mostly a matter of routine, rather than constantly coming to a better understanding. We are confident that we are keeping the Sabbath and God's other laws correctly.

5) At this stage outwardly there is nothing to distinguish us from other church members who have progressed to obedience to God that is spontaneous and intuitive.

6) But there has never yet been a change in our own minds. We have mechanically examined every law of God that has come to our attention, and so we are applying those laws in our lives. But throughout this process of learning God's laws and then putting them into practice, our own way of thinking has not changed (i.e. if we are still at this stage).

7) This fact that our way of thinking has never changed throughout this process is evidenced by **our spontaneous reactions to unexpected situations**. Our spontaneous reactions in this stage of our spiritual development, in spite of living by God's laws, almost invariably put our self-interest first. Put another way, at this stage our spontaneous reactions are frequently not the best reactions. Frequently we have to be reasoned with by other people to persuade us to set aside our self-interests; mostly we don't set them aside intuitively and spontaneously without some outside input.

So how do we make the transition to spontaneous obedience?

SPONTANEOUS AND INTUITIVE OBEDIENCE

In most cases by this time it is assumed that we are submissive to all the laws of God that we are aware of. We have already made that commitment. But in order to progress towards spontaneous obedience

we also have to do something else.

1) However we choose to phrase it, we have to come to understand that **the way our own mind naturally works is a major problem for us**. The Apostle Paul worded it this way:

I delight in the law of God after the inward man. But **I see another law in my members**, warring against the law of my mind. (Romans 7:22-23)

In these verses Paul is speaking about two distinctly different ways of thinking, two different ways of using our minds. Paul's point here is that he could see both these ways of thinking in his own mind at the same time. And that created a conflict in his mind.

2) This recognition (i.e. really understanding Romans 7:22-23) is one of the major distinctions between intuitive obedience and calculated obedience. "Seeing this other law in our members" is not something that anybody else can give us or make us see. We either come to see this ourselves, after it has been brought to our attention, by the way we decide to use our minds, or we never come to see it! **This is that "something" that we ourselves have to provide!**

3) Once we recognize that our natural way of thinking (even if we are trying to keep the ten commandments) is the problem, **then we need to strive to reject our natural way of thinking**, and to embrace God's way of thinking.

4) The way to seek to embrace God's way of thinking is to **always look ahead**! Solomon recorded the following principle in the Book of Proverbs.

A prudent *man* foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished. (Proverbs 22:3)

This principle represents one of the most significant components of a godly way of thinking! It doesn't matter what is involved: **WE MUST ALWAYS LOOK AHEAD!**

We must always ask: what will be the consequences of this action? Will they be good in the sight of God, or will they be bad in God's sight? This principle must be applied to every single decision we ever make! Adam should have applied this principle. And every human being since Adam's time should always apply this principle. It is a godly way of thinking.

5) Looking ahead focuses on two things:

A) **Anticipating** the **consequences** of any actions. Everything we do has some consequences, be they good or be they bad. **GOD ALWAYS LOOKS AHEAD!** Looking ahead is a dominant feature in God's thinking. So if we want to think like God, then we must always look ahead. We should never be caught in a situation where we say "I didn't realize that this would **obviously** happen", when the logical consequences of our actions come about.

B) **Anticipating potential problems**. Sometimes our own actions are the cause for problems that arise. But there are also situations where we ourselves are not in any way causing problems, yet we can see potential problems arise, because of certain circumstances. So here we can either try to take evasive actions before any problems arise, or we can make preparations for dealing with certain problems should they arise.

6) Looking ahead means that **we always ask questions**.

When offered something to eat by people outside of God's Church, if I cannot recognize the item as obviously clean food, I routinely ask: what is this, what is it made of? (One time in Namibia I was visiting new people, and the answer to this question was "wild bush pig", though it looked like it could have been a beef stew. I'm glad I asked.)

When the Sabbath approaches we should ask ourselves: do we have everything we need for the Sabbath ... food, gas for the car, clean clothes for wearing to Church, etc.? When asked to visit people, we should always ask ourselves: will other people be present or will I be alone with someone of the opposite sex in a house or room with a closed door (important for a minister visiting ladies who are on their own)? We need to always avoid creating the appearance of evil (1 Thessalonians 5:22).

When the Days of Unleavened Bread are approaching, we need to ask ourselves: besides bread and cookies what other items in my home contain leavening agents? And when eating out during the Days of Unleavened Bread we should always be on guard for foods that surreptitiously contain leavening agents. After all, Satan is the god of this present age (2 Corinthians 4:4), and Satan's ways are always devious. You may be amazed to find out all the places where in our world today leavening agents are used.

When entering any kind of agreement, we should ask: what happens if things don't work out as planned? Does this agreement involve any financial obligations or commitments which may be difficult to meet? If we are going to engage someone to do a specific job for us: are we clear on what is expected to be done, and how much we will pay? What could possibly go wrong (actually plenty, whenever you are hiring someone privately)? Etc.

Such questions need to be asked **for everything we do or consider doing**. Looking ahead must become **as natural** for us **as breathing**. In this present life we should NEVER assume that everything is obviously okay.

This reminds me of the department manager in a large company who sent a memo to his staff, saying: "what I need is **a list of specific unknown problems we will encounter**". That request was obviously an oxymoron, since if the problems were "unknown" then his staff could hardly have listed them. However, while this manager had worded his request somewhat foolishly, the underlying idea was: let's do our best to try to anticipate what might perhaps go wrong. Where or how could problems possibly arise, for which we have not yet made any provisions? What could go wrong if we do what we are intending to do?

It doesn't matter what it is. God ALWAYS looks ahead. God is always able to "declare the end from the beginning" (Isaiah 46:10). And if we want to think like God, then we too must ALWAYS look ahead!

7) Now looking ahead means that we anticipate one or more potential results or consequences for all our decisions. And so we must be resolved in our own minds how we will respond to those consequences. The more we look ahead, the more our responses will become intuitive.

8) Looking ahead also demonstrates that we really do desire to avoid transgressing any of God's intentions for our lives. Because we are concerned about wanting to do things correctly before God, therefore we look ahead. We guard against being careless and then getting caught unprepared for one or other problem.

9) We resolve to always ask: what would God like me to do in this circumstance, rather than asking: what would I like to do in this circumstance? We always give the benefit of the doubt to God's side of any equation, rather than claiming the benefit of the doubt for our personal position. And this approach must become intuitive for us.

10) To spontaneously think like God means that we need to apply the same principles to our thinking that God applies to His thinking. For example, the Apostle Peter made clear that "**God is no respecter of persons**" (Acts 10:34). It follows that if we want to pattern our thought processes after God's mind, then we need to be sure that we too will not be respecters of persons.

And we will surely be put to the test in this area sooner or later!

God needs to find out whether we will put immediate family and close friends ahead of objective justice. If something is wrong when strangers do it, then we must obviously also reach the conclusion that it is wrong if our children or parents do it. And we must spontaneously reach the conclusion that our own close family cannot get away without censure for actions that we without hesitation recognize as wrong when they are engaged in by other people.

The priest Eli was guilty of honoring his own sons above God (1 Samuel 2:29). And whenever we spontaneously take the side of our own children or parents in whatever situation arises, then we are in danger of becoming guilty of the sin of Eli. We need to guard against that danger.

In our society we are expected to spontaneously take the side of our own close family in any dispute. That is very unfortunate indeed! If we cannot objectively censure something our own close relatives have done, when we very readily censure the same actions in other people, then we most certainly are not yet capable of thinking like God!

When we try to defend wrong actions by any of our own family members, then that is emphatic evidence that we have not yet inculcated God's way of thinking into our minds; and that in this situation our thinking is still on the level of mechanical obedience (i.e. if we spontaneously defend our close relatives before we even listen to the factual evidence that incriminates our own relatives). Whenever our loyalty to our own relatives comes ahead of loyalty to God (that is another way of saying loyalty to the truth), then we are clearly not yet thinking like God. That is precisely the type of situation Jesus Christ was referring to when He said:

He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. (Matthew 10:37)

In this verse Jesus Christ is speaking about people who take the side of their parents or their children when those people are in the wrong. To love Jesus Christ more than these close family members we need to be willing to clearly censure those family members when they are in the wrong.

When a man after God's own heart (i.e. David) sinned, then God saw to it that those sins were exposed for all of humanity to see, by having them recorded in the Bible. God certainly did not "cover up" the sins of His own servants. Closing ranks around family members who have done something wrong is a way of showing God that we love God less than we love our own family. And there are no justifications for doing that; at least not if we believe what Jesus Christ said! Many of us can think of examples in our recent history, where precisely this situation has arisen, i.e. attempts to cover up the sins of close family members of prominent church leaders. Such cover ups are always a mistake.

IN CONCLUSION

Well, there are probably still some other points that could be addressed on this subject of obedience to the laws of God. But I think we have covered enough material to enable you to develop this subject further, should you desire to do so.

So can you understand the distinction between spontaneous intuitive obedience to God’s way of life and mechanical calculated obedience to the laws of God? Think about those people at the end of the millennium who will so easily be provoked into rebelling against God, after having been taught by Jesus Christ and those in the first resurrection for decade after decade after decade.

Can you understand how it is that so many people in our age have forsaken God’s way of life after attending the Church for so many years? Can you objectively recognize that your own relatives who have left the Church had in all likelihood never progressed beyond mechanical calculated obedience? We have always had people who "with their mouth show much love" (see Ezekiel 33:31), but who then still left the Church anyway. And they were all somebody’s sons or daughters, right?

At this stage all that remains for me to tell you is:

Wherefore the rather, brethren, **give diligence to make your calling and election sure**: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: (2 Peter 1:10)

Frank W Nelte