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OUR ETERNAL DESTINY RESTS IN OUR OWN HANDS

We understand that God is working out a plan whereby God is calling a relatively small number of people now for the first resurrection, to then later give the majority of all people the opportunity for salvation during the millennium and the time allotted to those in the second resurrection. We understand that only those that God the Father calls or "draws" (see John 6:44, 65) can have a part in the first resurrection. So this fact presents a clear limitation for people who can become a part of God's Church in this age. People who have not been called by God simply cannot become a part of God's Church.

But if we are not careful the above scenario can lead us to believe that the process of God calling people is far more limited than it actually is. The reasoning "they are not in the Church because God hasn't called them" is in many cases not correct. After all, Jesus Christ did say "**many** are called, but **few** are chosen" (see Matthew 22:14), implying a certain amount of responsibility for the people that make up the difference between "the many" and "the few" in Jesus Christ's statement.

In plain language:

The responsibility for all those from amongst "the many" that are not chosen does not lie with God! Their lack of response to God, resulting in them not being chosen, is not due to God supposedly not calling them; it is due entirely to the way they themselves chose to respond to being called. Jesus Christ clearly said that "**many are called**". The question then is: **why are most of those who are called not "chosen"?** And how does God treat those from amongst the "many" that will not be "chosen"? What happens to them?

It is important for us to understand these things because they affect a person's eternal salvation.

Consider the following situation:

You hear what you believe is a really good sermon. You say to yourself: boy, **if only** my parents or my children or my best friends in this other Church of God group could hear this sermon, **then they would understand**! Or it could be a booklet or article that you have read that elicits this response from you. And so you pass on a CD (or booklet or article) to your parents (or children or best friends, etc.) and you say "listen to this (or read this) and then you'll really understand the truth about this subject". And so they listen to (or read) whatever you had given them. And then you see them again.

And are they as excited about the information you shared with them as you are? Overwhelmingly they are not, right? Most of the time **they disagree with you, don't they**? It is only very seldom that they have become as excited as you are about the material you shared with them. Most of the time they are indifferent about the material you gave to them.

To illustrate this point:

Quite a number of people have listened to the feast sermons I made available this year. Several people commented that they found the sermons to be helpful. But I also received an email from one man who didn't like them at all, and he expressed his disapproval in the strongest terms. He didn't comment on any of the Scriptures I explained in those 11 hours of sermons.

He did nothing more than vent his personal feelings of anger without any explanations whatsoever for his anger. My explanations simply did not fit in with his picture of God's ways of working with us human beings. And that's not a problem to me. I really couldn't care less what he thinks. But it illustrated once again that different people can look at the same information, and then reach completely different conclusions.

I have always known that I don't have the power to make anyone understand any spiritual principles, no matter how clear I might think my explanations happen to be. I know that some people understand the things I explain, while others look upon those same explanations as "foolishness", to use Paul's reference to this type of situation (see 1 Corinthians 1:18; 1 Corinthians 1:23; etc.).

The difference in response is always due to the fact that "the things of God knows no man but (by) the Spirit of God" (1 Corinthians 2:11). Without God's Spirit making understanding possible, it is inevitable that people will not be able to understand the things of God. And I don't have the power to give anyone such understanding.

So I have received comments that express both extremes in how my sermons affected people. That is always how it works. And there is nothing I can do to help some people to understand.

But why is it that some people can understand the truth when it is explained to them, while other people simply cannot understand? **Why can't such people see the logic** that you and I can see so clearly? The answers to these questions lie in a parable Jesus Christ gave.

THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER

Notice Matthew chapter 13.

The same day went Jesus out of the house, and sat by the sea side. And **great multitudes** were gathered together unto him, so that he went into a ship, and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore. (Matthew 13:1-2)

This is the setting for what then followed. Gathered before Jesus Christ was a great multitude of people. Ostensibly they were all there because they wanted to hear the things that Jesus Christ was teaching. But that wasn't really true for everyone in that multitude. Later we see that many of the people followed Jesus Christ for other reasons. Some were hoping for some free food, and others were hoping to see some miracles being performed (e.g. Matthew 15:31). So this multitude before Jesus Christ in Matthew 13 represented **a mixed bag of motivations for being there**.

Let's continue in Matthew chapter 13.

And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, **a sower went forth to sow**; (Matthew 13:3)

What then follows is the well-known parable of the sower. We are already very familiar with this parable, right? So do you feel that you already understand this parable quite well? After we have examined this parable in some detail you might ask yourself that question again: how well did you really understand this parable before? There are some things about this parable that very few people in the Church have previously considered. So let's now examine this parable in some detail.

For a start, the focus of this parable is not the sower, and the focus is also not the land on which the

seeds fall. **The focus of this parable** is the seed and **what happens to the seed**. The seed is at the center of this parable. The whole account is presented from the seed's perspective, where it lands and what happens to it in each case. People are not directly mentioned in this parable itself, although this parable very obviously relates to people.

This focus tells us that the purpose of this parable is to tell us something about what God does, and how human beings respond to what God does. The whole picture is presented from God's point of view, not from a human point of view. It shows us how God views the consequences that His actions produce amongst human beings.

We'll see that the seeds fall on **four** different types of ground or soil.

And when he sowed, some *seeds* fell **by the way side**, and the fowls came and devoured them up: (Matthew 13:4)

This represents **the first** of the four types of ground that the seeds fall on. We are told that in this environment the seeds' fate is to be devoured by birds. This category of seeds never even starts to achieve its purpose of sprouting and then bearing fruit. This category is **doomed to failure** before it can even get established.

Some fell **upon stony places**, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth: And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. (Matthew 13:5-6)

This represents **the second** of the four types of ground that the seeds fall on. In this case the seeds do take root to some degree! The soil is actually okay for producing fruits, but **there is just not enough soil available**. And so the problem here is that, because the soil is only very shallow, i.e. in very limited supply, therefore the few roots that had developed were only very shallow and not able to support the full plants once "the heat was turned up". What doomed these particular seeds to failure was **the limited and insufficient availability of good soil**.

And some fell **among thorns**; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them: (Matthew 13:7)

This represents **the third** of the four types of ground that the seeds fall on. In this case the seeds have **adequate amounts of good soil** available for growth, certainly much more soil than the seeds on stony places. And so the seeds do in fact take root and begin to grow. But unfortunately the seeds find themselves in a very unsavory environment populated by nasty thorns and thistles. The result is that this nasty environment overwhelms the seeds to the point of choking the life out of them. So these particular seeds are **pressured into failure by the unsavory characters** (i.e. the thorns) that dominate the seeds' environment.

But other fell into **good ground**, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold. (Matthew 13:8)

This represents **the fourth** of the four types of ground that the seeds fall on. In this case the ground is good and available in abundant quantities, and furthermore there is nothing bad or negative in the seeds' environment. So **these seeds produce much fruit**.

That's the parable. That is all that Jesus Christ told the general public for this particular parable. Later when His disciples came to Him, Jesus Christ explained this parable to them; but He did not give the explanation for this parable to the multitudes. He deliberately withheld certain information from the multitudes.

This means that the great multitudes who followed Jesus Christ were somewhat like most people around you who don't understand certain spiritual knowledge that you are able to understand. They may have heard some things but they haven't really understood.

THE ABILITY TO UNDERSTAND

Before we look at Jesus Christ's own explanation for this parable, let's first look at what Matthew recorded right after this parable and before presenting the explanation. That is the same sequence in which Jesus Christ dealt with this subject.

And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why do You speak to them in parables? He answered and said unto them, Because **it is given unto you** to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but **to them it is not given**. (Matthew 13:10-11)

The difference between Jesus Christ's disciples and the multitudes in general was that God had given "something" to Christ's disciples, which "something" God had not given to the multitudes that followed Jesus Christ. That "something" was **the ability to comprehend spiritual knowledge**, the ability to know "the things of God" (see 1 Corinthians 2:11).

Now when people who have been given this ability and people who have not been given this ability both look at the same spiritual information, i.e. the same sermons or the same articles, etc., then they will come away with two completely different impressions.

Those who have not been given this ability **will fail to comprehend** the real significance of any spiritual information, **no matter how much spiritual information they are given**. The problem for their lack of understanding the spiritual information correctly is not that they weren't given enough information. They could be given a ton of information, and they still wouldn't get it. The real problem for that group of people is that they, just like the multitudes that followed Jesus Christ, haven't been given the ability to comprehend spiritual knowledge.

This means that it is inevitable that **there will always be two completely different responses** when spiritual understanding is presented to any group of people in any of the congregations of the various Church of God groups. Those who have been given the ability to know "the things of God" will always come away with a different understanding from those people who have not been given this ability.

It is a mistake to assume that simply because people attend one of the Church of God groups, that therefore they must surely have been given this ability to understand the things of God. The vast numbers of baptized people who have left the Church since Mr. Armstrong's death proves otherwise. The Church has always had many people attend who did not really understand God's truth. You might also look at 1 John 2:19 in this regard.

Okay, so if we have two different groups, where one group has not been given an ability by God which ability God has given to the other group, then how could the first group possibly be responsible for not understanding the things of God? And why doesn't God give that ability to comprehend equally to all the people who attend His Church? Doesn't it seem a little unfair for some people who attend God's Church to not be given an ability that is given to other people who are also in the Church?

Let's understand.

MATTHEW 13:12

Jesus Christ provided the explanation for these questions in the very next verse.

For whosoever has, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever has not, from him shall be taken away even that he has. (Matthew 13:12)

In English the verb "has" is used in two distinct ways. Firstly, it has the meaning "to possess". Secondly, the word "has" functions as an auxiliary verb, qualifying another verb.

When the word "has" is used with the meaning "to possess", then we expect it to be followed by an object, as in "he has money" and in "he has a book", etc. When the word "has" is not followed by an object, then our minds are conditioned to expect the word "has" to be followed by another verb, where "has" functions as an auxiliary verb, as in "he has eaten" and as in "he has come", etc.

Either way we are conditioned to expect something to follow the word "has", either an object or else another verb, to clarify the intended meaning of "has" in that context.

But in our English text of Matthew 13:12 the word "has" is not followed by another word. And so the expression "for whosoever has" leaves us hanging in the air. This expression raises the automatic question "**has what?**". Is the intended meaning here speaking about "possessing something"? Or is the word "has" intended to qualify another perhaps implied verb?

The expression "for whosoever has" in Matthew 13:12 creates an unclear picture, because it presents an incomplete thought.

In this verse "has" is a translation of the Greek verb "echei", a form of the Greek verb "echo". The main meanings with which the Greek word "echo" is used in the NT include:

1) to have, to hold to, to hold fast to

2) to own, to possess

3) to lay hold of a thing, to adhere to

4) **to be closely joined to** a person or a thing

Matthew 13:12 should really read something like:

For **whosoever has produced**, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but **whosoever has not produced**, from him shall be taken away even that he has. (Matthew 13:12)

Keep in mind that Jesus Christ made this statement in the context of **expecting seeds to produce fruit**. So in this verse Jesus Christ referred to one person who has laid hold on the seed that was sown, and become closely joined to it and committed to it, thereby producing growth. Then Christ referred to another person who has not produced because that person never really laid hold on the seed that he had received and he didn’t join the seed to himself; and therefore he didn’t produce growth.

A key here is that in order for us to produce fruit we must become "joined to" the seed, an expression of commitment, a commitment that many people have not really made. And the verb "has" in this verse is used in connection with bringing forth fruit by becoming joined to the seed.

Also keep in mind:

This statement in verse 12 is an explanation for and elaboration of the statement in verse 11. **Verse 12 explains why "it is given" to some, and why "it is not given" to others.**

In plain language: Giving or not giving the ability to understand the things of God is not something that God does arbitrarily. It is not "the luck of the draw" that some are chosen and others are not chosen. **The calling and election of God is based on Matthew 13:12!**

And that brings us back to the parable of the sower. So now let's examine Jesus Christ's own explanation for this parable.

BY THE WAYSIDE

Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower. **When any one heareth the word** of the kingdom, and **understandeth *it* not**, then cometh the wicked *one*, and catcheth away that which was sown **in his heart**. This is he which received **seed by the way side**. (Matthew 13:18-19)

The first point is that "**the seed**" applies to a person "hearing the word of the kingdom of God". So "the seed" represents making **the truth about God's plan** of salvation available. The seed represents a message from God, truth that God has revealed to us human beings. And on all four types of ground the seed is always the same. **The seed is not a variable**; it is the same seed whether it falls by the wayside or on stony ground or amongst thorns or on good ground. And the sowing takes place "in a person's heart", i.e. in his mind.

To put this in plain terms: **"the seed" refers to "the calling of God"**! Many seeds are spread, and **many are called**. The seed and the calling are one and the same thing!

So the subject of this parable of the sower is how God calls people and what happens to that calling in various different circumstances. We can now rephrase our earlier statement as follows: **The focus of this parable is the calling of God and what happens to the calling of God**. This is the focus that we need to understand, that there are different responses from different people when God calls them! And **all of them are called by God**. The person by the wayside had clearly "received" the seed.

Now a message doesn't really fall on any ground or soil. A message reaches a person's mind. It is the mind which will process any information that comes to the person. So "**the ground**" in the parable represents **the mind of a person**. In Jesus Christ's explanation "the heart" likewise stands for the mind. Since there are four different types of "ground" in the parable, therefore they must represent **four different ways that human minds respond when confronted with a calling from God**, when they "receive" the seed from God.

At this point we might make an observation: God actually "calls" a lot of people, far more than just those that end up on good ground in God's Church.

When a human mind is exposed to the truth of God, then one of two things always happens: either the truth of God is not understood at all, or it is understood to varying degrees.

So in response to God's calling:

The seed by the wayside represents the human mind not understanding the truth of God at all. The other

three types of ground represent the truth of God being understood at least to some degree, with the three types representing continually greater understanding of the things of God.

To put these things into some kind of perspective, if we represent an understanding of the truth of God when God extends a calling to people on a scale from 0-10, then:

- by the wayside = Level 0

- on stony ground = Level 2

- amongst thorns = Level 5

- on good ground = Level 10

This scale is not intended to imply accuracy, not at all. So you can ignore these numbers. The only point is: there is a continual progression towards greater understanding of the truth of God as we go through these four types of ground. And zero understanding applies only to the first group. The other three groups are all above zero in their understanding, with the good ground obviously achieving the highest level of understanding.

We should also keep in mind that the greater the understanding, the greater the accountability to God. This is the principle of Luke 12:48.

So **the seed by the wayside** represents a human mind that cannot understand anything about the plan of God, irrespective of how many sermons that person may have heard, or how many articles they may have read. The things they heard and read never sank in; they never really understood the things of God.

Now note! This lack of ever really understanding is not due to them being unintelligent or stupid or supposedly "not called"! It has nothing to do with their IQ. Their lack of understanding is caused by them allowing Satan to have such an influence over their minds that the truth of God can never really break through that bias. That bias is so deeply ingrained. But **they themselves are nevertheless in control of and responsible for this situation**.

Let me give you an example that applies in a limited way:

Let’s suppose that you are someone who is thoroughly convinced that Satan used to have the name "Lucifer". You simply know that that used to be Satan’s name, even though God obviously did not give any Latin language names to any of the angels (i.e. Michael and Gabriel are Hebrew names, so why would God have given Satan a Latin language name?). Anyway, that’s what Isaiah 14:12 says and nothing can shake your belief on this matter, at least not up till now.

And then some whippersnapper smart aleck comes along and actually has the nerve to say that not only did the name "Lucifer" never at any time belong to Satan; but that "Lucifer" is in fact a name that applies to Jesus Christ. And then he tries to confuse you with a whole bunch of Hebrew and Greek and Latin words to supposedly prove his point.

If your mind is like the soil "by the wayside", then no amount of proof can get through to you. You may hear the proof, or you may read the proof; but because of your mindset that proof can never get through to you. On this particular issue Satan has got your mind so thoroughly deceived (Revelation 12:9) that nothing will convince you that Satan before his rebellion didn’t have the Latin name Lucifer. And your level of intelligence is immaterial in this matter. This has

nothing to do with intelligence.

If you can understand this example, then you should be able to identify people who are "by the wayside", not only out in the world, but even occasionally attending one of the Church of God congregations. This group of people is not simply identified as being outside of God's Church, although that is where most of those by the wayside are. **They are identified primarily by their mindset**, a mindset that does not permit the truth of God to really sink into their minds, like a mental block to understanding the truth of God.

The name "Lucifer" is just one specific example. But you can see that same mindset with numerous other issues, where no amount of objective, factual knowledge will get through to people. The seed of the truth on those particular issues doesn't stand a chance of "taking root" in those people's minds, and the birds of the air will take those seeds away from them before the seeds can do any good.

I should clarify one point at this stage.

Our minds are very complex. The four examples in this parable oversimplify things somewhat for teaching purposes. In practice very many people incorporate in their minds aspects of many different, and sometimes even conflicting positions on life. Thus, as far as God's truth is concerned, someone may have a mind that exhibits aspects of "the wayside" and at the same time also exhibit "stony ground" and also "amongst thorns" and even some "good ground". It is seldom a clear-cut picture of just one category without any influence from any other category being present. It is really a case of one of these four being the dominant category, rather than being the exclusive category.

So my point is: Many people who are basically "on good ground" may quite possibly **on certain specific issues** have a mental block. None of us are perfect, meaning that none of us are "on good ground and nothing but good ground". If that were the case, then we would already be perfect, which we most certainly are not. So all of us are likely to also have **some** stony ground and **some** thorns in our own mindset, which mindset hopefully is overall dominated by "good ground". This may in part account for the differences between producing a hundredfold when compared to only producing sixty-fold or only producing thirty-fold?

Recognizing in someone else a certain mindset **on one specific issue** does not necessarily place that person into that particular grouping for every other aspect of their being.

I mention this lest we go about judging other people based on one particular issue. On some issues even Mr. Armstrong had a mental block. Today many people have a mental block when it comes to dealing with the calendar question. And the chances are that you and I also have our own mental blocks in certain other areas, and we likewise cannot see our way through our own mental blocks.

Realize that there is a difference between a mental block on the one hand, and being "willingly ignorant" (see 2 Peter 3:5) on the other hand. For someone in God's Church being willingly ignorant is a completely different thing from being by the wayside on some or other specific issue. **Being willingly ignorant carries an enormous weight of responsibility and accountability** for someone in God's Church, whereas being by the wayside on some or other specific issue carries far less responsibility.

Let's look at the next category.

ON STONY GROUND

But he that received the seed **into stony places**, the same is he that hears the word, and anon **with joy receives it**; Yet has he **not root in himself**, but endures for a while: for when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, by and by **he is offended**. (Matthew 13:20-21)

This person receives the truth of God's plan of salvation with joy! This tells us that this person has a certain level of understanding. Understanding automatically brings with it accountability. It is that understanding which causes his initial joy. But this person unfortunately has a weak character, one that typically is somewhat fearful and easily pressured by other people.

There is a very vital key in this verse. Here Jesus Christ made quite clear that **"the roots" must always be provided by the person himself**!

For a plant to grow and produce fruit there must be four things:

- There must be a **seed** to start with.

- There must be **soil** to provide the right environment.

- There must be **sunshine** to provide energy and power.

- There must be **rain** (i.e. water) to enable growth to take place.

Those are the four essential ingredients: seed, soil, sunshine and rain. This process mirrors the way God implements His plan of salvation for mankind. But that plan requires a cooperative effort between God and each individual person; a person who is called must work with the things God provides.

As far as these four essential ingredients are concerned, God provides three of them, and **one of these four ingredients we ourselves are solely responsible for**, without any input from God. This is vital for us to understand.

God will always provide **the seed**, the sunshine and the rain. This could also be stated as: God will always provide **the calling**, the sunshine and the rain. The seed and the calling are interchangeable terms.

But **we ourselves must always, always provide the soil**. If we ourselves don't provide the soil for the seed that God has made available, then salvation is not possible. And we ourselves are always **responsible for the quality of the soil**! It depends totally 100% on us as to whether the soil we provide is by the wayside or on rocky ground or amongst thorns or whether it is good ground. Before God we can never blame anyone else if the quality of the soil we provide is in some way undesirable. The quality of the soil we provide is a part of our character profile.

That's what free moral agency means! We ourselves have the power to turn bad ground into good ground. We are talking about right character. We control how we choose to respond to the conditions around us, Satan's deceptions notwithstanding. As Jesus Christ said, **we must have the roots for solid growth in ourselves**!

In a moment we'll take another look at these four things (i.e. seed, soil, sunshine and rain) and carry our analogy a bit further. But let's move on for now.

A major characteristic of this stony ground group is that they only provide a **very shallow** amount of soil. On the day they were baptized and started to attend church services they looked identical to all the people in the congregation who were providing good ground in their own minds. They looked solid,

sound and firm, as far as their membership of the Church was concerned.

But they are in fact shallow in their understanding, and shallow in their commitment and implementation of God's instructions, and shallow in their relationships with God's people. That's what "they had not much earth" means. And it takes either a few years or else a simple turning up of the heat (i.e. hardships and persecutions) to bring that shallowness out into the open.

They are also easily shaken and quick to go along with "every wind of doctrine" (see Ephesians 4:14). They were in the avant-garde in accepting and in implementing all the doctrinal heresies that were introduced after Mr. Armstrong's death in January 1986, quick to embrace practices that had previously not been condoned in the Church.

We might also note that the people in this group start off with "**joy**", they are **shallow**, and they end up being "**offended**". Have you ever known anyone like that?

We should understand that these people themselves are responsible for taking that approach. They themselves are responsible for their own shallowness. That shallowness is not somehow "the hand they were dealt"! It is their own doing because God requires all human beings to exercise control over our minds, and to determine for ourselves how we will respond to every situation in which we may find ourselves. **We are responsible for what we do with our minds.**

Let's look at the next category.

AMONGST THORNS

He also that received seed **among the thorns** is he that hears the word; and **the care of this world**, and **the deceitfulness of riches**, choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful. (Matthew 13:22)

This person isn't necessarily shallow in his understanding. His understanding is certainly better than those who are on stony ground; his mind has provided more ground to work with. He has established some roots and he does have some depth. He is in fact in a position to potentially become fruitful.

But he can't help feeling that he always needs to have more money. He worries about money. Money is extremely important to this individual. It is important to this person that other people think well of him. He desires the approval of other people. In some cases he is a speaker in church services, because his riches have established for him a certain status of respect in the congregation. So it is not that uncommon for people amongst thorns to be giving sermonettes and even sermons.

Obviously this does not apply to every one who is financially well off, and I don't mean to imply that. Many people in God's Church have been blessed with wealth well above their needs. And "the blessing of the Eternal, it makes rich, and He adds no sorrow with it" (Proverbs 10:22). The people in this "thorny ground" category are identified not by their wealth but by **their attitude towards wealth**. They worry that they won't have enough to pay for "the cares of this world", their desires for riches and status.

King Solomon was somewhat in this situation. He was the richest man of his time. Yet in spite of all of his wealth, he couldn't get enough. Intellectually Solomon understood that "a good name is rather to be chosen than great riches" (Proverbs 22:1), but in his own life he really wanted both. And so he needlessly taxed his own people to the hilt, to the point where the people felt oppressed by their wealthy king (1 Kings 12:4). "The thorns" that choked the life out of Solomon were all his foreign wives, coupled with his desire for more wealth. His wives exerted an enormous pressure on him to

accommodate their idolatrous practices, etc. But he himself was responsible for bringing all those thorns into his own life.

Let's look at the last category.

ON GOOD GROUND

But he that received seed into **the good ground** is he that **hears** the word, and **understands** *it*; which also **bears fruit**, and brings forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. (Matthew 13:23)

It is the mindset of these people that determines that the ground is good. And that mindset lays the foundation for them to understand. Note this point: it is **a person's mindset** that lays the foundation for a good understanding!

So notice the following points about this parable:

1) By the wayside = Christ said that **they don't understand**.

2) On stony ground = No comment regarding their understanding.

3) Amongst thorns = No comment regarding their understanding.

4) On good ground = Christ said that **they do understand**.

The progression is from a total lack of understanding for the first group to a good understanding for the fourth group. Groups two and three fall between these two extremes, with more understanding than group one, but clearly less understanding than group four. The understanding of groups two and three is thus incomplete; they don't have the correct picture of God's dealings with mankind and they can't really fully understand God's ways.

It is impossible for anyone to have a good understanding of the things of God without that person's mind having "good ground"! Stony ground and thorny ground can never really have "a good understanding" of the things of God.

We should never mistake technical understanding about biblical subjects (e.g. commentators, language scholars, etc.) with a real understanding of "the mind of Christ" (see 1 Corinthians 2:16). Important is an understanding of "the right ways of the Lord" (see Acts 13:10), and that understanding can only come from God (1 Corinthians 2:11).

This brings us back to what I said earlier regarding Matthew 13:11-12. Now we come to **why** understanding "**is given**" to some people and **why** it "**is not given**" to other people. Whether or not God "gives understanding" to people depends completely on "the ground" that they provide in their minds. The better the ground which they provide, the more understanding God will give; and the worse the ground they provide, the less understanding God will give. That is what we see with the four types of ground.

The degree of understanding that God gives to those He has called (i.e. those who have received the seed) depends on the type of ground that they provide for the seed God has presented to their minds.

In plain terms: **you yourself are responsible** for the degree of spiritual understanding that God will give to you. This brings us to the next point.

THE KEY FOR GROWTH

The key for growth and for producing fruit is always **the quality of the soil**. The seed itself has no effect whatsoever on the quality of the soil. The seed has no power to make stony ground or thorny ground into good ground. Seeds only provide us with information.

What we need to understand is that we ourselves are always responsible for the quality of the ground in our minds. We have full control over that quality. The same applies to all other people; they have the power to control the quality of the soil in their minds, irrespective of their stations in life. Very few people understand this responsibility correctly.

We talk a lot about godly character. But godly character is essentially nothing other than committing ourselves to provide good ground for the seeds that God plants. And people with stony ground or with thorny ground don't really have godly character.

That brings us back to that good sermon or article we passed on to our family or friends, in the hope that this material would help them to understand. **What we don't realize is that the sermon or article we pass on to our family or friends does not have the power to change the quality of the ground in their minds.**

If the ground in their minds is good ground, then they may well understand the significance of the material we passed on to them. But if the ground in their minds is rocky or thorny, or even by the wayside, then the material we gave them will not do anything at all for them.

In plain terms: 1000 good sermons (i.e. about 20 years in the Church) do nothing whatsoever to change rocky ground into good ground, or to change thorny ground into good ground. Sermons can never change the quality of the ground in a person's mind. Sermons can never remove even a single thorn out of the ground in someone's mind.

Now am I trying to discourage you from listening to good sermons or from reading good explanations of the Bible? Am I critical of good sermons? Certainly not!

Let's look again at **the four things that are needed** for producing fruit. They are seed, soil, sunshine and rain. I mentioned that we ourselves must always provide the soil, that we ourselves are exclusively responsible for the condition of the soil we provide. But now let's consider the three things God always provides: the seed, the sunshine and the rain.

With most things God works through human agents. God sends His servants with messages to His people, as we can see throughout the Old Testament. So here is the point about these three things God provides for producing fruit in us human beings:

1) **God provides the seed** by having His servants proclaim the true gospel, explaining the truth of God to people, etc. God stirs up and motivates human agents to do the actual spreading of His truth. So **human beings must preach and write** so that the minds of people can be exposed to the seed. In this process those human agents are providing a witness to the people whose minds are reached by the seed, irrespective of the quality of the ground in those minds.

2) **God provides the sunshine** by **direct inspiration** of those people who at that point have good ground in their minds. In our particular analogy here the sunshine is not spread by God's servants (i.e. this is not about us "letting our lights shine"). No, when that seed falls on good ground, then **God Himself opens the mind** which contains that good ground to a degree of spiritual understanding. It is God Himself who gives people an understanding of spiritual things. So God's servants are not directly involved in this aspect of fruit being produced. This part of the process takes place strictly between God and that individual person.

3) **God provides the rain** by having His servants teach and instruct those who have started to show some growth. The rain enables the fledgling plant to absorb nourishment, food for more growth. This part of the process of producing fruit is mostly carried on by God's ministers providing spiritual food via preaching and teaching. So it is again **human beings that must provide the preaching and teaching**, in speaking and in writing. By this time the people are typically already members of a congregation somewhere in the Church of God.

So here is the point I want to make. I mention this lest you come away from reading this article with a critical view of good sermons.

We need to understand that neither the seed, nor the sunshine, nor the rain can in any way change the quality of the ground. No amount of sunshine and rain will turn stony ground into good ground; and no amount of sunshine and rain will remove the weeds that are choking the seed. This in no way diminishes the vital importance of both the sunshine and the rain in the process of producing fruit. It is simply a case that a change for the better in the soil quality is beyond the scope of the sunshine and the rain in our analogy.

Spreading the seeds requires much preaching and teaching. And providing rain for the growing plants also requires much preaching and teaching. But that preaching and teaching, even when done by Jesus Christ Himself, does not have the power to change stony ground and thorny ground into good ground. That preaching and teaching is only of value to those people who have good ground in their minds. And at no point does anyone ever relinquish responsibility for the quality of the ground in his own mind.

The reason those 1,000 good sermons are extremely valuable to some people is because those people themselves provided good fertile ground when they listened to those sermons (or read those booklets, etc.). But those sermons didn't produce good ground in those people. No, the people themselves had to provide the good ground, and then those sermons were very helpful in that good ground environment.

However:

There is a good chance that after 20 years the quality of the soil is still the same as it was 20 years earlier. And for people who themselves did not provide good ground for the spiritual food that was made available to them, the person may have more head knowledge than 20 years earlier. But in most cases that additional knowledge has not affected the quality of the soil in their minds. So pastors can preach their hearts out year after year, and achieve very little, if anything at all, in trying to upgrade the quality of the ground in someone else's mind.

The only way to change the quality of the ground in our minds is for us to actively repent! That is, we need to **change the way we use our minds**; we need to change our way of thinking. We need to accept a way of thinking where God's wishes and intentions always receive the highest priority and consideration in anything we think and do and plan to do.

This "repenting" is not about putting sins out of our lives. We're not talking about sins here. We're talking about a different way of using our minds. We're talking about a mind that seeks to understand

how God thinks and what God's wishes and intentions for our own personal lives might be. We are talking about a way of thinking that desires to please God at all times.

SOMETHING GOD DOES NOT KNOW IN ADVANCE

Now think carefully about what I am going to say.

Many farmers today would sow their seeds far more efficiently than God does in this parable. Did you know that? Our farmers today would remove rocks and thorns and weeds from their fields before sowing the seeds. And they would be quite careful to not let the seeds fall "by the wayside". God's way of sowing in this parable involves a lot of seeds being wasted, i.e. **a lot of callings are wasted**, and God's way of sowing is in fact somewhat inefficient by our standards.

Why is that? Is God deliberately inefficient? **Obviously not.** So what is the answer? Why does God not remove the rocks and the thorns before sowing the seeds? Why does God knowingly let His seeds fall by the wayside?

When God sows the seeds (i.e. when God calls people) **God does not really know in advance what type of ground His seeds will fall on**! Did you know that? Before the seeds are sown, i.e. while the people are still very much a part of this present evil world, God cannot with absolute certainty predict what will 20 years down the road turn out to be good ground, what will turn out to be stony ground, what will turn out to be thorny ground and what will turn out to be wayside. These types of ground frequently start out looking quite similar to one another before the seeds are scattered upon the ground.

This is all due to the fact that God has created us human beings with **a free will and a free mind**. Prior to our minds making any definite long-term commitments to God, it is difficult to predict with certainty how each individual mind will in fact respond to God 20 or 30 years down the road.

Consider the situation when God created Adam and Eve.

While God was undoubtedly prepared for some disobedience, I don't believe that God had anticipated the magnitude of the utter depravity human beings would sink to, just how perverse, evil, twisted and rebellious our human minds would turn out to be. God had not anticipated that for the first 1,600+ years of human existence, out of multiple millions of people that had been born, only a mere handful would actually willingly submit their lives unconditionally to God (i.e. Abel, Enoch and Noah, and perhaps even a few others?). Before the flood good ground was very, very scarce in human minds.

When we are told that "**it repented the LORD that He had made man on the earth**" (Genesis 6:6), it means that God changed His mind about how He was going to achieve His purposes. The changed plan that God set into motion after the flood is evidence that **God had not anticipated how the vast majority of human minds would function and reason**.

That is the ultimate proof that we do indeed have totally free minds, free to submit to God and also free to rebel against God. And God wouldn't have it any other way; under no circumstances did God want to create human beings whose minds had been preprogrammed to automatically always be in submission to God's wishes. However, when all is said and done, God also will not hesitate to permanently blot out all those minds that did not of their own free will choose the way of submission to God.

The flood in the days of Noah was an emergency measure, to terminate a plan that had not worked out, and to replace it with a modified plan that held out the hope of a greater success rate. God had not

expected that things would turn out as bad as they did in the first 1,600+ years.

I believe that God at first also hoped for a better return with the revised plan **after the flood**. But that too turned into a disaster. So God intervened once again and divided humanity at the tower of Babel. During that period God had also not anticipated that things would again turn so bad so quickly. That again shows that God cannot predict with absolute certainty what every human mind will decide in various circumstances.

GOD'S SELECTION OF SAUL

Consider the time when God selected Saul to be king.

God selected Saul to be king so that Saul might "save My people out of the hand of the Philistines" (1 Samuel 9:16). That was about 10 years before David was born. It was God's expectation that Saul would turn out to be a good king! Before letting Saul go, Samuel told Saul: "and the spirit of the LORD will come upon you, and you shall prophesy with them, and **shall be turned into another man**" (1 Samuel 10:6). Notice that!

The only way that Saul could be "turned into another man" was for God to give Saul **the Spirit of God**. There is no other way to change someone "into another man"! A few verses later it says: "and it was so, that when he had turned his back to go from Samuel, **God gave him another heart**" (1 Samuel 10:9).

It is absolutely clear to me, beyond any doubts whatsoever, that God fully expected Saul to be a good king, and **God gave Saul the Holy Spirit**. God was going to back up Saul at every step of the way. At that point in time Saul was clearly very humble, and there was no indication that he might ever turn out to be rebellious towards God.

But God was not able to see how "the ground" that Saul was providing in his mind for **the calling that God had extended to Saul** would change 20 or 30 years later. And it was a major blow when Saul later turned out to be weak, selfish and rebellious. That is why we are told that "**the LORD repented that He had made Saul king** over Israel" (1 Samuel 15:35). "The ground" that made up Saul's mind had become very thorny.

That statement (it repented God that He had made Saul king) all by itself makes quite clear that Saul "had been called by God" and was in the process of losing out on that calling. If that was not the time when Saul had his one chance for salvation, then God would not have "repented". **It is a serious matter when God repents!**

If Saul was going to come up in the second resurrection anyway, then God would assuredly not have repented, because Saul's rejection of God's authority would only have been a relatively minor issue, like it is for the billions of people that will come up in the second resurrection, with things that can very quickly be forgiven when those people are resurrected to a physical life.

We might keep in mind that God also gave His Spirit to David and to Solomon.

David received God's Spirit at about age 17 years when Samuel anointed him to be king (see 1 Samuel 16:13). And Solomon also received God's Spirit early in his reign as king. When Solomon in his dream asked God to give him "an understanding heart to judge Your people" (1 Kings 3:9), God said: "lo, I have given you a wise and an understanding heart" (1 Kings 3:12), meaning that God was giving Solomon the Holy Spirit. That is the only way to have a really "wise

heart".

That was when "Solomon loved the LORD" (1 Kings 3:1). When David shortly before his death spoke to Solomon, he said the following: "the word of the LORD came to me ... behold, a son shall be born to you, who shall be a man of rest; and I will give him rest from all his enemies round about; for his name shall be Solomon" (1 Chronicles 22:8-9). In 2 Samuel 12:24 it tells us that **God loved Solomon**. Yet towards the end of Solomon's life (he died in his mid-50's) "Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD" (1 Kings 11:6) and got involved in idolatry. And therefore "**the LORD was angry with Solomon**" (1 Kings 11:9).

The point is this: God gave His Holy Spirit to the first three kings of Israel. And two of them (Saul and Solomon) disappointed God. What this tells us is that God could see "the ground" in the minds of these men when He first called them, but God did not know that for two of these men the quality of the ground would change for the worse in their later lives.

As it turned out, **for both Saul and Solomon the seed had landed "amongst thorns"**; both of them allowed other people to pressure them into compromising their responsibilities before God. Saul was a disappointment for God, and with Solomon God was plain angry.

Thus: even when God selects individuals for specific jobs, with the full expectation that they will prove themselves to be faithful and true, sometimes they still turn out bad. And if that can happen to other people who were in the past called by God, then it can equally easily happen to you and to me.

We are not immune to the temptation to turn our backs on the calling of God. The Apostle Paul took this very seriously and guarded his mind against becoming a castaway (see 1 Corinthians 9:27), continuing with:"wherefore let him that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12). Since in our own minds you and I mostly don't really think we are going to fall, therefore we need to especially take heed. **Paul was talking to us.**

Let's look at God's dealings with Abraham.

A LESSON FROM ABRAHAM

God worked with Abraham for a long time. At age 75 years Abraham departed from Haran (Genesis 12:4). When he was 100 years old his son Isaac was born. For the previous 25 years "the ground" in Abraham's mind had always been good! When Isaac was at least 25 years old (possibly even a few years older?) God tested Abraham by instructing him to sacrifice his son Isaac (Genesis 22:2). At that point in time **the ground in Abraham's mind had been good for at least 50 years**! So why did God still test Abraham at that stage of his life?

We all know this story very well. When Abraham had indeed shown himself committed to sacrificing his son, God intervened. And God then said: "**now I know that you fear God**" (Genesis 22:12).

That is a very significant statement!

God had worked with this man for at least 50 years, during which time Abraham had always shown himself to be faithful to God. For the entire 50+ years Abraham's mind had always provided good ground for the seed that God had provided. **Yet during all those years God had still held back from reaching a final decision about Abraham's commitment to God.** This means that anyone who is at present faithfully obeying God is likewise still capable of changing from good ground to thorny ground.

It is when God is able to say "**now I know** that you fear God" about any individual that that person's testing has then been completed. Abraham's testing was completed with Genesis 22:12. For the rest of Abraham's life there were no more tests from God.

The point I wish to make in our context here is this:

God knew Abraham and his character very well. For over 50 years God had watched Abraham very closely. There was nothing to imply that God could not trust Abraham. Abraham was a good man, who was unconditionally loyal to God. Yet even at that stage God was not able to reach a definitive answer without first imposing one more very severe test. Can you see that?

When we have this fact in mind, how much does God know about the minds of people when God first calls them, when God first throws out the seeds?

Yes, God certainly knows **the present state of mind** for all people. That is made quite clear in Hebrews 4:12-13. But when God exposes all these human minds to His truth by way of scattering His seeds amongst them, God doesn't know how they will respond to His truth 10 or 20 years from now. What looks like good ground in some people today (e.g. Saul and Solomon) may turn out to be very thorny ground 20 years from now.

That is always the risk when you deal with totally free minds. Likewise, on the day when God created Satan, God did not suspect that Satan would later become an extremely vain and conceited rebel, because God had also given Satan a completely free mind. **It is very risky to give created beings totally free minds.** But that is a risk that God was willing to take in order to offer you and me and all human beings the potential to live for all future eternity in the presence of God.

I hope you can now understand that when God sows the seeds, **when God calls people**, then God doesn't always know what kind of reception His calling will have, what kind of ground His seeds will fall on. So from the outset when God calls "many", God knows in advance that some of those people will be "by the wayside" or "on stony ground" or "amongst thorns". God knows in advance that only "a few" of those seeds will fall "on good ground". But it isn't absolutely clear which individuals will fall into which category.

That is what Jesus Christ was referring to when He said "many are called but few are chosen".

To consider one more example: When God selected Jeroboam to be king over 10 of the tribes of Israel (1 Kings 11:31), I don't believe that God anticipated Jeroboam promptly establishing idolatry amongst those 10 tribes (1 Kings 12:28-29). Jeroboam had been such a fine young man (1 Kings 11:28), yet Jeroboam turned out to be quite selfish and evil.

By now some of you may be thinking of Philippians 1:6.

THE GOOD WORK GOD HAS STARTED

Notice what the apostle Paul wrote.

Being confident of this very thing, that **he which hath begun a good work in you** will perform *it* until the day of Jesus Christ: (Philippians 1:6)

Here is something you probably had not considered before. The good work which God has begun in us

had not yet started when God called us! Did you know that?

The good work in us does not start with the sower sowing the seeds! God knows in advance that many seeds will fall by the wayside! God knows in advance of extending His calling to us that **many of those He calls will not respond at all**, and therefore they will not be chosen. See again Matthew 22:14.

Here is the key.

God does not begin to work in anyone who does not **first** have **a positive response** to the seed he receives, i.e. first there has to be a positive response by the person to receiving a calling from God.

The whole process is **initiated by God** when God calls us by placing a seed in our minds. And **then God waits for a response from us**. This brings us back to the four types of ground on which the seeds fall.

Those whose minds represent "by the wayside" don't respond at all with their minds. And so God never even starts "a good work" in them **even though God had called them**.

The initial responses from the other three groups are all positive; i.e. not only those with good ground, but also those on rocky ground and those amongst thorns are initially excited about God's truth and God's plan of salvation. **Therefore with their initial positive responses God then, and not before then, "starts a good work" in all of the people in these three groups.** This is important to grasp because it has profound consequences.

Now here is why this point is so very important!

None of the people in whom God has "started a good work" can ever be in the second resurrection!

God only starts "a good work" one single time in any human being! Once God has started a good work in someone, then that is the sign that this is the day of salvation for them, even though this is not the day of salvation for most other people. Nobody gets a second chance at having God "start" a good work in them! Once God has started a good work in someone, then in the words of an old song it is a case of "**it's now or never**".

So let's understand this quite clearly:

God has started a good work in all the people who comprise the good ground plus the thorny ground plus the stony ground.

And so God knows in advance that a considerable number of those people in whom God has started a good work, based on their initial responses to being called, will in fact turn out to be bad before the end of the race, like Saul and Solomon turned out to be bad before the end of their lives. Obviously that is not what God desires. But that is still nevertheless far, far better than was the case for the 1,600+ years before the flood.

Once God has started that good work in a person, God cannot guarantee that that person "will make it" into His kingdom. The reason for this is that "making it" or "not making it" is simply not God's call any longer! Once God has opened a human mind to His truth, then it is always the person's call as to how they will respond to God.

What Philippians 1:6 shows is that God will do everything to try to achieve salvation for all the people

whose initial responses to God's calling were positive. God will most assuredly do His part in this process; that we can be confident of. But **God is never responsible for how we use our free minds**. And Philippians 1:6 does not guarantee in absolute terms that all those whose initial responses to God were positive will in fact endure unto the end.

Paul wrote Philippians 1:6 as an encouragement for people from the most positive perspective he could take. He wrote this from the perspective of people who are committed to hold fast to their commitment to God. It is people with that committed mindset that need to understand that it is absolutely dependable that God will resurrect them to immortal life at the return of Jesus Christ.

This verse is a part of Paul's opening comments to the Philippians. This was not the place for Paul to include the obviously implied proviso that **this outcome assumes** that we will keep our side of the agreement with God, that we will stay faithful unto the end. In these opening comments Paul was trying to encourage these people; he was saying: you guys just need to hang in there, and look at the gift of immortal life that God will give you at Christ's second coming.

However, in no way can Philippians 1:6 achieve salvation for those who are on stony ground and those who are amongst thorns. Some of the people in Philippi who received Paul's letter would have been in those two categories, and Philippians 1:6 wasn't going to do them any good. They themselves were responsible for the ground in their minds.

THE PURPOSE OF GOD'S CALL

Let's see if we can understand in plain terms what is meant when we say that "God has called someone".

What is the purpose of calling? Why do you sometimes "call" someone? The purpose of calling, whether God does it or whether we do it, is always the same. **The purpose of calling is always to solicit a response!**

When you call someone (e.g. "hey, John ... can you hear me ... where are you ...?", etc.), it doesn't go any further if you don't get a response. If you don't get a response from John in our example, then whatever you had in mind for John is terminated! You may have wanted to tell John something or do something for him or have him do something for you, etc., but when you get no response from John, then whatever you had in mind is terminated.

So likewise with God:

When God calls people, then there is at that stage no commitment from God for anything to those people. It is only if people respond positively to God's calling that **then God makes a commitment** to those people, to offer them immortal life in the Family of God.

The calling expresses an intention, but not a commitment. That intention ceases if there is no appropriate response from the person that was called. The commitment by God only starts after God has received an appropriate response to His call.

Now note:

Once a person responds positively to God's calling, **then they are chosen**! The choosing is based on how people respond to God's initial calling. This means that not only are those on good ground chosen, but **also those on stony ground and those on thorny ground are chosen**. That is when their names are added to the book of life. They are chosen because at the time of their initial response to God it was

not yet apparent to God that they would later prove to be stony ground or thorny ground.

At the time of their initial response to God's calling the ground in their minds looked identical to good ground. So all these people who are chosen by God, including those who later turn out to be stony ground or amongst thorns, are heading for the first resurrection from the moment they are chosen by God.

Now once some people start to use their minds in ways that indicate that the ground in their minds is either stony ground or else thorny ground, then they are in danger of having their choosing by God aborted! And if **at the end of their lives** their minds are still stony ground or thorny ground, then they will indeed be aborted from their status of having been "chosen" when they first responded to God. If they are aborted, then they will end up in the lake of fire.

This is extremely serious with the potential for immortal life in the balance.

THE USE OF "CALLED" AND "CHOSEN"

Jesus Christ made a very clear distinction between "called" and "chosen", when He said "many are called, but few are chosen". Christ was speaking to the large unconverted crowds, all of whom were "hearing a call" because they were listening to the Son of God speaking to them. But very few of them actually responded in a positive way to God (i.e. only the 120 disciples in Acts 1:15), and those are the ones that were then chosen.

The chosen status is established when God gives His Holy Spirit to a person. So the chosen status of those 120 people was established in Acts 2:3-4, when God gave all of them His Spirit.

Now Jesus Christ made **a very clear distinction** or contrast between being called and being chosen.

However, the Apostle Paul later wrote his letters to a completely different audience. Paul's letters were written to those people who had responded positively to God's calling, and had then been baptized and become a part of the Church of God. Paul wrote his letters to people who had been both called and also chosen.

Coming into the Church established the chosen status for all the people to whom Paul wrote his letters. So whenever the Apostle Paul referred to "our calling", he really meant "our calling and election". Paul used the term "called" to mean "**called and chosen**", without always writing this out in the long form.

Rather than using the words "called" and "chosen" to express a contrast, as Jesus Christ had done during His ministry, **Paul used these two words as synonyms**. With Paul either of these two words "called" and "chosen" in fact always meant "called and chosen", and this is based on the audience to whom he was writing.

Consider that in writing to members of God's Church Paul could not possibly use these two words to express a contrast, because both words automatically applied to all the people to whom he was writing. Let's look at an example.

For ye see **your calling**, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, ***are called***: But God **hath chosen** the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God **hath chosen** the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, **hath God chosen**, *yea*, and things which are not, to bring

to nought things that are: (1 Corinthians 1:26-28)

There is a small mistranslation in verse 26 that you have probably never considered. You see, **Paul did not say "not many noble are called"**! The words "are called" are not in the Greek text, as indicated by the italic print for these two words in the KJV. More on this in a moment.

In writing to church members Paul equates "**your calling**" in verse 26 with "**God has chosen**" in verses 27-28. In these verses Paul makes no distinction whatsoever between "being called" and "being chosen". Can you see that? Paul is using these two terms interchangeably, as being synonymous for the people to whom he wrote this letter. Here there is no hint of the contrast that Jesus Christ presented in Matthew 22:14.

Now coming back to the "not many wise ... mighty ... noble *are called*" statement in verse 26: the obvious point Paul was making was that **not many wise, mighty or noble people had come into the Church**. But that is not the same as saying that not many wise, mighty or noble people "had been called", not at all! And so Paul himself did not use the words "are called" to refer to this group of people.

The point is this: there is no indication how many wise, mighty or noble people may at one time or another have heard "a call from God". And their numbers are immaterial. All we know is that **not many of them have responded to God**, to where they also would have the "chosen" status that Paul refers to in verses 27-28.

To use the words "called" and "chosen" from the perspective of Matthew 22:14, since all these wise, mighty and noble people are just as unconverted as were the multitudes to whom Jesus Christ spoke in Matthew 22:14, we would technically have to say that "**not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are chosen**", irrespective of how many of them had received a call from God. That is certainly the meaning that Paul had in mind, since he was thinking of church membership.

Now I don't have a problem with continuing to read "are called" in verse 26, for the simple reason that, like Paul, I will understand that statement in this specific context to mean "called **and** chosen". And in that way it is a correct statement. So the KJV translation here is not an issue to me.

The only reason why I have pointed this out is because some people will try to see a contrast in the words "called" and "chosen" when applied to the Church in 1 Corinthians 1:26-28. We have to understand that Paul used these words as synonyms and not as a contrast as Jesus Christ had done in Matthew 22:14. One key lies in two completely different audiences being addressed in these two places.

The same applies to the other places where Paul refers to concepts like "called", "chosen", "election", etc. Paul is writing to church members, to whom all these terms apply automatically, and so Paul uses these terms as interchangeable.

So don't let Paul's valid use of these words prevent you from correctly understanding the process in which a calling by God first requires a positive response from the person before God then makes a commitment to that person, by then "choosing" that person, i.e. giving that person His Holy Spirit.

Let's continue.

A VERY SOBERING PICTURE

When we understand that God has "begun" a good work in all the people on good ground and on stony

ground and amongst thorns, then a very sobering picture emerges. God knows in advance that **many people will start out** just like Saul and Solomon started out ... **humble** and **teachable** and **submissive** to God's rule over their lives.

Even Satan had originally started out that way, when God had made him a covering cherub (Ezekiel 28:14). And regrettably many people will also end their lives just like Saul and Solomon, having used their own free wills to at some point turn their backs on God's ways. That is what God was checking for when He tested Abraham after more than 50 years of faithful service to God.

Now the reason God knows that what may start out as good ground **may** later with the passage of time turn out to be stony ground or amongst thorns is because **that is precisely what had happened to Satan**. Satan had been perfect at the time when God created him (Ezekiel 28:12), without any hints that he might later turn out to be evil, arrogant, selfish and rebellious. It was **the passage of time** that revealed that Satan's mind no longer contained any good ground, that it had become filled with thorns and briars.

Therefore in testing human minds for good ground God must also allow for the passage of time. Just as with Satan, so also for us human beings, what is good ground today may not be good ground tomorrow. This uncertainty is due entirely to the total freedom given to the human mind, to choose good or evil. Freedom of choice creates a certain amount of uncertainty. Therefore it requires **a period of testing** to remove that uncertainty.

Permanent character can never be established by "a deathbed repentance", because even though the dying person may have a really good and remorseful attitude at that point of death, that is no guarantee that this good attitude would still be there 20 or 50 years later, if the person were to have the opportunity to live those additional years. So people with a deathbed repentance can come up in the second resurrection, which will start a time of testing; but people with a deathbed repentance can never come up in the first resurrection.

[Comment: The people of the Laodicean era will end up having to give their lives to prove their commitment to God. But all of them will have had to make that commitment to God some weeks or months or even a few years before they end up dying. So their repentance will not be "a deathbed repentance". It will not be the case that they only come to repentance the very day on which they will die. Their repentance will have been some time earlier.]

If people with good ground do not "endure unto the end" (Matthew 24:13), then that good ground will become corrupted in some way. And **God cannot predict whether the good ground in any person's mind today will stay good ground until that person's time of testing has come to an end**. God cannot predict that **because God has given us a free will** and a free independent mind. Very short quick intense testing doesn't reveal much about a person's staying power; the staying power is revealed when we "endure unto the end".

Thus:

God couldn't change the ground as thorns started to arise for Saul and for Solomon, at least not without taking away their free moral agency, their free will to decide how to respond to God's instructions. And God is not going to take away a person's free will, because that would go against God's explicit intentions. And so God knows that this sad picture, of His calling initially falling on good ground which is then later taken over by thorns, or it perhaps turns out to be very shallow and stony, that sad picture will happen time and again.

This is not what you have believed for all your years in God's Church, is it?

Many times we have been told that "God isn't playing games with us human beings". But we haven't grasped the full impact of that understanding. We always want to see the best; we hope for the best. We want to see those of our own family and close friends who have left God's Church come up in the second resurrection. When those close to us have left the Church, we want to find ways to believe that they will still come up in the second resurrection.

And so we soothe our minds with the thought that "God is a God of immense love and mercy", which is true. But in our own minds this statement frequently translates into: "therefore all those people that we care about must surely have a chance in the second resurrection". And on our part that is often just wishful thinking.

We need to keep in mind the principle that God is not a respecter of persons (see Acts 10:34; Romans 2:11; Ephesians 6:9; etc.). God didn't really want any of the people before the flood to perish and miss out on salvation, but that is what happened anyway (except for a very small handful of people). God's dealings with people before the flood make very clear that **God only "starts a good work" in any person one single time**. That is it. And when that happens we either respond positively to God, or we will miss out for good.

That is why **it is so very important that God does not start "a good work" in anyone who is by the wayside**. That is why Jesus Christ spoke to the people in parables, to avoid them becoming so responsible for what they heard from Jesus Christ, that it would have precluded them from ever coming up in the second resurrection; that their options would have been restricted to the first resurrection or the third resurrection.

Of all the people who have been exposed to God's seed, the people by the wayside are really the only ones who will come up in the second resurrection. Of the "many" that are called in Matthew 22:14, only those "by the wayside" will come up in the second resurrection, with those "on good ground" making up "the few" who will come up in the first resurrection.

Now in those people who later end up on stony ground and amongst thorns there was actually "some initial growth", and that initial growth is evidence that God had indeed "begun a good work" in them.

That is very sobering, because **that affects a large number of the people** who used to be a part of God's Church years ago. And it doesn't help for us to stick our heads in the sand on this issue, hoping it will just go away on its own.

God is serious. Look at the principle Jesus Christ mentioned. When the Pharisees asked Jesus Christ "are we blind also", Jesus Christ could have said: "you most certainly are", because they were spiritually blind. But Christ didn't say that. Instead He said the following:

Jesus said unto them, If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now **ye say, we see; therefore your sin remains**. (John 9:41)

It is a matter of accountability. The Pharisees' claim of knowing God's truth, even though that claim was false, was enough to make them accountable. Therefore their sins "remain", i.e. continue to be held against them. So when anyone has gone as far as becoming a part of God's Church, even if only on stony ground or amongst thorns, and that person then leaves behind that initial commitment to God, then likewise "his sins remain".

Now this principle of John 9:41 also applies to the large number of people who came into the Church without ever repenting. So they never at any time received God's Spirit. Yet by their outward visible membership in the Church of God all of them in effect said "we see", and therefore their sins remain.

This is serious!

And like I said earlier, it is very risky to give created beings totally free minds. The stakes are very high. And many of those in whom God had begun a good work will not endure to the end. That is why there is so much emphasis on enduring in Scriptures like Matthew 10:22.

And ye shall be hated of all *men* for my name's sake: but **he that endures to the end shall be saved**. (Matthew 10:22)

This warning is given because, amongst other things, many will turn out to be on stony ground and amongst thorns. The good ground they started out with did not endure. The same point is made in the many Scriptures that admonish us to "**hold fast**" (Hebrews 4:14; Hebrews 10:23; Revelation 2:25; Revelation 3:3; Revelation 3:11; etc.). If we don't hold fast, then the good ground can very easily turn into ground that is filled with thorns.

There is no guarantee that what is good ground today will still be good ground tomorrow, **unless** we ourselves are very resolutely determined to hold fast.

MATTHEW 7:13-14

Consider what Jesus Christ said in Matthew chapter 7.

Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide *is* the gate, and broad *is* the way, that **leads to destruction**, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait *is* the gate, and **narrow *is* the way**, **which leads unto life**, **and few there be that find it**. (Matthew 7:13-14)

Now you may not have understood the full implications of this statement before. Here is the point we need to take note of.

Jesus Christ's entire sermon on the mount is **directed at the Church of God**, and not at people outside of the Church! Jesus Christ was speaking to His disciples (Matthew 5:1-2). **They** were the ones He was teaching! Numerous statements throughout this section make very clear that all these comments are directed at members of God's Church and not at what people in the world may or may not do.

For example:

- "You are the light of the world" doesn't apply to the world.

- "Love your enemies" doesn't apply to the world.

- "After this manner therefore pray" doesn't apply to the world.

- "But you when you fast" doesn't apply to the world.

- "lay not up for yourselves treasures" doesn't apply to the world.

- "No man can serve two masters" doesn't apply to the world.

- "Seek first the kingdom of God" doesn't apply to the world.

- "Take no thought for the morrow" doesn't apply to the world.

- "Ask and it shall be given to you" doesn't apply to the world.

- "You'll know them by their fruits" isn't said to the world.

- "Beware of false prophets" doesn't apply to the world.

etc.

So now consider Matthew 7:13-14.

Jesus Christ is telling us in His Church that **for people who come into the Church there are two different roads**! Some people come into the Church on "the broad way", and others come into the Church on "the narrow way". Have you really understood this before?

These verses are not telling us what people out in the world are doing. No, these verses tell us what happens when people come into the Church of God, when they respond to the seed that was sown in their minds. This whole section of Matthew chapters 5-7 is concerned with the actions and conduct of Church of God people. The world simply wasn't a consideration in this entire sermon on the mount.

In these two verses Jesus was **contrasting two end results** for people who come into the Church of God. When He said that the narrow way leads to "life", He obviously meant **immortal life in the Family of God**! And when He said that the broad way leads to "destruction", He meant permanent **destruction in the lake of fire**!

To spell this out in very plain terms: Jesus Christ assuredly did not mean that the broad way leads to the second resurrection, because the second resurrection cannot be identified with "destruction"! None of the people who are heading for the second resurrection (i.e. the vast majority of all people who have lived after the flood) can be said to be heading for destruction. The second resurrection is not a time of destruction.

So let's understand these verses correctly.

Jesus Christ was speaking about people trying to "enter into something". The people in the world are not trying to enter into anything. Jesus Christ was speaking about people trying to enter into the Church of God, with the goal of being resurrected to immortal life in the Family of God.

The people who enter the Church by the wide gate on the broad way are the same as the people who receive the seed on stony ground and amongst thorns.

And the people who enter via the narrow gate on the narrow way are the same as the people who receive the seed on good ground.

Jesus Christ knew in advance that many people who would come into God's Church would not have good ground in their minds; the ground in their minds would turn out to be either stony or very thorny. The people who enter the Church via the broad way and wide gate have never really grasped the total commitment that God requires from us.

Think of the speechless person to whom Jesus Christ said: "friend, **how did you get in here** not having a wedding garment?" in Matthew 22:12. That is speaking about **people who come into the Church** and who are really clueless as to what God expects from us. They don't understand that they are shallow and superficial in their response to God's instructions.

To paraphrase Matthew 22:12, we could read:

"Friend, how did you get into the Church of God without ever repenting? And he was speechless."

Notice what happens to this person who had come into the Church but didn't end up having good ground, i.e. without really repenting.

Then said the king to the servants, **Bind him hand and foot**, and take him away, and cast *him* into outer darkness; there shall be **weeping and gnashing of teeth**. (Matthew 22:13)

First of all we should understand that "weeping and gnashing of teeth" is always code language for destruction in the lake of fire. So in this verse Jesus Christ said that this person who came into the Church but didn't meet God's requirements will end up in the lake of fire, to be permanently blotted out.

There is no chance of a second resurrection for the person in this picture in Matthew 22:13!

The really scary part of this is the implication that **the great majority of the people who have over the centuries come into God's Church did so via the wide gate**, the gate that leads to destruction in the lake of fire. I don't see how there is any other way to read Matthew 7:13-14. This is extremely serious!

To be clear: "The gate" cannot possibly refer to the kingdom of God for a very simple reason. We cannot possibly enter the kingdom of God by the wide gate, and neither can an entry into the kingdom of God lead to destruction.

Jesus Christ very clearly referred to **two gates** on **two different roads** that make possible "an entry" into something. That "something" is the Church of God; that "something" is the body of Christ. And having entered the Church, **that then leads to two possible outcomes**. Minds with good ground will lead to eternal life; and minds with stony or thorny ground will lead to destruction.

When an entry leads to something else, then that tells us that "the entry" sets in motion **a time of testing**. The entry Christ speaks about in these two verses is not a destination; it is only an intermediate point, from where **it leads to two completely different destinations**. Likewise, membership in God's Church is not a destination; it is only intended to be a stepping stone towards the goal God has set before us. But that membership also carries an enormous risk for those who don't meet God's conditions.

DURING THE MILLENNIUM

Let's consider the people during the millennium.

People will live physical lives in ideal conditions. God will provide for all their needs. I would speculate that all the weekly sermons around the world will always be given by spirit beings. The sermons will thus present perfect knowledge and perfect understanding.

For decades and for centuries people will live happy lives in peace and prosperity. Jesus Christ will be ruling, and He will speedily answer people's prayerful requests. And if people are tempted to go off the track, then a spirit being will intervene and say: "this is the way (to live), walk you in it" (Isaiah 30:21). There will be no crime and no pollution.

And then the millennium comes to an end. For centuries human beings will have interacted with Jesus

Christ and the 144,000 in the first resurrection. There will be no atheists and no agnostics, because the existence of Jesus Christ will be personally known to every single human being alive at that point. So Satan is set loose for a very short time (a few weeks or a few months at the most).

It seems highly likely that the vast majority of the billions of people alive at that point will not respond to Satan. They will stay faithful to Jesus Christ who has ruled over them for 1000 years. Nevertheless, within a heartbeat, it seems, Satan is still able to stir up millions upon millions of other people (see Revelation 20:8) to rebel against Jesus Christ who, as all those rebels will know, has staggering powers to deal with enemies. All those who follow Satan in that rebellion have to be totally irrational and crazy to think they stand a chance against Jesus Christ. They obviously know that they cannot give themselves immortality.

Yet they will rebel anyway. How can that possibly happen? How can people who have been instructed by spirit beings for hundreds of years possibly have any cause to rebel? What has Jesus Christ done to them, to make them want to rebel? What is it that they don't like with the status quo at that time? Think about these questions.

The rebellion in Revelation 20:7-9 is evidence that hundreds of years of perfect sermons and perfect examples and perfect teachings could do nothing to change **the quality of the ground in the minds** of those that will then rebel against God.

I don't think that those rebels even care that their rebellion is doomed to failure. Their rebellion will be an expression of resentment and hatred for God and frustration at having had to always live by God's laws. They will resent that they were forced to live by all of God's laws. They resent having to submit their carnal minds to God's way of life. They resent that they had to keep their anger bottled up inside for centuries, with no opportunities to ever live their lives selfishly and without restraint. They had put on a facade of willing obedience to God's laws, when inwardly they didn't agree at all. They were afraid because Jesus Christ followed the "every knee shall bow" policy (see Isaiah 45:23 and Romans 14:11), but they didn't bow willingly.

I don't believe that the people in that rebellious multitude actually believe that they can win against Jesus Christ. **They just don't care**, and they don't really appreciate the gift of life. If you said to them: "look, if you fight against Jesus Christ, then you will be killed", I believe all of them would reply: "I just don't care; let God kill me if that's what God wants to do".

Reading Revelation 20:7-9 always reminds me of **the prophet Jonah**. The Book of Jonah opens with Jonah in **a bad attitude towards God**, even though Jonah says "I fear the LORD" (Jonah 1:9). Jonah doesn't really care what God thinks. And Jonah openly rebels against God's instruction and does the opposite of what God has told him to do. When God then brings a storm that threatens to sink the ship, Jonah says: "I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you" (Jonah 1:12). Yet Jonah does not show even the slightest hint of remorse.

The solution Jonah offered was basically: throw me into the sea **so that I will die**! He didn't care about his life, but he wasn't going to change. He would rather die than do what God had commanded him to do. Jonah obviously did not foresee that God would have a great fish swallow him to preserve his life, so that **he would still have to carry out God's instructions**.

Jonah then carried out God's original instructions with a resentful attitude. He still wanted to see Nineveh destroyed. He didn't care that God did not want to have to destroy Nineveh. And then the Book of Jonah closes the same way it had opened, with Jonah in a resentful attitude towards God. **Jonah resented that he had been forced to obey God.**

For me Jonah's reluctant obedience and his clear resentment towards God are a parallel to those people at the end of the millennium that follow Satan in rebelling against Jesus Christ and His rule. Jonah knew he would die if thrown into the sea, but he just didn't care. In the same way I expect that the rebels in Revelation 20:8-9 know they will die when they rebel against God, but they just don't care.

Now the point I want to make with these references is this:

Nothing was able to change the quality of **the ground in their minds**. It is impossible to change the ground in anyone's mind from the outside. It **can only be changed from the inside**, by the person himself.

When a free mind puts self first, ahead of God, then no outside force can change that mind. And that is a mind that is 100% completely on Satan's wavelength. God cannot change such a mind. The only thing God can do to such a mind in a human being is to blot it out of existence, as though it had never existed at any time.

Jesus Christ also made this point quite forcefully, that nothing from the outside can change the quality of the ground in someone's mind. Let's look at Luke chapter 16.

LAZARUS AND THE RICH MAN

This is another very well-known parable. Here is the opening description that Jesus Christ gave for this parable.

There was **a certain rich man**, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: And there was **a certain beggar** named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. (Luke 16:19-21)

Notice the description Jesus Christ provided for the two characters in this parable:

The rich man is not presented as evil or wicked or a murderer or greedy, etc. Nothing at all is said directly about his character. All we are told is that this man lived it up in the lap of luxury. It is made quite clear that the rich man knew Lazarus, and he also knew that Lazarus was living on the edge of starvation in utterly pathetic circumstances. So the only implied indictment against this rich man is that he was not prepared to do good to others, that he lacked mercy and compassion for other people, that he was in fact totally selfish.

Lazarus is presented as an extremely humble beggar, who was in very poor health and his body was "full of sores". He didn't demand anything from those who would have been able to help him. Lazarus is not shown as having lived a righteous life or as being particularly devoted to God. But he appears to have accepted his fate without complaining.

Then both men die.

What then follows is a description of **Lazarus** appearing in the **first resurrection** to immortal life in the Family of God. And the **rich man** is presented as appearing in the **third resurrection** to mortal life, with the imminent lake of fire staring him in the face.

So note! The purpose of this parable was to compare the first resurrection with the third resurrection. It

was to teach us the differences between these two resurrections. In actual practical terms **most rich men** in this life whose circumstances would resemble the rich man's life will probably come up **in the second resurrection**, with an opportunity to still become eligible for immortal life in God's Family.

But for the purpose of warning us that those who don't accept God's ways will eventually be burnt up in a lake of fire, for that purpose Jesus Christ chose to present two different individuals with one in the first resurrection and the other in the third resurrection. And for this particular lesson Jesus Christ assumed good character for the poor beggar and an evil character for the rich man.

The gulf of immortality separated the rich man from Abraham and from Lazarus. For our particular interest here let's note the following.

The rich man asks Abraham to send Lazarus to his five brothers to warn them to change their selfish lifestyles. (see Luke 16:27-28).

Abraham tells the rich man that his brothers "have Moses and the prophets" (Luke 16:29).

Then the rich man replies with the logic that most people would accept. He says:

And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but **if one went unto them from the dead**, they will repent. (Luke 16:30)

In our context today the rich man was basically saying: "**If you send Mr. Herbert Armstrong back to be Elijah and also the leader of the two witnesses, then the Church will really repent!**" The rich man was saying: it will take **a miracle** to change the ground in the minds of my five brothers.

We all know how Abraham replied to this request.

And he said unto him, **If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead**. (Luke 16:31)

What Jesus Christ, who spoke this parable, was saying with this statement is this: nothing whatsoever from the outside, not even God's direct intervention, can change the quality of the ground in a person's mind. The quality of the ground in a person's mind can only be changed one way, and that is by that person himself doing the changing from the inside.

And God's call to repentance is essentially a call to us to change our way of thinking, so that the quality of the ground in our minds can be changed from rocky and thorny into good ground. **That is what repentance is all about.** And once it has been changed into good ground, then it must be subjected to a period of trying and testing, for God to make certain that it will always stay as good ground, that it will never return to its former bad state.

So that brilliant sermon or booklet you may want to pass on to someone else isn't really going to achieve very much in changing someone's thinking. I hope you are beginning to understand this matter.

Now let's get to the most important point.

SO WHAT ABOUT YOU?

As I said in the title of this article, your eternal destiny rests in your own hands. You're in God's Church

and God has already done His part in your life for the present. At this point you are both called and chosen. Now the ball is in your court. And so, as the Apostle Paul put it, "**work out your own salvation with fear and trembling**" (Philippians 2:12).

You are fully responsible for providing good ground in your own mind. If you allow the ground in your mind to be shallow and rocky or overgrown with weeds, then that is entirely your own doing! It is always a matter of cause and effect. And you alone are responsible in this matter, even as I alone am responsible for the quality of the ground in my mind.

If you do not pray daily to God, then obviously the ground in your mind is going to be shallow. That is a simple matter of cause and effect. And 1,000 good sermons cannot change that. And neither can sympathetic, kind, gentle, compassionate, understanding and nurturing ministers and pastors change that. The ground in your mind cannot be changed by anyone or anything from the outside, not even by Jesus Christ Himself! Only you yourself can change that ground from the inside.

That is what makes you unique, the ability to freely decide your own course of action independently of any outside influences. Now if you have to be pressured into, or argued into, or cajoled into, or reasoned into praying, then your prayers won't be worth a hill of beans! If you pray because your minister told you to pray, then you might as well spend your time watching TV, because those prayers won't be worth anything before God.

This principle also holds true in all our other actions. If we do anything that is right **only** because someone else has told us to do that, then those right actions are of no value before God. The reason they are of no value is that doing something other people have told us to do can never change the quality of the soil in our minds! When people with stony ground do what the minister tells them to do, then the ground in their minds will remain stony. And when people amongst thorns do what the minister tells them to do, then their ground remains just as thorny as before.

The quality of the ground can only change when the person's own mind is involved in making right decisions, not when someone else makes those right decisions for them. Now someone else can certainly tell us what we need to do, but then our own minds must be actively involved in wanting to do those right things, and then doing those right things will indeed have a great value before God. The key is that we ourselves have resolved in our own minds that we do indeed want to follow the advice or instruction we were given, because we ourselves have come to believe that that is the right thing to do before God.

The only prayers that really count are when **you yourself have decided that you need to and want to pray to God**! When you yourself believe that you have **an absolute need to daily pray to God**, to help you and to guide you, then your prayers count. And **then the quality of the soil in your mind begins to improve**. There is always still hope for people whose minds at this point in time have shallow stony ground.

If you are trying to juggle your life between serving two masters, God and materialism, then obviously the ground in your mind will sprout thorns and thistles like a field overgrown with weeds. That too is a simple matter of cause and effect. And no sermon is going to change that ground in your mind. Nothing from the outside can change your mindset. But you yourself do have the power to change your mind from the inside.

However, we should understand that once a patch of thorns and weeds becomes well established in a field, then it becomes extremely difficult to ever get rid of those thorns. The only real way to eliminate those weeds is to dig them up from the roots. If the roots are allowed to stay behind when the weeds are

removed, then it is inevitable that they will come back.

Note! Of the two situations, shallow stony ground and ground covered with thorns, the easier one to rectify is the shallow stony ground. Shallowness can be remedied by bringing in more soil, by adding depth. And shallowness does not necessarily involve established external problems that need to be overcome.

On the other hand, trying to remedy ground covered with thorns involves dealing with and rooting out established problems, whose pressure comes from the outside. This is always the more difficult task. Once these thorns (i.e. financial cares of the world, etc.) have taken root in a person's mind, it is extremely difficult to root them out completely. Satan's own mind is filled 100% with thorns! This situation also happened to both Saul and Solomon, that their minds were overrun by thorns.

People in this situation invariably find it very difficult to pray. The reason is that other master whom they are serving. They themselves know that the other master really dominates their thinking, and they have to juggle his demands on their lives in order to try to somehow still fit obedience to God into their lives as well. It is a constant juggling act for them. And with that mindset they can't bring themselves to approach God on their knees on a daily basis. In their own minds they know that they don't really put God unconditionally first in their lives. And that causes them to feel uncomfortable on their knees before God.

We should be able to recognize that all of those that will comprise **the Laodicean era** of Revelation 3:14-22 are people for whom the seed landed amongst thorns. One of the greatest problems in our age for the people who are called by God is "the deceitfulness of riches".

So is there hope for people whose ground is covered with thorns?

Yes, there is; but it is going to be difficult! Because their problems revolve around worrying about their lives, therefore the only way for them to clear out all those thorns is to make a firm commitment that they will be willing to lay their lives on the line for God. They need to make a firm commitment to push their thoughts about taking care of all their physical needs to the back of their minds, in clear submission to any and all requirements that God has set for us.

This is a mindset that they must choose to adopt. And when they try to do this, Satan will try to convince them that it is an impossible task. I have to tell you that, once the thorns are firmly entrenched in the mind of someone in God's Church, more often than not the person never succeeds in getting rid of the thorns. I know that this is a discouraging statement, but I must tell you the truth. And I have regrettably witnessed this on numerous occasions.

To paraphrase the words of Jesus Christ, **these kinds of problems "go not out but by prayer and fasting"** (see Matthew 17:21), meaning that there is a solution, but it is quite difficult and it requires an undivided commitment.

THE BIG PICTURE:

We need to understand that God calling people is not nearly as limited as we might be inclined to think. Typically we tend to look at those people, whose actions make clear that they are like the seed by the wayside, as if those people have never been called by God. That is not correct! If they have had some exposure to God's truth, then they had the opportunity to respond positively to God, if they had decided to do so. It was their own response to God's truth that established for them a "by the wayside" status.

It is true that billions of people have lived and died without ever being in any way exposed to the seeds from God. Another way of saying this is: there are billions of people who were never called by God. But it is equally true that tens of millions of other people over the past 2,000 years have "heard the word of the kingdom and not understood it" (Matthew 13:19), and therefore all of them have ended up by the wayside. **These tens of millions of people make up "the many" in "many are called".** Jesus Christ really did mean "many"!

The key in determining how God will deal with people who had received the seed "which was sown in their hearts" (verse 19 again) is how they responded to that seed. The very purpose of a call is to solicit an answer. Any call that is left unanswered loses any potential value it may have had. The value of any call is contingent on an answer being received. And how God will deal with people is based on Matthew 13:12; it is based on their response to God’s calling.

We need to get this idea that "God selectively only calls one person here and another person there" out of our minds, because **that picture is wrong!**

Jesus Christ made very clear that "many are called", because God knows in advance that only a very few of them will end their lives with good ground in their minds, though God does not know in advance who will be in which group. And therefore God has set up a system of calling people which will allow the vast majority of those that are called to not be spiritually responsible for not responding to that call.

At the start I asked the question: **how does God deal with those that are not chosen?**

There are five possible groupings that all people after the flood fall into. Those five groupings are:

1) Those who were never called by God.

2) Those who received the seed by the wayside.

3) Those who received the seed on stony ground.

4) Those who received the seed amongst thorns.

5) Those who received the seed on good ground.

These five conditions refer to what these people are like **at the end of their lives**, not what they were like at some point many years earlier. Many years before the end of their lives those in the last three groups all looked like good ground. It was the passage of time and exposure to tests and to trials that resulted in exposing that some of those were in fact on stony ground, while others from that initial group were in fact amongst thorns.

Here is **how God deals with all five groups**.

1) All those who were **never called** (i.e. billions of people) plus all those who were by **the wayside** when they were exposed to God’s call (i.e. an additional tens of millions of people) will come up in the second resurrection. i.e. **Groups #1 and #2** = **second resurrection**.

2) All those who at the end of their lives received the seed on **good ground** (i.e. 144,000) will come up in the first resurrection. i.e. **Group #5** = **first resurrection**.

3) All those who at the end of their lives had received the seed on **stony ground** or **amongst thorns** (i.e. an undefined large number) will come up in the third resurrection, to be burnt up in the lake of fire.

i.e. **Groups #3 and #4** = **third resurrection**.

So here is the perspective on God working out a plan of salvation for mankind. There are three steps:

1) The first **1,600+ years** (i.e. before the flood) brought in a net result of very likely **less than ten** people who fully submitted their lives to God.

2) The next **4,300+ years** will bring in **144,000** people (less the handful from the first period) who will have submitted their lives to God. That is a staggering improvement from the handful of people from the first 1,600+ years.

3) The next **1,100 years** will bring in **multiple millions or even billions** of people who will gladly submit their lives to God.

In addition to these numbers there will also be a huge group of people (i.e. from Adam's time to the end of the Great White Throne judgment period) who **will be destroyed**, and who will then be "as though they had never existed" (see Obadiah 1:16).

IN CONCLUSION

Now if you have correctly understood what a sobering picture this presents for those who are called by God, then I will just point out that we really should have understood this all along. After all, could Jesus Christ have spelled this out more bluntly than to say "**many are called but few are chosen**" (Matthew 22:14)? That is an extremely powerful warning! Right there Jesus Christ was telling us that **the majority of those who are called will not end up in the first resurrection**! There is a very lopsided difference between "many" and "few" in Christ's statement. This conclusion is inescapable. Yet we didn't see it.

Please try to understand that it is not my personal idea that the majority of those who are called will not be in the first resurrection. That is the only possible conclusion we can draw from Matthew 22:14, and I can't make it otherwise. We can't just assign a different meaning to the word "called" in Matthew 22:14, just so that we can avoid facing the real picture.

The only positive thing I can tell you is that "the majority" of those who are called will in fact be "by the wayside" people, and they will have the opportunity to be in the second resurrection, to then have the opportunity to really understand God's plan and purposes. But that does not apply to the people on stony ground and those amongst thorns.

Earlier I mentioned that even people who have "good ground" in their minds can still have some mental blocks on specific issues. Such mental blocks are quite similar to a "by the wayside" environment. One of the best illustrations of such a mental block for people who otherwise provide a "good ground" environment is this "many are called but few are chosen" statement by Jesus Christ.

We have read that statement for decades without ever grasping what this statement actually means. We have all had a mental block towards this Scripture, assuming that it couldn't possibly mean what it in fact states in such a plain and direct way ... that the majority of those who are called by God will not be in the first resurrection.

We have likewise had a mental block towards Matthew 7:13-14, that these verses speak about two different ways that people come into the Church of God. When we correctly understand what Jesus Christ is telling us in these two verses, then that changes the overall picture in a major way.

When we are able to let go of these mental blocks, then that adds a whole new dimension to the admonition "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12). Nobody will cruise into God’s kingdom with a few years or even a few decades of Sabbath-keeping and Holy Day observances.

We have to go far beyond that, by actively providing "good ground" in our minds for whatever information God makes available to us. Good ground is tested by the principle of James 4:17, i.e. "to him that knows to do good and does it not, to him it is sin".

Now some of you who will read this article will be able to see the mental blocks you used to have towards the things I have explained in this article. And there will also be those readers who will continue to have mental blocks on some of the things I have explained. And there is nothing I can do to change that. You yourself always provide the ground for any information that reaches your mind.

All of us need to make sure that the ground in our minds is good ground, eager and willing to accept all of God’s truth, willingly submitting our lives to God’s wishes (see 1 John 3:22). And we need to **strive to keep it that way**. We also need to recognize that we ourselves are always responsible for what we do and for how we use our minds. If we do these things, then we shall never fall (see 2 Peter 1:10).

We need to realize that our eternal destiny very largely rests in our own hands.

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