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UNDERSTANDING THE MIND OF CHRIST

In 1 Corinthians 2:16 the Apostle Paul asked God's people a question: **who has known the mind of the Lord?** So how would you answer this question for yourself? How well do you understand the mind of Christ? You are a member of God's Church; you keep the Sabbath and the Holy Days, etc. Does that mean that you therefore have a good understanding of the mind of Christ?

Let's look at this question more closely.

In the Church of God we understand that God has called us to live by His laws. We base our lives on the fact that God's laws are holy and just and good (see Romans 7:12). So **for us** the laws of God form the basis for how we live our lives, what we do and what we don't do, and how we conduct ourselves in every situation. For us God's laws are extremely important.

When Jesus Christ was asked by one of the scribes what is the most important commandment in the law of God, He answered as follows:

Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second *is* like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. **On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets**. (Matthew 22:37-40)

We are all quite familiar with these verses. We have frequently mentioned that the first four commandments tell us **how to love God**, and the last six commandments tell us **how to love our neighbor**. You have surely heard and read that quite often.

But there is a lot more for us to notice in this statement by Jesus Christ. I don't want to focus on the two actual commandments at this point. Rather, right now I want to focus on the statement Christ made after He had identified these two great commandments.

It is interesting to note that **Jesus Christ did not say** that **these two "are the foundation"** for all the law and the prophets. Saying that they are "the foundation" would have implied that all the law and the prophets "are built upon" these two great commandments, that they are "based on" these two great commandments. And for some people that imagery might perhaps also seem logical? After all, the Apostle Paul used just that imagery for a slightly different subject in Ephesians 2:20.

And are built upon **the foundation of the apostles and prophets**, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner *stone*; (Ephesians 2:20)

But Jesus Christ did not use this foundation imagery in speaking about God's laws. So let's notice this distinction:

1) As far as **membership of God's Church** is concerned: We are built **on the foundation** of the apostles and prophets, with Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone in that picture. Ephesians 2:20.

2) As far as **how we are to live God's whole way of life** after having come into God's Church is

concerned: Everything, all of the laws and the prophets, **hangs from** the two great commandments. Matthew 22:40.

Becoming a part of God's Church amounts to being built on a foundation. Something is **built upwards**. But the way we are then to conduct our lives "hangs down from" two great commandments. This amounts to something **hanging downwards**.

No, I am not trying to split hairs. There is a reason why the way we are to conduct our lives must "hang downwards" from something.

Here is the point:

Anything that is built upwards on a foundation is rigid and firmly in place. Sometimes it can perhaps be replaced if necessary, but it can't move to another place on that foundation. It has no "wiggle room". It is fixed in its place within a greater structure.

But anything that hangs downwards is not fixed in a specific place. It does have "wiggle room". It hangs! It can still swing forwards, backwards, to the left and to the right. Anything that hangs downwards can to some degree move and adapt to different circumstances. **The only thing that is fixed** for something that hangs downwards **is the anchor point**; the rest is still to some degree flexible. The anchor point is absolutely rigid and absolutely inflexible.

So let's consider this picture:

The two great commandments, to love God above all else and to love our neighbor as we love ourselves, form the absolutely rigid anchor points, from which all our obedience to God and our whole way of life must hang down.

Obedience to the ten commandments and to all of God's other laws and instructions must hang below those rigid anchor points. This means that **it all depends on those anchor points**. The required obedience to God has the theoretical potential to move somewhat in one direction or another; it still has a certain amount of flexibility **to adapt to changing circumstances**. It is in fact less rigid than if it had been built upwards on a foundation. Can you understand this?

So what was Jesus Christ telling us when He said that all of God's laws "hang on" these two great commandments? Why did Jesus Christ word it like this?

Here is what we need to understand.

THE BIG PICTURE

God the Father and Jesus Christ have always existed. Their relationship to One Another has always been guided by an unconditional desire to always do what is best for the Other One. That desire, that relationship, is identified by the word "love", an unconditional commitment by Both of Them to always say good and do good to the Other One. And between the two of Them that commitment has always been unconditional.

Whether or not there was already a hierarchy between these two Beings when They alone existed is not totally clear to me. Very possibly God the Father was already "the Greater One". However, with Their absolute and unconditional commitment to One Another, and in the total absence of any other living

being, there would never have been an occasion for God the Father to need to appeal to His higher rank, because Both of Them spontaneously did whatever was best for the Other One.

Consider the following philosophical perspective:

If only two beings exist, with absolutely no other living being, neither spirit nor physical, existing anywhere, then everything either one of those two beings does automatically in some way affects the other one. In that context we then define "love" as "an unconditional commitment to always say and do only whatever is best for the other one". With "love" defined in this way, it is not possible to ever put self ahead of the other one, if their relationship is one of love.

In that type of situation with only two beings in existence there is no need for one to be in authority over the other one. There is never any need in that type of situation for one to have authority over the other one, because there is no third party that would also in some way have to relate to both of these beings. And both of them would always and spontaneously do whatever in any other relationship would require someone in authority to determine to do, i.e. to make binding decisions, establish rules, etc. This scenario is only possible if both of them personified love in absolute terms, as we have defined it.

Now simply because there may not have been "a need" for someone to be in authority in that situation obviously does not mean that therefore it had to be that way. Not at all. God the Father could very well always have been in some kind of authority relationship over Jesus Christ. And I certainly don't mean to exclude that possibility. But here is why I present this philosophical speculation. Jesus Christ said:

And now, O Father, **glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was**. (John 17:5)

The Greek for "with Your own self" is "para seauto", where "seauto" is the dative case of the reflexive pronoun for "yourself". When the Greek preposition "para" is used with the dative case, then it means "by the side of, besides".

So Jesus Christ was here saying: "glorify You Me **by the side of Yourself** with the glory ...". In other words, Jesus Christ appealed very specifically to being "right next to" God the Father, on the Father's level, rather than being "under" the Father.

The Greek word for "world" in this verse is a form of "kosmos", which refers to "human society". So the expression "before the world was" literally means "before We created human beings". However, here Jesus Christ was not just referring to the day before Adam was created. Jesus Christ was here referring to "**before We created anything and everything else**", before creating man and before creating the universe and before creating any of the angels.

Jesus Christ was here speaking about "the glory" He had possessed by the side of God the Father when only the two of Them existed, before They created anyone else.

So in this statement Jesus Christ was not merely referring to glory; **He was speaking about a very specific type of glory**.

The specific type of glory to which Jesus Christ here referred was the glory He possessed when only God the Father and Jesus Christ had existed. And since that glory was by the side of the Father, rather than under the Father, it seems to imply that it was equal to the glory the Father had at that time.

Notice also something that the Apostle Paul mentioned.

Who, **being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God**. (Philippians 2:6)

Paul is here speaking about the mind that was in Christ (previous verse) while He had been "in the form of God", i.e. before He had come as a human being. So this refers to when Jesus Christ was God before the angels and the physical universe and mankind were created.

The expression "thought it not robbery" means that Christ didn't think He was taking anything away from God the Father by seeing Himself as "**equal with God the Father**".

What is interesting here is that at no time during His ministry did Jesus Christ ever make any direct statement that could be used to imply that He was making Himself "equal to God the Father", other than perhaps John 17:5? But Christ also very clearly said that "the Father is greater than I" (John 14:28). So how did Paul get to make this "equal with God" statement?

Notice that Paul does not claim to quote anything that Jesus Christ had said. Rather, Paul is speaking about **thoughts in the mind of Jesus Christ**. How could Paul possibly have known about the thoughts in Jesus Christ's mind? Not a single action during Christ's ministry would have revealed those specific thoughts.

Can you confidently state how Jesus Christ thinks about Himself in relation to God the Father, other than to say that Christ surely looks upon God the Father as being over Him in power and in authority? I can't! Without other additional statements from Paul, all I can say is that the "equal with God" statement must mean "equal in type but not equal in authority status". In other words, **I must try to reconcile this "equal with God" statement with Christ's own "the Father is greater than I" statement**.

We should note that there is no indication that Paul was afraid that his "equal with God" statement might be misunderstood or misconstrued. Paul made this statement fairly boldly, in a matter-of-fact tone. If any of us, on the other hand, dared to make such an "equal with God" statement for Jesus Christ (without having Paul's precedent to appeal to), we would probably be quite careful to clarify exactly what we mean, in order to avoid being misunderstood. But Paul didn't do that. He just made this statement without further explanations.

So what does that tell us?

Let's go back to how Paul came into the Church.

Paul was called by God while he was on the road to Damascus (Acts 9). The account in Acts 9 leaves out certain details. Paul filled in some of the missing details in his letter to the Galatians. There he points out that immediately after his conversion he went "into Arabia" (Galatians 1:15-18). It seems he spent about three years in Arabia before returning to Damascus.

Paul referred to something that happened during the time he spent in Arabia in his second letter to the Corinthians. In chapter 12 Paul is speaking about himself. Notice the context:

It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to **visions and revelations** of the Lord. (2 Corinthians 12:1)

In what follows Paul is speaking about his own personal experiences, the visions he personally experienced while in Arabia. He tells us that he was "**caught up to the third heaven**" (2 Corinthians 12:2). That experience had been so vivid and so real to Paul himself, that he couldn't even tell whether he had literally been taken to the third heaven or whether it was only a vision God had given him. We should understand that it had been a vision because no flesh and blood will ever appear in the third

heaven, but for Paul it had been powerfully vivid.

In those visions Paul had heard "**unspeakable words which it is not lawful for a man to utter**" (2 Corinthians 12:4). Paul was trained by Jesus Christ while Paul was in Arabia. But Paul's training was dramatically different from the way Jesus Christ had trained His twelve apostles during His earthly ministry. While all of the 12 apostles were trained by Jesus Christ **before** any of them came to repentance and received God's Spirit, the Apostle Paul was only trained by Jesus Christ **after** he had come to repentance and after he had received God's Spirit.

Paul saw visions and received understanding regarding things at the very throne of God that none of the original twelve apostles, with the exception of the Apostle John, were ever privileged to experience during their lifetimes. The Apostle John's visions in the Book of Revelation, also experienced after John had come to repentance, come closest to what Paul experienced.

The point is that in his visions Paul saw God the Father and Jesus Christ interacting with One Another in the third heaven. And Paul was not allowed to report on those things: they were "not lawful" for him to utter. But Paul would have seen Jesus Christ sit down with God the Father in the Father's throne (see Revelation 3:21). Paul would have seen Their relationship like no other human being has ever been privileged to see.

So my point is this:

Paul's statement regarding the thoughts that went through the mind of Jesus Christ (i.e. thinking of Himself as "equal with God") are based totally on the things Paul had been privileged to see and to hear in the visions God gave Paul while he was in Arabia. Those visions made this point clear to Paul to such a degree, that Paul could boldly make this "equal with God" statement for Jesus Christ.

This "equal with God" concept is further supported by God the Father sharing His throne with Jesus Christ (see Revelation 3:21 again). That is a gesture indicating that God the Father accepts Jesus Christ as an equal. Sitting with God the Father on the Father's throne means that Jesus Christ can wield the exact same authority that God the Father wields. In other words, even though God the Father will be the undisputed Head of the God Family, the Father Himself nevertheless freely acknowledges the equal status Jesus Christ had possessed before They had decided to create other living beings, and which status Jesus Christ in a way still possesses even now. Sitting with God the Father on the Father's throne is an acknowledgment of this point.

When we grasp this exalted status of Jesus Christ by the side of God the Father, then it should become clear what a huge, enormously blasphemous teaching it is to claim that Jesus Christ was created by God the Father like one of the angels. The magnitude of this heresy is equal to any false teaching found anywhere in paganism.

To continue:

Before They created any other beings, Both of Them unconditionally loved the Other One "with all Their heart and soul and mind". This worked perfectly with only two Beings in existence. Neither One needed to ever exercise any authority over the Other One. Either One always gladly complied with the wishes of the Other One.

That is the relationship God the Father and Jesus Christ had enjoyed for past eternity.

That is the absolute, inflexible anchor point of Their relationship to One Another. **Nothing can change that anchor point.** And so this was the only "law" that regulated Their existence. There were no other

laws.

Then these two God Beings decided to create the angels.

When They created the angels and other spirit beings, They simultaneously also created a second law.

The first law remained intact. That first law Jesus Christ referred to as: "this is **the first and great commandment**" (Matthew 22:38). However, with the creation of the angels **the wording** of that first law **was modified**, to then be seen from the perspective of the angels whom They had just created, rather than from Their own perspective, as it undoubtedly had been before the angels were created.

They clearly intended the angels to be in a hierarchical relationship under Themselves, i.e. They intended for the angels to be subject to Their authority.

Now here is something we need to understand.

As soon as a third living being came into existence, the system that had worked with only two beings in existence could no longer work. A system that was based on unconditionally co-equally relating to just one other individual in existence cannot work without some modifications when there are two or more other individuals to relate to. We cannot relate to two or more other individuals in the same way that we would relate to just one other individual in existence. Neither a trinity nor a triumvirate can ever work; that is just impossible.

I'm sorry if this is a bit intellectual, but I don't know how to make this simpler.

When we have to relate to two or more other individuals, then we must have some kind of priority established. Two can be equal to one another if both accept a certain mindset; but three cannot be all equal to one another; **that simply cannot work**!

In a relationship between only two individuals each one can give his undivided loyalty 100% to the other one. But we can never give our undivided loyalty simultaneously to two or more individuals. One will always come ahead of the other one. That is what Jesus Christ explained in Matthew 6:24 (i.e. "either he will hate the one and love the other, or else ...").

Likewise, when we claim to have three co-equal branches of government running the nation (i.e. the executive, the judiciary and the legislature), then we have a system that is doomed to failure. It must fail because it is impossible for three to all be co-equal. In such a situation one of the three will frequently try to dominate over the other two. Which of the three will try to dominate may change with time. Or else two of them will gang up against the third party to prevent domination. But **three can never be co-equal**. That simply cannot work.

Without getting into a lengthy explanation, the point is that as soon as other living beings were created by these two God Beings, it was absolutely essential that an authority structure would be established, with one individual very clearly in charge. It was Jesus Christ who explained this point when He said: "**No man can serve two masters**" (Matthew 6:24).

That statement "no man can serve two masters" is an absolute principle that applies to all situations, irrespective of in which context it may appear. It is true when the "two masters" stand for contrary views (e.g. God and Satan), and it is true when the "two masters" stand for the identical views (e.g. God the Father and Jesus Christ). It is impossible to serve two masters with undivided loyalty.

So if God the Father and Jesus Christ had until then not had One of Them in authority over the Other

One, then that chain of authority of God the Father over Jesus Christ was established when the angels were created, with 100% agreement on the part of Jesus Christ.

Because the creation of the angels had brought into existence a hierarchy with God the Father at the very top of that hierarchy, therefore the wording of the first law was adapted to reflect that hierarchy, rather than just reflecting the exclusive relationship that had existed between the two God Beings. So in the day that God created all the angels the first law (or commandment) received its final form, as spelled out by Jesus Christ in Matthew 22:37.

The second law that They then established on the day on which They created the angels was "you shall love your neighbor (i.e. your fellow angels) as yourself". This expressed God's desire that all the angels would use their own free wills to establish the identical mindset that God the Father and Jesus Christ have always possessed. It was God's intention that every created being with an independent mind (i.e. angels and later also human beings) would eventually share of their own free choice the exact same way of looking at life as God the Father and Jesus Christ have always done.

We should understand that this second commandment was originally established to describe the relationship that God wanted the angels to have between themselves, one of concern for one another. This commandment Satan also broke when he led into rebellion all the angels whom God had entrusted under Satan's leadership.

This second commandment addresses the same intent as the first commandment, but applied to a newly created level of other beings. That is why Jesus Christ said "the second is like unto it", meaning that it actually addresses the same point as the first commandment. The intent of both of these commandments is to identify and to define the ideal interpersonal relationships that God will require amongst all those who will eventually inhabit future eternity with God.

Notice that the scribe in Matthew 22 had asked Jesus Christ to identify **one** commandment that stands above all the others. But Jesus Christ then promptly gave the man **two** commandments, not one. Jesus Christ did this because **these two commandments cannot be separated**. Both of them are absolutely essential in order to establish the Family of God. The one is greater and has preeminence, but both are essential; and without either of these two commandments God's intentions cannot be achieved. Therefore Jesus Christ presented both of these commandments as the answer for "which is the great commandment of the law?".

Those interpersonal relationships will enshrine willing unconditional submission to the will of God the Father and a genuine outgoing concern for the well-being of every other individual in existence (obviously excluding Satan and the demons who will be banished into "the blackness of darkness forever", see Jude 1:13).

Both of these commandments had already been in force before God created Adam and Eve. These two commandments were not given specifically for human beings. No, they were simply expanded in their applications to include the newly created category of beings called "human beings". In other words, mankind was expected to fit into the structure of interpersonal relationships that had already been defined and established even before God created man. (COMMENT: Here we are not talking about the status that God intends man to have once the plan of salvation has been completed.) Man was expected to fit into the framework of the two commandments that were already in force.

So here is **the big picture** as far as all laws are concerned:

In the presence of God there is **only one law**, **subdivided into two parts** because the Family of God

will be a hierarchy with God the Father at the supreme head. The two parts of that one law are directed at identifying and establishing and entrenching the interpersonal relationships that will exist between all members of God's Family and all the holy angels. And **there are no other laws or commandments** that would somehow not be covered by the two parts of that one law.

GOD'S DEALINGS WITH MAN

So in the presence of God (i.e. in God's Family plus all the angels) there will be only one very simply stated law (with two parts to it) because God expects all other spirit beings to be completely capable of applying appropriate principles correctly to every possible situation that might arise. Individuals who can competently and accurately always apply the correct principles to any given situation simply don't need any additional laws.

In plain language: Angels and other spirit beings (cherubim, seraphim, etc.) don't need four distinct commandments to tell them how to love God above all else; they just need the one principle, and the rest they can figure out spontaneously. Similarly, angels don't need six distinct commandments to tell them how to love their fellow spirit beings; this too they can figure out spontaneously for themselves from the one principle.

Any additional laws in the Family of God environment would only complicate the relationships between all the angels and all members of God's Family, because such laws would amount to imposing some or other restrictions or duties on someone. That would then imply that these spirit beings wouldn't be able to identify and apply for themselves and to themselves such duties or restrictions, based on their own understanding; and that therefore they would need additional laws to provide them with additional guidance. But anyone who needs "additional guidance" cannot possibly be "God", i.e. that individual cannot be a born son or daughter of God by a resurrection; and neither can that individual be one of the holy angels.

Spirit beings are quite capable of determining the correct principles to apply to every possible situation. But we human beings are not as intelligent as the angels, and compared to God's intelligence we are as "less than nothing" (see Isaiah 40:15-17). So in God's dealings with mankind it very quickly became apparent to God that **human beings have a hard time applying underlying principles correctly** to every situation.

One of the reasons for that is that **we are primarily selfishly motivated beings**, unlike the holy angels of God. And for selfishly motivated beings (this also applies to Satan and the demons!) it is almost impossible to correctly apply the principles that are involved in very many situations that arise. Self-interest gets in the way of correctly applying the principles involved in certain situations.

This same point holds true for any secular debate or discussion. People who are motivated by self-interests are simply not capable of understanding the correct principles that apply to situations where their self-interests also happen to be involved.

So the two great principles were simply not enough to make human beings understand how we are to conduct ourselves in every possible situation. And so there came to be a need for additional laws for human beings.

Because of our selfish bias and our inability to always correctly apply the principles that are involved on our own, therefore God broke down the two great principles into ten specific principles, which we know as the ten commandments from Exodus 20:1-17. Now while those ten principles (i.e. commandments)

are quite specific on some issues, they are at the same time also rather non-specific on other issues. And with those other "non-specific" issues (e.g. the feeling of hatred being covered by the commandment to not kill, etc.) we once again have to look for the underlying principles to apply.

Now without some additional guidance from God we would probably never have figured out on our own that hatred and uncontrolled anger violate the principle underlying the commandment to not commit murder. Without some additional guidance we would probably never have figured out that thoughts of sexual lusting violate the principle underlying the commandment to not commit adultery. The same goes for other things that violate the principles underlying the other commandments.

In other words: we human beings still needed additional help in order to correctly identify the principles, **which principles are obvious to spirit beings**, underlying any and every thought and deed. When it comes to spiritual matters, we human beings are on our own not really very good at correctly identifying which principles apply in which circumstances. That is where we still need help and guidance.

And so Jesus Christ during His ministry provided us with very many examples of applying the appropriate principles to various different situations that may confront us at some point in time. Many of those examples are found in the sermon on the mount and in the many parables; and other examples are scattered throughout the gospel accounts. And they all reveal to us various aspects of the mind of Christ.

Life in the presence of God is about understanding and correctly and spontaneously applying principles. Life in the presence of God is not about complying with do and don't do instructions. Life in the presence of God is about constantly making right decisions based on a good understanding of all applicable principles.

AN ANALOGY

It is God's desire that we human beings learn how to correctly determine **which principles we must apply in which circumstances**. To teach us this, God has exposed us to training situations. [Comment: I hope you can see that this is a vastly higher purpose than believing that "God desires that we human beings all keep the Sabbath and the Holy Days".]

Let's assume that you are a very good and competent driver. So you decide that you will teach your teenage son how to drive. After showing him the basics about starting the car and how to steer the car, etc., you cautiously take him out on the open road and expose him to real-life traffic situations, perhaps gentle country traffic to start with.

Now you don't just want to know that he has learned how to change gears, how to speed up and how to slow down, how to change lanes and how to turn right and left, etc. **What you really want to know is if he has learned to make the right decisions in real-life traffic situations**. Does he not only know what to do before he overtakes another car, but does he actually do all those right things intuitively?

As long as you can see that he still laboriously has to think of "what must I do now?" before taking the right action, you know he is not yet qualified to drive on his own. You want to know if he will intuitively think ahead when he approaches a curve or a corner, and that he will confidently take the correct action in those situations.

You want to know whether he visually takes in the whole picture, or whether he is driving with tunnel-vision, because he has to concentrate so hard on what to do next. So you sometimes ask him

"what was that traffic sign we just passed?" to test what information from the environment he actually takes in.

Your ultimate goal is to train him to the point where you are confident that he can intuitively make the right decisions in whatever traffic situations that may arise, in addition to the ability to competently control the car's operation. You want him to think ahead, to anticipate potential problems, to mentally evaluate road conditions and weather conditions, to identify unusual sounds coming from the engine, etc., without any of these things having to be specifically pointed out to him.

When he can confidently and competently do all these things, then the training is complete, and he should be able to drive on his own.

That is exactly what Jesus Christ was doing for us in the sermon on the mount!

To teach us how to identify the correct principles to apply in various different circumstances, Jesus Christ in the sermon on the mount elaborated on various different laws from Old Testament times. He showed that these laws **all** have a far deeper and more profound application than is apparent from looking at just the actual wording of these laws. With all these examples Jesus Christ was saying "you need to look deeper because there is more to this law than meets the eye".

Like a father teaching his son to drive, so Jesus Christ was taking His disciples out for a driving lesson when He gave the sermon on the mount to them. He was trying to show them how to make right decisions in all kinds of different traffic situations. The intention in this exercise goes far beyond the few Old Testament laws that Christ used as examples. **The intention was for the disciples to learn how to utilize the same processes for every single other law of God as well.**

Throughout His entire ministry, not just in the sermon on the mount, Jesus Christ was trying to teach us how to drive on our own with foresight and with competence. In other words, Christ was trying to teach us how to correctly extract the right principles involved in any and every possible situation we might face.

The mechanics of knowing the laws of God are like knowing how to use the steering wheel and the gas pedal and the brake, etc. And that is what constitutes "the milk" (see Hebrews 5:12), the basics, in our interactions with God. And, once we come into God's Church, it is assumed that we have gotten past that stage, that we are now quite confident in identifying the spiritual steering wheel and brake and gas pedals. Unfortunately that assumption isn't always correct.

The question is: do we know how to use these parts of our spiritual cars under pressure in unexpected circumstances, so that we don't have an accident? Or does someone in an emergency situation still have to tell us "hit the brake now" or "lookout before changing lanes" or "watch what that car in front of you is doing", etc.?

If we have learned to correctly identify the principles that are involved in every situation we face, then we have graduated to the point of being able to drive on our own. But if we are constantly needing the minister to point out the correct principles involved in what we are doing, or what we want to do, then we are still in the learner-driver category, needing a qualified driver sitting next to us to tell us what to do next. And in that case we would still be in the same situation as were the Hebrews to whom Paul wrote his letter; i.e. we would have a need for someone to teach us again "**the first principles** of the oracles of God".

Can you follow this analogy?

A major focus of Jesus Christ's ministry was to teach us how to identify and then apply the correct

principles, based on a good understanding of God's laws, for whatever situation might arise. The few examples Jesus Christ gave in the sermon on the mount are to tell us that **we must also take the same approach with every other law of God**. And it all goes back to all the laws "hanging from" the two great commandments.

Far too many people who have been in the Church of God for 20 or 30 or 40 and more years are still in the learner-driver stage. They feel the need to have their minister explain even simple Scriptures to them. They are hesitant in many of the decisions they have to make. And that is after studying the Bible for anything from 20 to 50 years.

Now if they had studied any other subject from A to Z (i.e. from agronomy to zoology and everything in-between) for 20 - 50 years, they would very confidently handle all straight-forward questions relating to their field of study. But when it comes to the Bible, then all too often some people in this situation still ask the same questions that people who have studied the Bible for less than two or three years might ask. Why is that? Why do people who have studied the Bible for two or more decades still lack so much basic understanding? **Why are they not able to answer their own questions?**

Probably the greatest part of the answer to these questions is that such people have never learned to discern the correct principles to every issue that comes their way. But that is precisely what Jesus Christ was doing in the sermon on the mount, teaching us how to go about discerning the underlying principles for all of life's situations. We have to learn how to do this in order to be able to drive on our own.

A major key for developing the ability to discern applicable principles is to lead every issue back to one of the two great commandments, from which absolutely everything else in life hangs down.

SEEING ALL LAWS IN THEIR CORRECT PERSPECTIVE

We need to grasp that there isn't a single law of God that somehow goes back directly to God without going through one of these two great commandments.

Every law of God comes from God, but all of them come through one of these two great commandments. There are no exceptions.

What I mean is that every single law or instruction from God represents an expression of one of these two great commandments. This is important to understand, because it has very profound consequences. Far too many people in God's Church tend to see specific laws of God in isolation, as if those laws somehow stand totally independently on their own legs. That is like a learner-driver driving with tunnel vision and not seeing the rest of the picture all around him.

Far too many people see specific laws (e.g. the Sabbath, tithing, etc.) as an end in themselves, something they feel must surely exist for all future eternity. Many years ago there was one evangelist in Worldwide who exemplified this particular approach, by extrapolating almost all present laws of God into a future "world tomorrow" setting. While that approach can be helpful in some ways, it is easy to get carried away and go too far in transferring present laws and circumstances into a kingdom of God setting.

This approach of looking at laws as an end in themselves also applies to all of the religions of this world; they typically view the rituals and instructions in their religions as an end in themselves. While it is good for us to understand this approach in the world's religions, we need not concern ourselves with their ideas.

So note carefully!

"**A foundation**" conveys the idea of permanence. But "**hanging down**" does not convey the idea of permanence at all! "Hanging down" creates a picture of a certain amount of insecurity, because things that hang down may very possibly fall down at some point, to then be lost for good.

When Jesus Christ said that "all the law and the prophets" hang on these two commandments, the word "all" applies to both terms. In other words, Jesus Christ was really saying that "**all the law** and **all the prophets**" hang down from these two commandments. This means that there are no exceptions.

So here is the point that Jesus Christ revealed with this statement:

None of God's laws, all of which hang down from these two great commandments, are permanent! None of them will exist in future eternity! All the things that "hang down" from something are destined to sooner or later "drop off"!

The only things that will abide in this regard are the two great commandments that are the anchors! They will continue to exist for all future eternity. But all of the laws that hang down from them only have a limited lifespan.

Now we might also ask: why did Jesus Christ here include "all the prophets"? I mean, the scribe hadn't asked about the prophets at all; he only asked about what is "in the law". So why did Jesus Christ say that all the prophets also "hang down" from these two great commandments?

God is the One who sent and inspired the prophets. The inclusion of the prophets in this statement should tell us that **everything God had communicated to Israel through the prophets** was also an extension from and an expression of these two great commandments.

At the same time Jesus Christ was also pointing out that all prophecies will eventually "drop off", meaning that they have either been fulfilled and therefore are no longer applicable, or else they did not come to pass because certain conditions were not met. Keep in mind that many conditional statements in the Bible are in fact prophecies, because they predict different outcomes (e.g. blessings and cursings) for different conditions (e.g. either obedience or rebellion). See also Ezekiel 33:10-20 where God makes clear that He will not bring a prediction to pass if the people involved change.

Keep in mind also Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 13:8.

Charity never faileth: but whether *there be* **prophecies**, they **shall fail**; whether *there be* **tongues**, they **shall cease**; whether *there be* **knowledge**, it **shall vanish away**. (1 Corinthians 13:8)

Prophecies, languages, knowledge ... these are all things that hang down from the two great commandments, in that they are a part of the present human experience aimed at trying to achieve God's intentions for us human beings. And all of these things will in time drop off and disappear. Notice that Paul included "prophecies" in this group. Prophecies don't have any permanent value. And once they have been fulfilled, then prophecies cease to have any value, except perhaps in a very short historical context.

The word "charity" in this verse refers to "godly love". And love is a specific way of relating to and interacting with other individuals. If we have the eyes to see it, the two great commandments of Matthew 22:37-40 are in fact the perfect definition of "agape", of "godly love". They are an even more precise definition of godly love than 1 John 5:3, for the simple reason that **they provide a better perspective on godly love**. We don't use them as a definition for godly love simply because that would amount to using

the word "love" in order to define "love". But they constitute the best definition of godly love nevertheless.

Having the definition of love focus on the two great commandments rather than on the ten commandments gives the definition of love a greater longevity; i.e. it will still be correct even after all the things that "hang from" the two great commandments have dropped off. So Paul's statement that "charity never fails" is just another way of saying that the two great commandments will always exist, for all eternity, that they will never fail!

Now here is a vital key to evaluating the significance of any and all of God's laws.

To correctly understand God's intentions for giving a particular law, to understand what we have frequently referred to as "the spirit of the law", we need to in our own minds lead that law back to one of the two great commandments.

It is frequently not the wording of the law itself that reveals the full extent of God's real intentions. The full extent of God's real intentions (i.e. the spirit of the law) is revealed by the anchor from which this particular law hangs down. God's intentions are revealed by whichever of the two great commandments the law in question is connected to. And we need to determine whatever principles need to be applied by looking at the anchor for that specific law.

That should suffice for some general background information. Now let's look at the matter of the mind of Christ.

WHAT IS MEANT BY "THE MIND OF CHRIST"?

Let's have a look at what the Apostle Paul told the Corinthians. Notice his comment in 1 Corinthians 2:16.

For **who has known** the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But **we have the mind of Christ**. (1 Corinthians 2:16)

Paul's question is addressed to the Church members in Corinth. Implied is that the people he is writing to don't have the mind of Christ. This implication is confirmed a few sentences later when Paul said very plainly "for you are yet carnal" (1 Corinthians 3:3). Carnal people don't have the mind of Christ.

So in these verses we see Paul creating a contrast by using the pronouns "we" and "you", as in:

- **you** are still **carnal**,

- but **we** have **the mind of Christ**.

With these pronouns Paul uses "**you**" to refer to **the membership** in Corinth, and "**we**" to refer to **the ministry**. Specifically, it seems that with "we" Paul was thinking of himself and Apollos, who had also spent some time in Corinth, and whose name Paul mentions several times in this context.

This entire first epistle to the Corinthians is filled with correction on a range of different subjects. The volume of correction that Paul included in this epistle should make clear why he referred to the members there as "yet carnal". And so his "we (ministers) have the mind of Christ" statement correctly implied that the people in Corinth by and large did not have the mind of Christ. It seems that a lot of them were either on stony ground or amongst thorns. (See my article "Our Eternal Destiny Rests In Our Own Hands" for a

detailed explanation of the parable of the sower.)

So what exactly is the mind of Christ?

Does "the mind of Christ" refer to knowing all the laws of God? No, that is not really what is meant by this expression. Knowing all the laws of God is a mechanical thing which can be done without any kind of discernment. Biblical scholars and commentators can give you a list of all of the laws in the Bible; and those people don't even remotely have the mind of Christ.

Here is the point:

The mind of Christ refers to the ability to apply the correct principles to every situation that may arise for anyone. The mind of Christ looks beyond the laws that are involved to the actual anchor points from which those laws are suspended. The mind of Christ looks at God's actual intentions underlying whatever laws may be involved.

The reason for this is that **every law starts out from an intention**. And a law is nothing other than an attempt to express the underlying intention in words. But **words easily impose limitations and parameters**, because different people assign different meanings to words. The mind of Christ looks at whether those parameters and limitations in the wording of a law accurately reflect the original intentions for that law, or whether those parameters and limitations are in fact unintended and sometimes perhaps even undesirable.

So we have the following situation for the laws of God:

God has **an intention** to achieve some form of conduct or behavior.

That intention can be **traced back to** one of the two great commandments.

That intention is then **expressed in words** in the form of a law.

The law is **kept simple** without becoming too verbose.

This approach **assumes goodwill** and an understanding approach on the part of those to whom this law will apply. This approach is something that the carnal mind usually does not really understand.

The carnal mind is not subject to the law of God (Romans 8:7). And it approaches God's laws from a confrontational perspective rather than with goodwill. That carnal-minded approach always creates problems.

So the carnal mind **spontaneously misunderstands** God's real intention and purpose for this law.

Thus the carnal mind seeks to **restrict the application** of this law as much as possible. This is obviously a wrong and carnal motivation.

In this way God's **original intention** for this law is **deliberately ignored** and rejected by the carnal mind.

This is achieved by **the typical lawyer's arguments**. The purpose of a lawyer's arguments is always the same: that purpose is **to separate the law from its original intention**. Few people understand this.

The method used is to argue about the law's wording, to **strive about words** to no profit (see 2 Timothy 2:14), while ignoring the obvious intent.

As Paul points out in this verse, the end result is always "**the subverting of the hearers**". In this way the original intention for the law is done away with. This opens the door to misapplying the law. [Comment: We have the same situation with civil laws in a nation, where lawyers frequently argue against the clear intent of the original lawgivers.]

Now the mind of Christ understands this overall picture as follows:

1) God has an intention to achieve something.

2) So God creates a law that expresses this intention.

3) The human mind then focuses on the wording of that law.

4) This focus may lead to some misunderstandings, because words have limitations and can easily have their meanings distorted.

This limitation was addressed by the Apostle Paul as follows:

Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for **the letter kills**, but **the spirit gives life**. (2 Corinthians 3:6)

"The letter of the law kills" because in many cases it cannot adequately express the real intentions for the law. Look at the sixth commandment ("you shall not commit murder"). That wording does not in any way address God's real intention of, obviously in addition to preventing murder, also ruling against people harboring attitudes of anger and resentment and hostility, etc. And the letter of the law must always make provision for penalties for disobedience of that law. Without penalties for transgressions the law would be meaningless. So all that the law has to offer is penalties for transgression; i.e. it holds out death as a penalty. But the law does not offer any rewards for not killing other people. It only offers penalties for transgressions, but no rewards for faithful obedience.

[Comment: God offers rewards for faithful obedience, but the law doesn't offer those rewards. The law only offers penalties for transgressions.]

On the other hand, eternal life is only available to those who live by "the spirit of the law", i.e. by God's actual intentions for establishing the laws, which intentions are invariably far more inclusive than the letter of the law.

To state this very plainly:

When we say that we need to seek to live by "the spirit of the law", we are saying that we need to seek out **God's original intentions** for every law that God has established. We need to search for God's mind beyond the actual wording of any law. And once we have come to understand God's original intentions, then we need to commit to making God's original intentions our own personal intentions and desires.

Regarding Paul's statement that we are to be "**able ministers of the spirit**": Paul is saying that it is a minister's responsibility to lead every law of God back to God's original intentions for giving that law. **That is what we are to teach God's people**, to focus on God's intentions underlying every law, rather than focusing on the wording of the law only. Many times the wording of a law will fall short in expressing God's full intentions for that law, as with the law that says "you shall not kill", etc.

Anyway, in the most basic contrast between the natural mind and the mind of Christ, we have the

following situation:

1) **The natural human mind** looks at every law of God at face value, without any regard for the obvious intention underlying those laws. The human mind refuses to see anything in any law of God that is not explicitly spelled out. Therefore the precise wording of any law becomes extremely important for the human mind. Frequently the human mind will use the precise wording to argue against the law's actual intention, revealing its innate hostility towards God. And the human mind wants to very desperately establish exact limits for every law of God, so that it may know "as long as I don't go further than this, I am not breaking this law of God". The natural human mind will only ask "what do I have to do to get by?" without understanding that this very question is an expression of selfishness.

Can you follow the above explanation? Because if you can, then you should also be able to understand how totally carnal people can become a part of a congregation of the Church of God, i.e. without ever really repenting. They are willing to accept the letter of the law, but they are **not interested** in coming to understand God's underlying motivation for establishing that law in the first place. All they are prepared to look at is the letter of the law. That approach can gain them an entry into a congregation of the Church of God, but that approach does not lead to salvation. See again 2 Corinthians 3:6.

2) **The mind of Christ** looks at every law of God from the perspective of trying to discern God's real intentions in establishing those laws. In that process the actual wording of the law (i.e. when the wording appears to set limitations of applicability for the law) becomes of secondary importance to seeking out God's real intentions for the law. The mind of Christ tries to see every law from God's point of view. Rather than asking "what do I have to do?", it asks "what does this law reveal regarding what God would like me to do?" The way the mind of Christ seeks to establish God's point of view is by leading every law back to one of the two great commandments. This mind asks: **why did God give this law?** What does God want to achieve with this law? This mind recognizes that with God the intention came first, and the law is then merely an expression of that intention. So **the intention for a law becomes more important than the letter of the law**.

Consider the example of the daughters of Zelophehad, recorded in Numbers chapter 27. Before the crossing of the people of Israel into the Promised Land, Moses took another census for every family line in every tribe. This was for purposes of assigning an inheritance in the Promised Land to every family within every tribe.

In this process we are told in Numbers 26:33 that "Zelophehad the son of Hepher had no sons, but (only) daughters". And Zelophehad had died. As the laws of inheritance stood, this meant that the family of Zelophehad would not be given an inheritance in the Promised Land, because the family did not have a man at its head.

That was the implication according to the letter of the law. So the daughters of Zelophehad came before Moses and before Eleazar the priest (Numbers 27:1-2). And basically they said to Moses: it is not fair that our father's line should not have an inheritance simply because our father, who is now dead, had no sons. So give us the inheritance that would be due to our father's line if he had begotten sons (Numbers 27:3-4).

Moses wasn't sure how to rule in this instance. So he took the matter to God (Numbers 27:5). And God's answer was: the daughters of Zelophehad speak right (Numbers 27:6-7). And then God added some statements of clarification to the laws of inheritance to deal with situations when a man has no male heirs (Numbers 27:8-11).

The point I want to make here is this:

As it stood, **the letter of the law was unfair in certain unexpected circumstances**. It had never been God's intention to deprive a family of its rightful inheritance simply because a man has no male heirs. As it stood, the law in certain specific cases went against the principle of the second great commandment, to love our neighbor as ourselves. Therefore God modified the letter of this law to make provision for taking such previously unforeseen circumstances into account.

The same is true for many other laws as well!

It is always possible for circumstances to come about that were simply not anticipated when the wording for a specific law was established. I'll remind you that God Himself had simply not anticipated the magnitude of man's depravity and perverseness (see Genesis 6:5-6). And because all of the laws before the flood were "hanging down" from the two great commandments, therefore it was a simple matter for God to change some of them after the flood, without actually changing the anchor points for all laws. [Example of a changed law: no death penalty for murder before the flood, replaced by the death penalty for murder after the flood; etc.]

This approach we can only understand on our own (i.e. without having God give us some examples in the Bible) if we understand that **the intention underlying any law is always more important than the actual wording of the law!** It is the wording's responsibility to express the real intentions as accurately as possible. It is never a case of the intentions underlying a law having to submit to the wording of the law, though that is precisely what typically happens in human law courts ... there the actual wording is the most important thing.

This is where we must exercise the mind of Christ! And here is the main point:

Once we are able to correctly grasp God's underlying intentions for a specific law, then God expects us to try to live by those underlying intentions, and not merely by the actual wording of the law. This is the precise point where "to him that knows to do good and does it not, to him it is sin" (see James 4:17) comes into force. This is the point where a greater understanding brings with it greater accountability.

Now let's get back to why all laws "hang down" from the two great commandments.

THE FLEXIBILITY OF LAWS THAT "HANG DOWN"

You might recall the incident where the scheming elite in the Medo-Persian kingdom conspired against Daniel to have him killed. After the king had been tricked into signing a stupid decree, he was powerless to prevent Daniel from being thrown into the den of lions.

The reason even the king himself could not save Daniel was because "no decree nor statute which the king establishes may be changed" (see Daniel 6:15). When the king signed this stupid decree, he had no idea that his nobles were going to use that decree to do something that the king himself was most emphatically opposed to, i.e. trying to get the king to pronounce a death sentence against his loyal Prime Minister Daniel (i.e. "Prime Minister" in our terms today).

The reason for the problem was that the laws of the Medes and the Persians were completely rigid, with no flexibility whatsoever. Even the king himself was powerless to change that. This incident exposes the main problem with inflexibility. And **that is not what God's laws are like**; God's laws will adapt to all changed circumstances. That is why all of God's laws "hang down" from the two great commandments.

So here is something we need to understand.

There is **a major difference between laws** on the one hand, **and the principles and intentions underlying those laws** on the other hand. That difference is as follows:

1) **Whenever laws take priority over the principles and intentions** underlying those laws, then this opens the door to the opportunity to misapply those laws in certain situations. The reason for this is quite simple: there is no perfect way to word any law, because we cannot anticipate every possible scenario that may arise at some point in the future. And sooner or later some situations will come about that were not anticipated by this law, and then the letter of the law would require a course of action that is simply not correct. Some actions that are in fact "innocent" could look "guilty" in certain situations because of the wording of a specific law.

2) **As long as all laws are always conditional on the underlying intentions and principles for those laws**, this wrong scenario can never happen! This means that the actual wording of a law is not nearly as important as is the intention underlying that law. So when at some future point certain situations arise that would amount to looking "guilty" by the letter of the law, if those situations are in fact in agreement with the actual intentions for that law, then this will never lead to a "guilty" verdict before God.

Innocent and guilty must always be established by the actual intentions underlying any law, rather than by the wording of the law alone. If it is clear that the intentions behind some actions are in agreement with the intentions underlying a specific law, then there is never any guilt on the part of the person responsible for those actions, even when the actual wording of the law might imply a certain amount of guilt.

This is also true for **the opposite scenario**.

If certain actions are in agreement with the actual wording of a specific law, but those same actions are in fact clearly opposed to the actual intentions underlying that law, then the person involved is **guilty before God**, even though that guilt cannot be established by any appeals to the actual wording of the law. For example, spiteful and resentful compliance with a law is no better than outright disobedience.

The intentions underlying any law are always far, far more important than the actual wording of the law. The wording of any law must always be in compliance with the intentions underlying that law. **The wording of a law must always be interpreted in such a way that it correctly reflects the actual intentions underlying that law.**

Let me try to make this clear:

When someone is forced to obey, and then **obeys rebelliously and resentfully**, then that person will incur the same penalty as outright disobedience. The reason this incurs the same penalty before God as outright disobedience is precisely because **such "obedience" is in fact disobedience**! You say: how can someone who does what he is told to do be disobeying? The answer here is very simple.

Here is that answer:

Obedience to God’s laws must always first and foremost be **obedience to the intent** underlying those laws! And it is always, always God’s requirement that we obey His laws joyfully and willingly!
So **resentful obedience is before God always a very despicable form of rebellion**! Resentful obedience violates God’s intentions underlying all of His laws.

Resentful obedience says to God: yes, I will obey You because You are forcing me to obey, but I will

hate You for it! And that is an attitude that God will never accept.

Look at the opening comments from God in the Book of Isaiah.

"Come now, and **let us reason together**, saith the LORD ..." (Isaiah 1:18)

God wants us to reason out these things. The rest of this verse refers to the magnitude of our sins. God's point is this: these things can all be worked out, if we meet one condition.

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

It is not enough to be obedient. It must be **willing obedience**! God will simply not accept any other kind of obedience. This is the key to understanding why vast numbers of people will be killed at the end of the millennium (i.e. when Satan is released for a short period). Those will be people who obeyed God for decades and even for centuries, but their obedience had never really been "willing". And that is why God has Satan round up all those people for destruction.

Let me state something quite plainly:

That huge multitude of rebels at the end of the millennium (Revelation 20:8-9) proves that all those who today resentfully obey would do exactly the same thing (i.e. rebel), if they were given half a chance to do so! The same principle applies even in our own child-rearing situations. When our children obey us resentfully, they would openly rebel if they felt they had half a chance of getting away with their rebellion. And resentful obedience is never acceptable!

Resentful obedience is always a form of rebellion, in whatever situations it may occur. It comes from Satan. Satan obeys God right now because God forces Satan to obey; but Satan's current obedience is extremely resentful. And resentful obedience, in whatever circumstances it occurs, must always be confronted and dealt with and rooted out. If it is left to smolder, that only postpones the inevitable open rebellion later. The people at the end of the millennium prove this beyond question.

To get back to the original intentions for a law and the subsequent wording used to express that law:

Only the two great commandments are worded perfectly, and absolutely nothing can get around the wording of those two great commandments. That is why God, in wording this first great commandment, didn't just say "you shall love God above all else", as I am doing in this article. No, God very deliberately said "you shall love the Lord your God **with all your heart**, **and with all your soul**, **and with all your mind**".

This was to make very clear that nothing is excluded! If we don't put God unconditionally first in our lives, then God doesn't want us around! Besides our "heart, soul and mind" **we don't have anything else** to make up our personal individual identity. So God was including everything and leaving nothing out. These two great commandments are indeed worded perfectly.

But every other law that is suspended from those two great commandments falls short in expressing the true intentions in the wording of the law. For all these "hanging down" laws the actual wording is never capable of expressing the full intentions behind those laws. There is always more to every law than is presented by the wording of that law. As Paul said, the letter kills and the spirit gives life.

So let's take a closer look at "the flexibility" that is built into laws that "hang down" from the two great anchor points. (We can also see it as one great anchor point that has two sides to it.)

SO WHAT ABOUT DAVID?

We all know the story of David eating the shewbread. This is recorded in 1 Samuel chapter 21.

David and a small group of young men had been fleeing from Saul for three days (see 1 Samuel 21:5). The implication is that they had fled without taking any food supplies with them. Thus they were by then extremely hungry. So David asked the priest for five loaves of bread (1 Samuel 21:3). The priest explained that the only bread he had was "hallowed bread" (1 Samuel 21:4). This was a reference to the shewbread of Leviticus 24:5.

In stating this law for the shewbread in Leviticus 24, God continued to say that after this bread had been used for seven days as shewbread before God, it was then to be used as food by the priest and his family (i.e. by Aaron and his family). See Leviticus 24:9. This use for the bread by the priest's family was quite clear and understood by all.

So this is the situation:

1) The use of this bread as shewbread before God **for seven days** is led back to **the first** of the two great commandments, to love God above all else.

2) The use of this bread after it has been taken away from before God (i.e. **after seven days**) is led back to **the second** of the two great commandments, to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. That is, God made it available as food for the priest's family.

3) David and his men had been without food for three days, which means that they were **close to starving**. At the same time the priest and his family had adequate food supplies available for themselves; they were not anywhere near starvation. They had the ingredients available to make "common bread" for their family, though that would take them several hours to make.

4) The shewbread the priest had in his possession had completed its purpose for the first great commandment. So this bread was now subject to the second great commandment, and the first great commandment was no longer an issue with this bread.

5) The second great commandment, to love our neighbor as ourselves, infers that we will share our food with those around us who are starving. As Jesus Christ said: "for **I was hungry** and **you gave Me food**" (Matthew 25:35).

6) So when the priest agreed to give David this shewbread, he was sharing his own food supply with David, putting "love your neighbor as yourself" into practice.

7) The "flexibility" of this particular law is as follows: when God designates certain food items to be eaten by the priesthood and their families, God's instruction is not meant to be rigid in circumstances where others in the same environment are starving. That was never God's intention. In such circumstances of starvation, showing a concern for the dire food needs of those who are starving allows that law hanging down from the second great commandment to swing a little to the right, making that food available to those who have a far greater need for it at that point in time.

8) This is what David understood. His dire need for food took priority over bread that "in a manner of speaking was common"; i.e. it had fulfilled its purpose of being before God as shewbread for seven days.

9) Jesus Christ accepted David's reasoning in eating the shewbread. This is recorded in Matthew chapter 12.

But he said unto them, Have ye not read what **David** did, when he was an hungered, and they that were with him; How he entered into the house of God, and **did eat the shewbread**, **which was not lawful for him to eat**, neither for them which were with him, but only for the priests? (Matthew 12:3-4)

Jesus Christ said very clearly that "it was not lawful" for David to eat the shewbread. But equally clearly Jesus Christ fully accepted this action by David and held David guiltless in this matter. The whole purpose behind Jesus Christ mentioning this incident in David's life was to point out that **sometimes** certain actions are acceptable because they involve **a higher principle** than the law they appear to be transgressing in the letter of the law.

10) The law regarding the shewbread is one of the laws suspended from both of the great commandments, which law will in due time drop off for good. It will not exist within the Family of God.

Let's look at another example.

JESUS CHRIST'S DISCIPLES EATING WHEAT

The same basic principle applies to the situation in which Jesus Christ was making the above comments.

On the Sabbath Jesus Christ and His disciples walked through the fields of wheat on their way into Jerusalem to go to the Temple. The disciples were hungry. So they plucked a few ears of wheat and rubbed the grains in the palms of their hands to remove the chaff. Then they ate these dry grains of wheat, a not particularly attractive task, when compared to having a slice of bread. They were clearly quite hungry.

The hypocritical Pharisees had invented strict rules for "harvesting" grains, based on the traditions of the elders. And by their hypocritical rules what the disciples did amounted to "harvesting" the wheat, an utterly absurd allegation. What the disciples had done did not even remotely amount to "harvesting". And it wasn't even worth arguing over with these fanatical Pharisees, because they were blinded by their own traditions.

So understand this:

Simply because Jesus Christ chose not to challenge the Pharisees' flawed accusation that what His disciples had done was supposedly "not lawful" (see Matthew 12:2), that does not mean that Jesus Christ agreed with their assessment. He did not agree with it. We'll deal with this in more detail later. For now we need to understand:

What His disciples had done was absolutely and unconditionally "lawful"!

The claim, repeated by Bible commentators and occasionally even repeated by certain ignorant ministers in some or other Church of God group, that technically the disciples had broken the Sabbath is absurd! People who make statements like that have an understanding that is just as shallow and flawed as was that of the Pharisees; i.e. they don't really have any understanding.

The disciples had not done anything whatsoever that violated the Sabbath commandment (see Exodus20:8-11). In no way whatsoever did their picking of a few ears of wheat in order to eat those

grains right away amount to "work". No way did their actions amount to what God means by "work".

But this incident is an excellent illustration of what I mentioned earlier.

1) Here we have a commandment from God, the Sabbath command.

2) The carnal-minded Pharisees did their utmost to fence this law in, by inventing a host of hypocritical rules for the Sabbath. In their own lives they could easily work around all those rules, if they wanted to do so.

3) They made no attempts to understand God's intentions for creating the Sabbath commandment, even though God has spelled out those intentions through the prophet Isaiah. They looked exclusively at the letter of the law, and totally ignored God's real intentions for this law. God had said:

If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, *from* doing your pleasure on My holy day; and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honorable; and shalt honor Him, **not doing your own ways**, **nor finding your own pleasure**, **nor speaking *your own* words**: (Isaiah 58:13)

4) Instead, their carnal minds turned actions that were perfectly lawful before God into supposed transgressions of the Sabbath commandment.

5) To make this quite clear: Going outside on the Sabbath and picking some fruit off a tree or off a bush, or picking a tomato or a carrot or anything else for immediate consumption is simply not addressed by the Sabbath commandment. To think that God was trying to regulate such actions with the Sabbath commandment shows an utter, total, complete, all-encompassing lack of understanding of what God had in mind for the Sabbath.

6) Such a perspective clearly views the Sabbath in isolation, as if it was totally divorced from the rest of life, as if nothing else could enter the picture. This is like driving with tunnel vision. This perspective certainly does not understand that the Sabbath commandment is in fact suspended from the two great commandments, and must invariably be led back to God through those two commandments.

7) The Pharisees also imposed their own ideas on what God means by "work" in the Sabbath commandment. The word "work" was not intended by God to stand in isolation. Rather, God expects us to seek out what He means by "work" in this commandment, irrespective of whatever meanings and definitions carnal human beings may attach to this word. And God did not intend the word "work" to apply to picking small quantities of fresh produce that one could pick up for immediate consumption. **The Pharisees were trying to use God's own commandment against God**, which is typical of the carnal mind.

So are you beginning to get the picture?

HOW CHRIST DEALT WITH THIS ISSUE

So in dealing with the Pharisees in Matthew 12:1-8 Jesus Christ did not focus on their flawed understanding of "working on the Sabbath". That might have led to "striving about words", and Jesus Christ didn't do that.

Instead He took the following approach, something we can learn from:

1) **Instead of arguing defensively** that what His disciples had done was in fact completely lawful, i.e. completely in agreement with the Sabbath commandment, **Jesus Christ** bypassed that issue and **went on the attack**, without commenting on the legality of picking some wheat for immediate consumption. He went on the attack by putting the Pharisees in the hot seat, forcing them into a defensive position.

2) So, just for argument's sake, let's assume that there really had been something about the disciples' actions that was not lawful. Let's just reason from the Pharisees' own premise, even though that premise was completely flawed.

3) So if what Christ's disciples did was wrong, **what about what King David had done**, at a time when he was hungry and had no food available, i.e. under similar circumstances to Christ's disciples?

4) It is quite clear (unlike the situation with Christ's disciples) that what David had done was "unlawful" (see Matthew 12:4). This fact the Pharisees could not deny.

5) Therefore in condemning Christ's disciples, the Pharisees would be forced to also condemn King David for having eaten the shewbread. **But this they were not willing to do.** They were not prepared to find fault with what David had done.

6) Next, it is quite clear that on the Sabbath **the priests perform real physical work** in the Temple (Matthew 12:5), yet they are blameless (same verse). Carrying out the Temple responsibilities involved real work. So technically the priests regularly profaned the Sabbath by performing their duties in the Temple. Therefore the Pharisees should also condemn the priests for what they did on the Sabbath. **But this they were also not willing to do.** The Pharisees' reasoning in this instance was that the Temple was so important that the duties of the priests, even though they amounted to working, took priority over the Sabbath command to not work.

[Comment: The truth here is that God had in fact commanded the priests to perform those specific duties on the Sabbath; and God never intended any of the priest's Sabbath duties to be classified as "working on the Sabbath". That should be very easy to see for anyone who understands the principle of Isaiah 58:13. None of the priest's Sabbath duties qualified as "doing their own ways" or as "finding their own pleasure" or as "speaking their own words". The amount of physical energy involved in slaughtering and sacrificing animals has nothing to do with this. Isaiah 58:13 makes clear that the priest's Sabbath activities were not to be looked upon as "work" in the sense of Exodus 20:10. In our Scripture here (i.e. Matthew 12:5) Jesus Christ was simply dealing with this matter from the perspective of the Pharisees themselves.]

7) Then Jesus Christ stated that He, the Son of God, was clearly more important than the Temple (Matthew 12:6). The unstated reasoning here is: if you show respect for the Temple by being willing to work on the Sabbath (and that Sabbath work by the priests had been ordained by God), then a far greater respect must be accorded to Jesus Christ, the God of the Old Testament, who was standing there in person. So if it is okay to work on the Sabbath to carry out Temple duties, then it is even "more okay" for those around Jesus Christ to also work on the Sabbath. This line of reasoning did not even require Jesus Christ to refute their foolish allegations that what His disciples had done supposedly amounted to "working". That is the reasoning involved here.

8) So note! Jesus Christ was not saying that what His disciples had done was "work", not at all. **He simply took the argument of the Pharisees themselves**, and turned it around by saying "right, so what about King David, and what about the priests?". This is the same approach that Jesus Christ used in Luke 11:19, where Christ said: "if I by Beelzebub cast out demons, by whom do your sons cast them out?" Obviously, Jesus Christ was not implying that He did cast out demons by Beelzebub. It is just a theoretical argument to expose the flaws in their bigoted reasoning. Christ did exactly the same thing in

Matthew 12.

9) This approach totally took the wind out of their sails far more effectively than if Christ had defended the legality of picking three ears of wheat in order to immediately munch and crunch on those grains of wheat. That approach they might have tried to argue with, but Christ's appeals to David and to the priests terminated all arguments.

Note that even if the Pharisees would not have agreed that Jesus Christ was far more important than the Temple, they still could not deny that the priests did extensive physical work in the Temple every Sabbath without that work incurring any blame or guilt. Neither could they deny that David ate something "which was not lawful for him to eat".

Note! What David had done was **not "lawful"**, but **it was "principle-ful"** and **it was "underlying intention-ful"**. (Sorry about inventing some new words here, but they make my point more precisely.) In other words, what David had done was unlawful when viewed against the law that hangs down from the two great commandments. But it was not unlawful at all when evaluated against those two great anchor point commandments directly. **A different perspective completely reverses the evaluation of what David had done.**

10) And then Jesus Christ presented the principle that applied to both King David and to His disciples, though in this context Jesus Christ was referring specifically to His disciples.

But if ye had known what *this* meaneth, **I will have mercy, and not sacrifice**, ye would not have condemned **the guiltless**. (Matthew 12:7)

Note that Jesus Christ here refers to His disciples as "**guiltless**"! Therefore according to the words of Jesus Christ Himself what His disciples had done had in fact not broken the Sabbath in any way whatsoever! So we can throw the views of all the commentaries that argue otherwise out the window! And anyone giving a sermon or sermonette in a Church of God congregation really ought to know better than to question the correctness of Jesus Christ's statements on this matter.

Note that Jesus Christ at this point did not explain why His disciples were guiltless. We'll come back to this point later.

For now note two points:

The first point is that both King David and Jesus Christ's disciples were guiltless in these instances. God did not count either incident as a violation of His laws. And we can never tell God how He must evaluate His own laws!

The second point to understand is that none of God's laws are ever intended to cause a hardship! That is the principle that applies here. This goes back to the two great commandments. The specific principle that hangs from these two great commandments in our context here is something God stated in Hosea 6:6, which is "I desire mercy and not sacrifice".

So when circumstances come about that could entail unintended hardships, then in some cases before God that law does not apply in the same way. That is because in creating that law in the first place it was not God's intention that the law would apply in those unusual circumstances. (This is never the case when I through my own foolish or thoughtless conduct bring some hardship upon myself. In such cases it becomes a matter of cause and effect, and God's laws apply to their full extent.)

Examples of providing for potential hardships typically include making provision for food and drink,

except for the Day of Atonement. So for the Sabbath God expects us to make in advance major preparations for the things we may need on the Sabbath. This includes preparing those food items that can be prepared in advance. But having done that, God accepts that we will also spend a small amount of time on the Sabbath itself getting our meals ready.

And that is what the disciples were doing, spending a very small amount of time preparing a few grains of wheat for immediate eating. God likewise makes allowance for us to take care of the essential needs of our animals on the Sabbath, within reason of course. That is, the Sabbath is not the time to go and find food for a 100-head herd of cattle. But feeding our pets or domestic animals is quite acceptable. The "ox in a pit" principle is also well known; i.e. God readily allows us to take care of genuine emergencies on the Sabbath, without viewing those actions as infringements of the Sabbath commandment.

To be specific: When God gave the law about only the priests eating the shewbread, **it was not God's intention** to ever withhold such shewbread from people who were in dire need of food. And when God gave the Sabbath commandment, **it was not God's intention** for this commandment to prevent people from picking fresh fruit off a tree for immediate consumption, any more than this commandment was intended to prevent us from taking a piece of fruit out of our fridge or from a tray of fruit on the Sabbath. Likewise, in giving the Sabbath commandment it was not God's intention to legislate on how we should deal with totally unexpected genuine emergencies, where our response time is of the essence (a fire, a flood, an accident, etc.).

God's intentions always define the application of a law more accurately than does the actual wording of the law.

What we see here is that the laws "hang down from" those two great principles. The laws in question here are not rigid or inflexible. They are adaptable to different circumstances, which may make provision for different ways of responding to these laws in different circumstances.

Here is a key:

Whenever we think someone has done something that violates God's laws, yet God Himself clearly accepts the actions of those people (i.e. our two examples of David and Christ's apostles), then **the problem always lies with our lack of understanding God's real intentions** in establishing the law in question. In such matters the key is always God's acceptance of what the people involved had done. That acceptance by God tells us that the wording of the law only inadequately expresses God's real intentions. And therefore in such cases the wording must defer to God's underlying intentions.

The flexibility of laws that hang down from the two great principles is also seen in many other situations. In the days of Adam the law made provision for a man to have only one wife. By the time of Abraham that law had swung slightly to one side (using our hanging down analogy), and so in the days of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob the law that applies to marriage had made allowance for a man to have more than one wife. But that law has now swung back to its original position, so that today it is not acceptable before God for a man to have more than one wife.

If you think this through, you should be able to see that same type of flexibility in certain other Old Testament laws as well. To make this quite clear: **it is always God, and God alone, who can exercise that flexibility!** Don't ever get the idea that we can somehow demand "some slack" or "some flexibility" when we have crossed the line and sinned.

The flexibility never involves "crossing the line", never! What it involves is an understanding of the underlying principles for certain laws, so that we boldly do certain things that others might condemn (e.g. eat the shewbread when we're starving, understanding that picking some fruit or vegetable fresh from

the garden for immediate eating does not in any way infringe on Sabbath-keeping, etc.).

We also need to understand that **the carnal mind will invariably misapply and misunderstand almost every intention that underlies the laws of God**, intentions that can always be led back to the two great commandments. So we need to beware of people who will give us "licence to sin".

The purpose of the flexibility is not to make things easier or more casual. The purpose is **to adapt to changing circumstances** in a constantly changing society, but without ever compromising God's real intentions. For example, two millennia ago smoking was simply not an issue. Today smoking is a huge problem on a worldwide scale. And so God's laws are flexible enough to certainly deal with and apply to the question of smoking, even though smoking is never mentioned in the Bible. That's a part of understanding the mind of Christ. But that is also something the carnal mind refuses to do "on principle"! That's Romans 8:7.

Now let's consider another aspect.

"TELL ME WHAT I MUST DO, AND I'LL DO IT"

A few decades ago we had quite a number of people come into God's Church who wanted to obey God in every way. They were sincere and eager to learn the right ways. And at some point along the way many of them gained an understanding that allowed them to practice God's way of life with confidence.

But at the same time we also had many other people who were somewhat insecure. And frequently such insecure people would say to their pastors: "tell me what I must do". On the surface that sounds really good. Here is someone who is willing and obedient and trusting.

But in actual fact **that is a fatal attitude**!

In this context I am not talking about getting advice and good counsel. That is a different subject. The point is that every single one of us in God's Church has the responsibility to seek to understand the mind of Christ. Yes, that is a learning process, and in that process "tell me what I must do" can certainly be a very early stepping-stone along the way.

But we also need to recognize that the "tell me what I must do" approach can never come to understand the mind of Christ. To understand the mind of Christ we ourselves must lead every law and every instruction back to one of the two great commandments, and then we need to establish God's real intention underlying that law or instruction, and the principles that apply.

We likewise need to be able to lead all the things we contemplate doing back to these two commandments. We need to lead our own motivations and desires and intentions back to these two great commandments. **When we do this, then the mind of Christ will start to come into focus for us.**

The "tell me what I must do and I'll do it" attitude is either unwilling or else unable to go through this process of examining our own motivations, desires and intentions against the two great commandments. And so that attitude relies on others to make the decisions for us.

Part of the responsibility for the problem here lies with the ministry. Back in the 50's, 60's and 70's many ministers expected the members in their congregations to come to them for all major decisions in their lives. In theory this was "to seek wise counsel" from the mostly very young ministers. But in all too many

cases it was really a case of getting the pastor's "permission" to do something. **That was very sad!** The decisions that members had to make for their own lives were never at any time the pastor's business! And some of the examples of the decisions some church pastors made for the people at that time are downright absurd.

The most devastating consequence of that widespread approach was that the membership of the Church was largely cut off from understanding the mind of Christ. You cannot understand the mind of Christ simply because you are willing to do whatever the minister tells you to do. That just doesn't work! Is it any wonder that many of those "old timers" have left the Church altogether, when they never progressed towards understanding the mind of Christ, because their pastors made all their decisions for them?

The only way you can come to understand the mind of Christ is if you yourself lead your own situation (i.e. whatever it is that you are asking the minister to tell you to do) back to the two anchor points, to the two great commandments. And then you decide what to do. By all means, get counsel and advice from your pastor. But having done that, you need to make your own decisions (e.g. what job to take, what house to buy, what kind of insurance to buy or not buy, what schools to send your children to, what type of job training to pursue, whether to move to another part of the country or not, etc.) based on the understanding you have come to, **irrespective of whether or not that agrees with what your pastor told you to do**. (I am here assuming issues that don't involve doing something that would be sinful.)

Don't ever allow yourself to be talked into doing something reluctantly, i.e. against your own better judgment. If the advice you are following turns out to be bad, then the minister is not going to have to give account for that. **You will have to give account**, because you are the one who accepted that advice. So follow your own convictions in all the decisions that you make, the principle of Romans 14:23.

Okay, so you'll probably make some bad decisions along the way. Welcome to the club! The door for us to repent towards God (in this case by recognizing and acknowledging that we made a bad decision) is always open; and all of us need to walk through that door many times; i.e. on our knees before God in prayer. But the important point is that we learned something from the bad decision we made. Hopefully it will make a deep enough impression on us to not make that type of mistake again. And hopefully what we learned from that experience will also carry over into other areas of our lives as well.

Please do not look to your pastor or to anyone else to make your decisions for you. Get advice, yes, but not decisions from your pastor. Otherwise an understanding of the mind of Christ will always elude you.

When we do what others tell us to do, then we don't learn anything about the principles that are involved, or that at least should be involved. **There is no learning in doing what we are told to do.** When our own minds are not engaged in reaching decisions and conclusions, then we don't learn anything (I am speaking about mature adults here, not about small children). The Christian life is one of learning right principles and making right decisions based on the correct principles that apply to any given situation. Doing what others tell us to do circumvents that process. Doing what others tell us mature adults to do is Satan's way of learning to be obedient.

ANOTHER "DRIVING LESSON" FROM JESUS CHRIST

Many people in the Church have a hard time leading God's instructions back to God's original intentions. Many seem unable to look beyond the actual literal wording of any specific law that applies to them. So let's examine one more example that illustrates how Jesus Christ extracted appropriate principles from Scriptures that on the surface don't even appear to apply to the subject under

discussion.

Let’s look at how Jesus Christ went about proving that there will be a resurrection. The account that deals with how Jesus Christ handled this situation is found in Matthew 22.

The same day came to him the Sadducees, **which say that there is no resurrection**, and asked him, Saying, Master, Moses said, If a man die, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother. (Matthew 22:23-24)

We all know this story. The Sadducees rejected the truth that there will be a resurrection. And so they came with this concocted story about seven brothers one after the other supposedly all marrying the same woman. Then they presented their punch-line.

Therefore **in the resurrection whose wife shall she be** of the seven? for they all had her. (Matthew 22:28)

Jesus Christ gave them a two-part answer. The first part addressed the totally wrong ideas the Sadducees had about the resurrection. Here Jesus Christ presented facts, i.e. in the resurrection people will not marry.

And only then did Jesus Christ address the actual, albeit unspoken, question of the Sadducees. Their real question was: we don’t believe there will be a resurrection; so how do you prove the existence of the resurrection to us?

So how did Jesus Christ actually answer the implied question? Notice:

But **as touching the resurrection of the dead**, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, **I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?** God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. (Matthew 22:31-32)

God’s simple statement to Moses in Exodus 3:6 that "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" is **absolute and irrefutable proof** that there will be a resurrection! You don’t need any other statement anywhere else in the Bible to understand that there will be a resurrection. That is how the mind of Christ reasons!

Other statements in the Bible can show us that there will in fact be **three** different resurrections, but the concept of a resurrection for the righteous is already fully revealed by God’s statement to Moses in Exodus 3:6. However, we will **only** understand the truth of the resurrection from this statement in Exodus 3:6 **if we can understand how God thinks**!

So what was Jesus Christ doing here?

He referred to a Scripture that doesn’t even have anything at all to do with the resurrection, nothing at all. It is simply a statement in which God identified Himself to Moses. And if Jesus Christ had not quoted this Scripture in the context of the resurrection, then none of us would ever dream of turning to Exodus 3:6 to prove that there will be a resurrection for the righteous.

The lesson for us here is that **all factual statements about God in the Bible are based on certain principles**. It is up to us to identify those principles. Exodus 3:6 is one single example. But there are numerous other statements that reveal many other things as well, but we need to search the Scriptures diligently to find these principles. And we need to learn to lead everything back to those two great commandments.

In our context here there are **three parts** to Christ's answer to the real but unasked question of the Sadducees:

First Christ stated their real issue, which was that they didn't believe in a resurrection. This first part was achieved with Christ's statement "as touching the resurrection of the dead". We should never allow ourselves to be sidetracked by questions that disguise the real issue people have with something. We should always try to discern the underlying motives for questions, because it is those motives that must be confronted.

Second, Christ then quoted a Scripture. In this case He quoted a verse that was as far removed from the subject of the resurrection as it possibly could be! The Scripture He quoted actually had nothing at all to do with the resurrection. This should tell us that Christ did not quote this Scripture for what it literally says! Christ quoted this Scripture for, from God's point of view, the obvious underlying premise inherent in the statement which God made to Moses. That obvious underlying premise is what Jesus Christ then focuses on in His next statement.

This approach of focusing on underlying premises and principles automatically eliminates being subverted by foolish arguments about words. See 2 Timothy 2:23 and Titus 3:9. There was no way the Sadducees could have taken any exception to this Scripture because it is a clear and non-controversial statement, one that didn't seem immediately threatening to their position.

Third, Christ then presented a principle which had nothing to do with the Scripture He had quoted. This principle is that "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living". This principle is true irrespective of which Scripture it is applied to. It is always true that God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. However, it is an application of this principle that is illustrated by Exodus 3:6.

This shows us how God's mind works! God works with principles! And the details of any issue are always on a lower level than the principles!

It is not that the details are somehow at odds with the principles, not at all. It is really that the principles encompass far more things than the specific details that may be immediately apparent to us. And many principles apply to things that don't impact on our conduct, as in this example regarding the proof for the resurrection.

That is how Jesus Christ handled this question from critical people, by doing the above three things.

So in our own endeavors to lead all of God's laws and instructions back to God's original intentions for those laws:

1) We need to examine what the real issue is from God's point of view.

2) We then study the Bible to see if there are Scriptures in addition to the law we are examining that address the real issue.

3) Then we need to look if there are any obvious principles involved, that apply to both the law we are examining and to the additional Scriptures we found.

[**COMMENT:** As a totally unrelated aside, I mentioned that there are numerous other things in the Bible that also reveal truths because of the principles that automatically apply to those statements. If any of you are looking for a challenging exercise, then consider the following. I will simply state this matter, but without explaining it. If you are so inclined, you can figure it out for yourself. Twice the Bible tells us that

"God is love" (1 John 4:8; 1 John 4:16). This statement all by itself proves that the "one God theory" is false. It is impossible for God to be "love" if there was only one God Being in the beginning. Love requires the existence of at least one other living being at the beginning. Anyway, I won't explain this. But if you are so inclined, you can think this one through for yourself, and consider that as an exercise in learning how to identify principles that God applies automatically to certain statements. And if you don't feel inclined to do that, that's okay as well. It is just intended as an interesting exercise for those who want to sharpen their discernment of applicable principles.]

Now let's look at a completely different example of the mind of Christ. This example involves the matter of paying taxes.

MATTHEW 22:15-22

At the time of Christ's ministry the Jews were a subjugated people who paid an annual tax to the Romans. That tax was obviously a hated thing. So the Pharisees and the Herodians colluded to trap Jesus Christ in an impossible situation. They asked the trick question: "is it lawful to give tribute (i.e. pay taxes) unto Caesar or not?" (Matthew 22:17).

In their own minds the Pharisees and the Herodians were convinced that they had trapped Jesus Christ. If He said "yes", then that would anger all the people who hated this tax. And if He said "no", then they would report Him to the Romans for sedition against Roman rule.

To put this situation into our context today:

What would we feel if all Americans had to pay an annual tax to Canada or to Mexico or to France or to China? What would the British feel if they had to pay an annual tax to Ireland or to Australia or to Brazil? How would Germans feel about paying an annual tax to Spain or to South Africa? How would people in Japan feel if they had to pay an annual tax to China or to Chile?

How would we feel if, for no reason at all, we had to pay an annual tax to another nation? Well, we here in the U.S. already answered that question in 1773 with the Boston Tea Party, right? It is bad enough that worldwide our own governments frequently force us to pay unreasonable taxes to them. But **it is always extremely hated and resented when a foreign government forces us to pay annual taxes to them**, simply because they are militarily stronger than we are.

So while the Jews in Matthew 22 did not rebel openly against the Romans, they hated and resented the Roman taxes just as much as you and I would have hated them. Everyone, including the Romans themselves, was aware of this public hostility to the enforced taxation.

So let's look at the mind of Jesus Christ in handling this matter.

Was Jesus Christ in favor of the Jews having to pay an annual tax to the Romans? **No, of course not!** That should be obvious from the inspired description of human governments that Samuel gave to the people when they asked for a king. See 1 Samuel 8:11-18. It is a description of greed and selfishness. All of them (human governments) are barely disguised forms of enslaving their own people, at times even comparable to the way the mafia demands "protection money" from helpless business owners. God is not in the least in favor of the ways of human governments to finance their insatiable desires; the ways of human governments are nothing more than **a penalty that we have to endure** because we rejected God's rule over us.

Samuel summed up his prediction with "**you shall be his servants**" (1 Samuel 8:17), meaning that the general population always ends up in servitude to their own governments. That's how human governments work, because **that is how Satan, the god of our world today, works**. By "his servants" Samuel was referring to the governments that would enslave their own people, those they rule over.

It is simply not God's system that one nation can demand payments from another nation, because that system is based on selfishness by those who are stronger. It is an expression of the get-way of life, **wanting to get something for nothing in return**. So Jesus Christ is assuredly not in favor of one nation paying taxes to another nation, even though God may allow this when God is punishing a nation.

But that frame of mind is not something Christ showed outwardly when He dealt with this trick question in Matthew 22. Notice the account.

But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, **Why do you tempt me, *you* hypocrites**? Show me the tribute money. And they brought unto him a penny. (Matthew 22:18-19)

Jesus Christ knew that their question was a set-up. He knew they were tempting Him to speak out against the Roman system of taxation. Christ called them "hypocrites" in this context to show that He knew this was a hypocritical question. Note that the Pharisees correctly predicted that in His own mind Jesus Christ was opposed to this foreign tax, and they really hoped that He would publicly speak out against it.

Jesus Christ knew that the question was hypocritical. He "perceived their wickedness". The Greek word here translated as "wickedness" is "poneria", and it refers to **moral baseness and depravity**, according to the Theological Dictionary of the New Testament. The word is also used to refer to a vicious disposition. It refers to being sly and devious.

There was no sincerity whatsoever in their question. And they didn't care which side of the argument Jesus Christ would come down on, though they hoped that He would be against the Roman tax. But they wanted to trap Him one way or the other, that's all.

So here is a lesson for us from Jesus Christ:

Have you ever faced **a totally hypocritical question** from someone, where you knew they didn't care about the answer; they just wanted to trap you in some way? Well, the one thing you don't want to do in such a situation is give the same answer you would give if the questioner was totally sincere and genuinely looking for information from you.

I expect that may be something that you may not have considered before?

When you know that someone's question is not sincere, never give the answer you would give to a sincere questioner! **Never do that!** If someone doesn't care about what the correct answer to their question is because their only desire is to find fault with you and to trap you, then you need to apply the principle of Matthew 7:6, i.e. "**don't cast your pearls before swine**"! Such people just want to figuratively "trample you under their feet" (same verse), and so you don't give them what they want. That should be obvious!

Keep that in mind if you are ever invited to coherently state your opposing views in some discussion or symposium intended to promote some teaching that you clearly understand is wrong. Don't get involved with people like that, because they are only looking for ways to find fault with whatever you may say. And with such questions never give the same answers that you would give to a sincere questioner.

We need to understand that the answer Jesus Christ gave to this trick question does not reflect Jesus Christ's own views regarding the matter of paying taxes to a foreign nation! Rather, **Jesus Christ answered a trick question with a trick answer**! He was, after all, dealing with hypocrites, actors, pretenders, evil wicked people.

You had never considered that, had you? Did you think that Matthew 22:21 is the same answer that Jesus Christ would have given to a deeply converted sincere questioner in a discreet private setting?

Open your eyes and wake up!

So now notice how Jesus Christ initiated His attack on those who wanted to trap Him. Christ didn't defend Himself; no, He went on the counter-attack.

And he saith unto them, **Whose *is* this image and superscription**? (Matthew 22:20)

This is where Jesus Christ's trick answer to these hypocrites starts. The picture and inscription on a coin has nothing to do with whether some form of taxation is valid or not. What if the coins would have had an image of King Herod on them, a possibility for people living in Judea? What if, for argument's sake, some coins with an image of any other king had been in circulation, and they were being used to pay that tax? Would that have changed things?

Have you seen how a lawyer in a trial will try to force a witness to say things just the way the lawyer wants them said, because that will then enable the lawyer to make the point he really wants to make? Have you ever seen that type of situation on TV? Well, **that is exactly what Jesus Christ did** with these hypocrites.

When He asked for "the tribute money", **Jesus Christ was setting them up** for having to give the answer that Jesus Christ wanted them to give. He forced them to have to say "Caesar's".

That is a lesson in how we should deal with hypocrites; back them into a corner and force them into having to say the things they don't want to admit.

Now Jesus Christ had them over a barrel, without actually having to comment on the merits of taxation to foreign nations!

So notice:

They say unto him, **Caesar's**. Then saith he unto them, **Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's**; **and unto God the things that are God's**." (Mt 22:21 AV)

Can you see how this is a trick answer that had them flummoxed? Has Christ actually said: "yes, you must pay taxes to Caesar"? **No, He hasn't said that!** But you are free to infer that, if that is what you are looking for. And many people have indeed inferred just such a view.

Listen!

Matthew 13:34 makes clear that "**without a parable spoke He not unto them** (the people)". So whenever Jesus Christ was speaking to people other than His own disciples, He spoke in coded terms; He disguised to some degree the real meaning of His words. And as a result most people never really understood what He was speaking about. So what do you think Christ would do when He faced a very devious trick question from wicked people? Give the same answer He would give to a very sincere honest question?

Let’s look more closely at the answer He gave them, after He had forced them to say the name "Caesar".

Christ’s answer contains two parts:

1) Render **therefore** unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s.

2) Render unto God the things that are God’s.

Has Jesus Christ said "**what**" we must render to Caesar? No, He hasn’t. Did the coin with Caesar’s image on it actually belong to Caesar? No, of course not; it belonged to some Jew who had made it available for Jesus Christ to look at. Did all the coins in the Roman Empire with Caesar’s image on them belong to Caesar? No, of course not! The coin in question still belonged to some Jew, probably to one of the Pharisees. In Christ’s answer it is left open for you to infer **whatever you wish to infer here**. Any inferences will be based on your own understanding and disposition. That is something that Jesus Christ did very deliberately.

That should also be apparent from the word "**therefore**" in Christ’s answer. This word "therefore" shows that Jesus Christ is here reasoning from "Caesar’s image" on that coin. It follows that **if the coin had someone else’s image on it**, then it would still have the same monetary value, but then **this line of reasoning would simply not have worked**! The trick answer Jesus Christ was going to give to this trick question depended completely on that coin having Caesar’s image on it. And Jesus Christ obviously knew that fact in advance. So Jesus Christ was in turn setting them up when He asked for a coin. Can you see that?

Next, has Jesus Christ said "**what**" we must render to God? No, He hasn’t. It depends on your own understanding of what things actually belong to God. I guess most of us would immediately think of tithing, because tithing and taxes both deal with money. But has Christ mentioned tithing? No, He hasn’t. Was Christ even talking about money in any way with this "render to God" comment? Hard to say. Again, it is up to you to infer your own understanding into this answer.

So understand this!

Jesus Christ worded this answer in these general terms because He wanted those hypocrites to make their own inferences from His statement. He simply wasn’t going to give them a "yes" or a "no" answer. And I don’t think that Jesus Christ was even concerned about whatever inferences they chose to make. His response had silenced their devious question. And **when you deal with hypocrites you should not give them the same answer that you would give to a sincere questioner**; that is one of the lessons of Proverbs 26:5.

But Jesus Christ had also done one other thing.

He introduced **a totally new focus** into the discussion by saying: "render unto God the things that are God’s". Christ had raised the focus to a higher level. Paying or not paying taxes to the Romans was no longer the central focus. It had been pushed to the side. Once Jesus Christ had directed the focus towards God, it was impossible for the self-righteous hypocritical Pharisees to redirect the focus back to taxes for Caesar. This new focus killed the original question.

Don’t read your own inferences into Jesus Christ’s "render unto Caesar" statement, because Jesus Christ kept His answer deliberately non-committal. As with the disciples eating grains of wheat on the Sabbath, where Jesus Christ didn’t bother to set the record straight, so here also Jesus Christ didn’t commit Himself regarding this Roman tax being lawful or not. Make a mental note of these two

occasions because we'll come back to them later.

Here is a lesson we can learn from this incident.

ANSWER A FOOL ACCORDING TO HIS FOLLY

It may have surprised some of you when I said earlier that Jesus Christ "went on the counter-attack" in dealing with this question. You don't think of Jesus Christ attacking those who asked Him trick questions, do you? Christ's approach here is a lesson for us in dealing with devious and hypocritical questions.

Consider this hypothetical situation: You are faithful in your marriage and have never committed adultery. Then in a pressure situation you are asked the question:

"Tell us, does your wife know that you are committing adultery? Just answer yes or no."

You cannot give a yes or no answer to such a question without wrongfully implying guilt on your part. You're cornered whether you say yes or no. Can you see that? The reason is that either answer assumes that you are already guilty of committing adultery, and the only supposed question is whether or not your wife is aware of your guilt. The problem is that the premise underlying that question is untrue. It should also be very obvious that the question is not sincere at all, that it is nothing more than a devious and not very subtle attempt to trap you.

The flaw in the above case is easy to see. But that is not always the case. So consider the following hypothetical example:

You are a scoutmaster for a group of young boys. You organize outdoor activities for your group. You have never, never at any time done anything inappropriate with any of the boys; i.e. you have never in any way whatsoever sexually molested any of the boys, neither physically nor verbally nor suggestively. You are completely innocent in this regard. Then someone falsely accuses you of molesting one of the boys. It ends up in a courtroom situation. And then the prosecutor puts you in the witness stand and asks you: **"Just answer yes or no. Have you ever in any way touched this boy?"**

Can you see the trick question? His question is specifically aimed at insinuating that you have made sexual contact with the boy. He doesn't want the jury to know that a "yes" answer from you is based on your having shaken the boy's hand a few times and having once put your hand on the boy's shoulder when you said "go that way Billy". No, when you truthfully say "yes" to his question, then the prosecutor wants the jury to infer that you have admitted to having touched the boy in a sexual way.

When people demand yes or no answers, then not always but very often that is a trick question for the simple reason that answers restricted to yes or no exclude the possibility of any other options being the correct answer. The questioner has already decided that there are only two possibilities: yes or no. So **in those cases** where neither yes or no is the correct answer (as in our two examples) the implicated person is prevented from stating the truth. People do this to us by either stating or else deviously implying a premise that is not true. This method, which is commonly used by lawyers, is a way of very effectively framing innocent people.

That is where "answering a fool" in the appropriate way comes into the picture. Whenever you are faced with a false accusation (e.g. the disciples supposedly breaking the Sabbath by eating a few grains of wheat) or a false insinuation (e.g. trick questions where either a yes or no answer will wrongly imply

some guilt), then you should never take a defensive approach! In such situations **we must always attack the false premises and the false accusations**.

Trying to defend ourselves against such false accusations will in many people's minds wrongly imply a certain amount of guilt on our part. We commonly expect guilty people to defend themselves and to justify themselves. So to many people a defensive approach would often imply a certain amount of guilt, even when that is not true.

Consider these three situations Jesus Christ faced:

1) The accusation that His disciples had supposedly broken the Sabbath.

2) The trick question regarding paying taxes to Caesar.

3) The question as to which is the great commandment in the law.

The first two questions here are either accusatory or devious trick questions. Therefore in both these cases Jesus Christ's response was **an attack on the questioners' positions**. That was enough to neutralize the problem.

The third question was a sincere enquiry where the questioner really wanted to know Jesus Christ's opinion. This is clear from Mark's account, which records the scribe discreetly responding with "**well, Master, You have said the truth** ..." (Mark 12:32), to which Jesus Christ replied to this scribe "**you are not far from the kingdom of God**" (Mark 12:34). This man was obviously sincere. Therefore in this case Jesus Christ gave an answer that was explanatory and not in any way aggressive. It was an answer that offered additional insight to a mind that is searching for understanding.

Can you see the difference in how Jesus Christ handled different situations? Now Jesus Christ was never ever in the wrong! Jesus Christ was always right! And therefore Jesus Christ also never at any time took a defensive approach when He was challenged in an aggressive way.

Jesus Christ responded to every challenge or accusation with a counter-attack. And that is always the appropriate course of action for us to take when we are dealing with clearly false accusations.

That is also the approach that the Apostle Paul took when he was faced with false assertions made by "false brethren". Notice the situation:

And that because of **false brethren** unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage: (Galatians 2:4)

In the next verse Paul explained that he immediately countered those false accusations in a forceful and determined and very assertive manner. He simply wasn't going to let people get away with making false accusations. That was the correct response to false accusations.

To whom we gave place by subjection, **no, not for an hour**; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you. (Galatians 2:5)

As examples for our world today, consider the outrageous attacks that are commonly leveled at some candidates in election years here in the USA. I am here not concerned with whatever political affiliation those candidates may have, because this tactic has been used by all sides at one time or another. But in many cases such attacks on the character and on the integrity of certain candidates are deliberately

false and distorted, intended to slander those candidates.

The intention behind such false attacks is to force the maligned candidates to defend themselves against those false accusations. The attackers don't care about the truth, and they don't care what answers the falsely accused person may give. They simply want to create an impression of guilt in order to influence public opinion.

It is a huge mistake by such falsely accused individuals to take a defensive approach. The correct response by anyone faced with outrageous accusations is to immediately launch a powerful counter-attack on the character and on the obvious lack of integrity and on the utterly selfish motivation of his or her accusers! Direct the spotlight on the accusers, rather than staying under the spotlight in a defensive position. Respond with strength and never from a position of fear. In practice this is seldom how falsely accused people respond to outrageous accusations. Mostly people tend to respond with a defensive approach, which is a mistake.

So much for our examples.

It is only when we ourselves are in some way guilty or negligent that a defensive response is appropriate. And as I said, to many people a defensive approach frequently "implies" some guilt, even though that implication is quite often wrong. That is the common "where there is smoke, there is fire" response from the general public, believing that there must be some basis for whatever the accusations happen to be.

As far as the mind of Christ is concerned, we need to understand that **when God is attacked in some way, then God never ever defends Himself**. When God is attacked, then **God will always counter-attack and smash His attackers** into the ground. That's what God did with Satan and the demons (see Luke 10:18; etc.). And that is basically the way Jesus Christ handled various attacks during His ministry; not by defending His own position, but by attacking the position of His attackers. And that is what will happen at the second coming of Jesus Christ, then again one time during the millennium (Ezekiel 38-39) and then one more time at the end of the millennium (Revelation 20:7-9). God's way of dealing with unjustified attacks is to counter-attack and then demolish the positions of those who have attacked us.

So are you learning things about "the mind of Christ"? Let's look at another example of the mind of Christ in action.

MATTHEW 15:22-28

This is the incident where a Canaanite woman had a daughter who had a demon problem (Matthew 15:22). Notice how Jesus Christ handled this particular situation.

But **he answered her not a word**. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she cries after us. (Matthew 15:23)

For a start Jesus Christ simply ignored this woman. This was deliberate. The woman's crying embarrassed Christ's disciples, and Jesus Christ was obviously very much aware of the woman, but He ignored her anyway.

When His disciples asked Him to send her away, then Christ told them the reason why He ignored this woman. The reason for ignoring her was that the woman was a non-Israelite, and Jesus Christ's work at

that time was not amongst non-Israelites.

But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. (Matthew 15:24)

Then the woman finally came right up to Him and worshiped Him, and again presented her plea very directly.

Then came she and worshiped him, saying, **Lord, help me**. (Matthew 15:25)

She knew that Christ had thus far deliberately ignored her. By that time many other people would already have taken offence. Have you ever had people get upset with you because either you ignored them deliberately, or else they thought you ignored them deliberately? That happens fairly easily in our society, doesn't it? But this Canaanite woman had not in any way taken offence thus far.

Now notice an example of the mind of Christ in action.

But he answered and said, **It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast *it* to dogs**. (Matthew 15:26)

This was **an extremely offensive statement**! Many times ministers have tried to soften this somewhat by saying: "well, Jesus Christ didn't actually call the woman 'a dog'; He was only using an analogy". But that is not correct!

What if you were in another Church of God group and you came to me and asked me to please let you listen to my sermons. What if I then said: look buddy, it is not right for me to cast my sermons before dogs ... what conclusions would you draw? In that scenario you wouldn't hesitate to claim that I had called you "a dog", or that I had compared you to a dog, would you? And the chances are that you would be extremely offended. And if I then added "I am only using a figure of speech here", that still wouldn't lessen the insult you would feel. You would very likely be upset and offended.

My point is: **of course the woman recognized that Jesus Christ was putting her down and comparing her to a dog**. Of course she understood that. Jesus Christ was very deliberately giving this woman every opportunity to take offence, to feel insulted and hurt. He didn't speak that way to or about other people. So why here to this woman?

Why did Jesus Christ do that? Do you understand?

What Jesus Christ had said was a deliberate ethnic slur in our modern terms. And when such terms are used to refer to us, we immediately recognize that we are being put down and insulted. The Canaanite woman likewise immediately recognized that she had been compared to a dog.

So why did Jesus Christ treat her this way?

This was **the quickest way that Jesus Christ could test this woman**, who was a total stranger to Him. **He was testing her faith!** She had called Him "Lord". Did she actually believe that, or was she using flattery to get something from Jesus Christ? So Jesus Christ in effect said: okay, if I insult you, will you still call Me "Lord", or will all your faith evaporate? What will you do?

Had this woman taken offence, then I don't believe Jesus Christ would have healed her daughter. The woman's response to being so publicly put down was going to reveal her real attitude. I'm not recommending that we ourselves try testing people this way. But insulting and offending people is the fasted way to cut through facades and get to the real inner attitudes of people.

For Jesus Christ this whole episode was a five minute procedure that told Him what He needed to know about this woman.

As it turned out, this woman really did have "great faith" in Jesus Christ and in His ability to heal her daughter.

And she said, **Truth, Lord**: **yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table**. (Matthew 15:27)

This was a staggering reply from the woman, which caught even Jesus Christ somewhat by surprise! Her level of humility was just mind-boggling. This was not a front she put on, because Jesus Christ had the power to discern the attitude underlying her statement. And her response was spontaneous! Her response revealed how her mind worked. She had faith in Christ's power to heal her daughter and she had humility.

So here was the situation:

1) The woman sought out Jesus Christ's help.

2) Jesus Christ deliberately ignored her.

3) Undeterred she approached Jesus Christ directly.

4) Totally unexpectedly Jesus Christ made a very condescending and offensive comment.

5) Spontaneously the woman not only agreed with this condescending comment, but even carried the condescending analogy one step further. All this she did spontaneously with genuine humility.

6) She had no way of knowing that Jesus Christ was simply testing her faith, but she passed the test with flying colors.

There is one key here worth noting:

It is not our calculated and premeditated responses to God that reveal our innermost character to God. Our innermost character is revealed **when we are confronted by totally unexpected circumstances**, for which we had no time to prepare some kind of response, and **where we are compelled to make some kind of spontaneous response**. Frequently we have to respond within seconds, not minutes. And those responses to totally unanticipated situations tell God far more about our character than our responses to situations where we had weeks and months and even years to prepare for those situations.

When people take a year or more to come to real repentance, this doesn't tell God nearly as much about their character, as when their response is spontaneous like the Apostle Paul, who took two seconds to say "Lord, what do You want me to do?" (Acts 9:6).

This is not intended to be a put-down for people who take longer to make their commitment to God, not at all. But it is intended to highlight the enormous value of spontaneous correct responses to totally unexpected situations. It is never good when our initial response is wrong (e.g. like King Saul in 1 Samuel 15:13-21), and once that is pointed out to us we then try to back-pedal, trying to gloss over our initial wrong response. **Back-pedaling is never the same as real repentance**, for the simple reason that back-pedaling does not represent a changed way of using our minds. Back-pedaling is always a form of self-justification.

Let’s look at the Canaanite woman’s response.

She was just as spontaneous as was the Apostle Paul in Acts 9:6. Her first two words were "truth, Lord". This shows that she fully accepted the lowly status which Jesus Christ had assigned to her with His comment. She was not in any way offended. Her statement amounted to saying: yes Lord, I fully accept my second-class status within this Jewish society here; I accept that I am inferior to the Jewish population, that the Jews are "the masters".

Her words "truth, Lord" were enough to show that she had not taken any offence. But she went one step further.

She not only accepted Jesus Christ’s analogy, but she spontaneously carried it one step further. And in so doing she made a very powerful statement. The woman was looking for help from Jesus Christ. And she tenaciously continued her plea with a very sincere self-effacing analogy.

The reference to "the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table" basically said: yes I know and accept that Your primary work is to be amongst the Jewish people. I am just asking for "a crumb" from that table, just one intervention for my demon-possessed daughter.

Here is how Jesus Christ responded to her.

Then Jesus answered and said unto her, **O woman, great *is* thy faith**: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour. (Matthew 15:28)

Jesus Christ’s statement "great is your faith" makes clear that the way Jesus Christ had dealt with her all along had been **for the explicit purpose of testing her faith**, something she could not possibly have known. What on the surface looked like an offensive comment was nothing more than a quick way to reveal the woman’s innermost feelings and convictions. And it worked perfectly.

The greatest tests in our lives always come without any kind of warning. And many times they don’t even look like "great tests" to start with. It is only when we become aware of the consequences of our responses to those tests that we may begin to grasp the real significance of the tests we have just faced. When King Saul was told to go and destroy Amalek, he had no idea that the future of his kingdom would be decided by how he handled that test. And King Saul failed that test.

So what does this incident with the Canaanite woman tell us about the mind of Christ?

A very important lesson here is that every trial and test we face has a purpose. And the purpose is always the same. The purpose of every test from God that we face is **for God to find out something about our character**! In this incident Jesus Christ needed to find out something about this Canaanite woman’s character.

And in the tests you and I face God wants to find out something about you and about me. Have you ever wondered why some people face some tests and other people face completely different tests. Why is that? When we take a test or an examination, then usually all the participants have to answer the same questions. But in God’s Church we all face different tests. Why don’t we all face the same tests?

Here is **a part of the answer**:

Usually God doesn’t have questions about every area of our lives. Usually there are just certain areas of our lives where God would like to have more information about us.

So God’s tests are directed at those areas where God is looking for more information about us, our character, our level of commitment, our convictions, etc. Usually those involve what could be called "the weakest aspects" of our character and our commitment to God. In all of us God is looking for more information. But for all of us God is looking in different areas of our lives for that additional information.

Thus:

Some people have major trials dealing with **unconverted family members**, while other people never experience any problems with unconverted family members.

Some people have major trials with **their jobs**, while other people never have a single job trial.

Some people have major **financial problems**, while other people don’t know what it is like to have financial problems, because they have never had any such problems.

Some people experience one **health problem** after another, while other people are always in good health, etc.

Some people experience endless problems with their **children** and with their **marriages**, while other people never experience any of those problems.

One reason why certain people don’t experience any problems in certain areas of their lives is because God already knows enough about them in those areas of their lives. And therefore God does not have to use additional trials to give Him additional information about us in those specific areas. Instead such people then have trials in other areas.

The purpose of trials is to give God more reliable information about us. And with different people God is looking for information regarding different areas of their lives.

There is also another part to the answer of our question.

That other part of the answer for why we all face different tests is because we ourselves bring many of our trials upon ourselves! Many of the trials we endure are entirely of our own making.

In fact, many of the tests and trials we face in life are not sent to us from God. Many of them are a consequence of our own conduct and behavior. Everything we say and do has consequences. And when we say and do things that are wrong or foolish, then undesirable consequences (read "trials") are frequently a part of the result.

I suspect that for most of us **most of our trials are in fact self-induced**; they are consequences to what we have said and done or neglected to do. So there is at times a correlation between the volume of foolish decisions and foolish behavior and mistakes that we make, and the volume of trials we have to endure.

There is another topic we should also look at in understanding the mind of Christ.

WHY DID JESUS CHRIST NOT CORRECT SOME THINGS?

Earlier I mentioned that Jesus Christ very clearly stated that His disciples were "guiltless" when they had eaten the grains of wheat on the Sabbath (see Matthew 12:7). Yet Jesus Christ did not bother to explain

this matter in defending His disciples against the false accusations from the Pharisees. And because Jesus Christ didn't bother to explain that His disciples had not in any way broken the Sabbath, therefore many people (Bible commentators, etc.) have assumed that "technically speaking the disciples had broken the Sabbath", which is an absurd assessment of the situation.

So the question is: **why didn't Jesus Christ explain** that eating some ears of wheat right out of the fields does not in any way break the Sabbath commandment?

In the matter of whether it is lawful or not to pay taxes to Caesar, Jesus Christ likewise didn't give either a "yes" answer or a "no" answer. The answer Jesus Christ gave carefully avoided a commitment one way or the other, by allowing the hearers to infer whatever conclusion they wish to infer into Christ's answer. **Why did Jesus Christ not give a clear answer** to this question?

This is one more aspect of the mind of Christ that we need to understand.

The answer to the above questions is as follows:

Jewish society at the time of Christ's ministry was steeped in pagan customs and traditions, disguised as "the traditions of the elders". That matter is discussed at length in my 2007 article entitled "The Development of Jewish Laws Through the Ages". By the time of Christ's ministry the five zugot (i.e. five pairs of scholars for a period covering about 100 years) had established all kinds of pagan customs and ideas within the religion of the Pharisees. By then the religion of the Pharisees was as far removed from the truth of God as were the pagan religions around them.

It was not Jesus Christ's purpose to reform the Jewish religion of His time. He did not try to correct their pagan ideas and customs for the most part, beyond occasionally stating that their customs amounted to a complete rejection of the commandments of God (e.g. Mark 7:9; Matthew 15:3; etc.). Mark records Jesus Christ saying that the Pharisees had **"many" customs that broke the laws of God** (Mark 7:13), which means that those customs were of pagan origin. But Christ did not spell out what those "many customs" are.

By and large Jesus Christ Himself didn't get involved in their religious ideas and practices. Christ's approach of not trying to sort out any of the problems in society at His time was predicted in a prophecy by Isaiah. Notice:

He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth. (Isaiah 42:2-3)

In Matthew 12:1-8 we have the account of the disciples eating grains of wheat on the Sabbath. A few verses later in that same context the disciples then discerned that Jesus Christ was fulfilling this prophecy from Isaiah (see Matthew 12:17). And then Matthew quotes the prophecy.

He shall not strive, nor cry; neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory. (Matthew 12:19-20)

The statement "He shall not cry nor lift up" means that Jesus Christ wouldn't argue with the religious leaders of His time. The statement "a bruised reed shall He not break" means that He would not try to rectify problems within the Jewish religion. The statement "the smoking flax He shall not quench" appeals to the image of a candle slowly but inexorably going out as it runs out of fuel (oil or wax). This picture also means that Christ would not reform the Jewish religion; He just wouldn't get involved in

sorting out and exposing all the pagan ideas that had become entrenched in the religious customs of the Pharisees.

Now the ungodly idea that picking a few ears of wheat and then immediately eating the grains somehow amounts to breaking the Sabbath was a part of that "broken reed". A broken reed has problems that simply cannot be resolved, because you can't do anything to make that broken reed recover.

All of the Jewish Sabbath customs are "broken reeds" which cannot be repaired! The only solution for all those Sabbath customs is to break them off! But that is something Jesus Christ was not going to do at His first coming. That is what the prophecy points out, and that is what the disciples also understood at that time, as recorded by Matthew in this very context of the disciples eating the grains of wheat.

So there was no point to Jesus Christ getting into some argument with the Pharisees by saying "picking and eating a few ears of grain does not break the Sabbath commandment". To address that one specific issue would be like standing in front of a wooden house that is engulfed by flames, and then trying to put out the flames on one small single window sill, while ignoring the roaring flames all around, a pointless exercise.

Can you understand why Jesus Christ didn't bother to explain the facts about one single specific matter regarding Sabbath keeping to a people who had multiple dozens of unbiblical Sabbath teachings? His simple statement that His disciples were "guiltless" was as far as He was prepared to go in this matter. But He deliberately did not explain these things to the Pharisees.

Now as far as the Roman tax was concerned:

Here Jesus Christ also did not come down on either side of this issue. Instead, He gave an answer that made it very easy to infer our own meanings into His reply. And it didn't bother Christ if people inferred the one side of the argument or the other. He simply pointed out that our responsibilities towards God are on a higher level.

But once again Jesus Christ was not going to get involved with "bruised reeds" and with "smoking flax".

Looking at the actual question that was asked ("is it 'lawful' to pay the Roman taxes?") is somewhat more involved. **What do you mean by "lawful"?** Lawful according to the laws of God? Or lawful according to the laws the Romans had imposed upon the Jews? Since the laws of God don't institute any forms of tax, therefore whose laws do you use to determine whether such Roman taxes are "lawful"?

Was it "lawful" that the Romans had conquered the area of Palestine? Were the Romans entitled to be in charge of the Jewish people? Were the Romans entitled to impose taxes upon the Jews or upon any other people? Who makes the laws of taxation? And do such laws have God's approval? Hard to say. The best we can do is apply the principle of accepting the rules that are imposed on us by those in authority (i.e. pay the taxes they impose on us) for the present dispensation, but without concluding that therefore such laws must be "lawful" by God's laws.

Keep in mind that "render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's" does not actually say that you must pay taxes to Caesar. Caesar's image on the coins does not mean that therefore all the coins with his image belong to Caesar, nor does Caesar's image on a coin automatically justify taxation.

Yes, it is easy to infer that Jesus Christ meant that we must pay taxes to Caesar. But did Christ actually want us to make that inference? I believe that Jesus Christ was once again deliberately not getting involved one way or the other.

The key here is this: Making a judgment regarding whether or not the tax to Caesar was "lawful" would have entailed meddling in this world's affairs! It would have amounted to judging the world. And that is something Jesus Christ was simply not going to do. So **Christ gave a deliberately ambiguous answer** without endorsing either option put forward by the Pharisees.

There are thousands of things in our human societies that need to be sorted out (i.e. mostly those things just need to be abolished!), and why should Jesus Christ have made a judgment on just one specific issue? Can you see the big picture? Can you see why Jesus Christ wouldn't break off the bruised reed and why He wouldn't quench the smoking flax of Roman taxation?

So here is the point about understanding the mind of Christ:

This is not the time for sorting out all the misunderstandings that exist in the world. This is not the time to resolve all of the world's huge problems. And as far as paying taxes to Caesar is concerned: **it doesn't matter whether those taxes are "lawful" or not**! It makes no difference! Whether they are "lawful" or not, **we have to pay them**, just like the Jews back then had to pay Caesar, irrespective of whether that was lawful or not. The question, after all, was nothing more than **a hypocritical academic argument**! The answer wasn't going to change anything for anyone.

One other point in this regard:

Privately all the Pharisees themselves didn't agree with this Roman tax either! Privately they were all convinced that it was "unlawful". But they weren't about to say that publicly. That was just a part of their hypocrisy. In fact, academic questions are very often trick questions. But you already knew that, right?

Let's consider another matter.

YOU SHALL NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS

We all know that the ninth commandment says: you shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. Most of the time we ourselves shorten that statement to saying "you shall not lie", as in Colossians 3:9 for example.

Now back in December 2002 I wrote a 28-page article entitled "ARE THERE SOME SITUATIONS WHEN IT IS OKAY TO LIE?" I specifically wrote the article in response to being asked "how does God expect us to respond when criminals ask us for private information in order to rob us?" At the time we were living in a violent society in South Africa, and our own homes had been burgled and ransacked on four different occasions during a 30-year period. Not many of you who will read this article will have had your homes ransacked that often, right? In addition, I knew personally over twenty people who were the victims of violent crimes, and two of the people I had known had in fact been killed by the criminals, one a church member whom I had baptized a decade earlier and the other a neighbor without any church connection. Both of them were gunned down at point-blank range.

The criminals were very brazen. If they stole someone's credit card, they would ask "what is your PIN number for this card?". If they burgled a house, they would ask "where have you hidden your money and your guns?" If they found a safe in a house they would ask "what is the combination for this safe?" If they surprised you while you were sleeping at night, they would ask "is there anyone else in the house in any other room?".

If they hijacked you on a country road at night, they would take everything from you and strip you down

to your underpants. They would get your house keys and they would ask "where do you live? What is your address? They were going to leave you basically naked on a deserted road (if they didn't decide to kill you) and drive to your house in your car and steal everything of value.

So the question was:

If criminals ask you for information so that they can steal more of your belongings, or so that they can harm your family in some way, **do you have to always answer truthfully?** Or are there actually some situations when it is okay to lie? What does God expect from you?

The point of my article was: don't ever give criminals any truthful information that will enable them to steal more from you! God never expects you to answer a criminal's questions truthfully!

If I found myself in one of the above situations, I would not hesitate to lie about personal information to the criminals. Under no circumstances are they entitled to truthful answers to such questions. Some time after writing that article I heard that some ministers in one of the CoG organizations had taken umbrage at my article. They felt I was encouraging people to lie.

This is a case that also requires an understanding of the mind of Christ.

The key to understanding the mind of Christ on this matter is to understand the things I have explained throughout this present article.

Before formulating the law "you shall not bear false witness against your neighbor", God already had a very specific intention. That intention came first, and the law came later.

God's intention was based on the two great commandments, to love God above all else, and to love our neighbor as ourselves.

So God formulated the commandment "you shall not bear false witness against your neighbor" to express God's intention on this subject.

We now hopefully understand that every law must be based on an intention to achieve a specific result, and that the intention is never based on the law. We need to clearly understand the correct priorities in this process.

Thus the important thing is for us to search out and identify God's intentions in giving the law "you shall not bear false witness ...". If we can identify God's intentions, then we can discover **how God would want us to apply this law in unusual circumstances**.

So let's put together all the things we can establish regarding God's intentions in formulating this law. Here we go:

1) The words "against your neighbor" in this law make quite clear that this commandment "hangs down from" the second great commandment, to love our neighbor as ourselves.

2) The obvious purpose for this commandment is to protect our neighbor from false accusations, to protect our neighbor from any harm resulting from anything we may say, including such things as gossip and slander.

3) This commandment clearly expresses an outgoing concern for the welfare of our neighbor. So this law not only covers actively bearing false witness against other people, but it also covers all forms of lying,

with one category of exceptions, which is based on understanding the anchor point for this law.

4) Provided that we ourselves are not guilty of some crime (in which case this commandment expects us to confess rather than to accuse our neighbor of the crime we have committed), **this commandment is never intended to cause us personally any harm**.

5) Specifically, **God never intended** this commandment to be used by criminals against us for the explicit purpose of harming us in some way. So when criminals threaten us and want us to give them additional information so that they may harm us or harm anyone else (e.g. they demand information to enable them to steal something from other people, etc.), **then this law is never applicable to anything we may tell those criminals**. God did not intend this law to apply to lies that are spoken to criminals who want to aggressively transgress God's laws with the information they want us to give to them.

6) The wording of every single law and commandment that hangs down from the two great commandments is always in some way deficient. It is deficient because it cannot predict every possible future situation that may arise. **That deficiency** inherent in all "hanging down" laws **is eliminated** when we understand and apply God's original intentions for each one of those laws; i.e. when we lead those laws back to the two great commandments.

7) It goes without saying that we can never appeal to this godly intent when we desire to cover and disguise our own guilt by resorting to lies. Lying about our own guilt is never acceptable.

8) Consider the following situation:

How often have people (family members, employees, friends, etc.) done something because they thought that's what you had said for them to do, only for you to then exclaim "**but that is not what I meant**"? And you then proceed to elaborate on what you had really meant for them to do. Or maybe you were the one that did something that you thought someone else wanted you to do, only to find out that you shouldn't have done that? How often has this happened in your life?

The point here is this: **you are actually unhappy** because of what they did! Yet all they did was try to do what they believed you wanted done. And had you known that they were going to do that in the name of your instructions, you would most emphatically have stopped them. **You would have stopped them** because you didn't want them to do that in the first place.

THAT'S WHAT YOU WOULD DO, RIGHT?

9) We need to understand that God feels exactly the same way **when we get the wrong end of the stick**. Had God known in advance that we would feel obligated to tell criminals the PIN numbers for our credit cards and the passwords for our online bank accounts because of the ninth commandment, God would tell us "**but that is not what I meant when I gave the ninth commandment!**".

10) We also need to understand that God is not really concerned that criminals receive accurate and truthful information. Criminals are by definition liars (i.e. they try to appear as upright people). And they are in no way entitled to facts and to information that would enable them to increase their criminal activities.

11) Don't ever think that God is pleased when you were "truthful" to criminals who threatened you in some way. There is no credit for being foolish! **It is foolish to give criminals additional information** that will enable them to steal even more from you. And when your losses then are even greater than they would have been without the criminals having that additional information from you, then that part is really your own responsibility. (We're speaking hypothetically here.)

12) When very unusual circumstances come about that challenge our compliance with one or other law of God, and we are in doubt whether we should or should not do something (and at that moment you're unable to ask your pastor for advice), then we need to lead the law in question back to the two great commandments. And where applicable, we should be able to hear God say "but that is not what I meant with this specific law"! That's what David understood when he ate the shewbread.

The intention underlying any law of God is always, without exception, more important than the literal wording of the law that is based on that intention. And understanding the mind of Christ involves correctly identifying the underlying intentions for all of God's laws.

Changed circumstances may require the wording of a law to be changed. But changed circumstances don't affect the original underlying intent for that law, and so changed circumstances will not change that intent, which is always based on the two great commandments.

Now please listen carefully!

You already understand quite well that the Sabbath commandment does not prevent you from taking care of "ox in the pit" situations, right? You understand that God in no way prevents you from dealing with genuine and totally unexpected emergencies on the Sabbath, right? This is already clear to you, is it not? And even though the Sabbath is one of the ten commandments, you understand that there can be **some circumstances** that will allow you to do certain things on the Sabbath with God's approval, even though those same "certain things" are not permissible on the Sabbath under normal circumstances.

Now this principle, that some circumstances may permit actions that would normally be considered violations of the Sabbath law applies to some other laws of God (assuredly not to all of God's laws) as well. With the "ox in the pit" consideration God has revealed that this law is not intended for certain situations.

THE SAME PRINCIPLE APPLIES TO THE NINTH COMMANDMENT!

Lying to criminals who want to extract personal information from us in order to steal from us is to the ninth commandment what "the ox in the pit" is to the Sabbath commandment.

Both of these commandments "hang down from" the two great commandments, meaning that both of these "hanging down" laws have some flexibility built into their applicability.

If you feel compelled to give evil people correct information, information that would harm you or other people, then God says to you: but that is not what I meant when I gave the ninth commandment!

If you can understand this principle, then you should be able to understand why there is not the slightest condemnation in the Bible for Rahab's lies, which she spoke for the explicit purpose of protecting the lives of the two Israelite spies (see Joshua 2:4-6). Rahab's lies had nothing to do with the ninth commandment, as far as God is concerned. And so those lies are never held against Rahab. Think this through carefully.

Let's continue.

THE LAW, OUR SCHOOLMASTER

Regarding the formulation of God's laws, I said earlier that first God has **an intention** to achieve some

form of conduct or behavior, and that intention by God is then **expressed in words** in the form of a law.

So here is another way to look at this process of coming to understand the mind of Jesus Christ:

When we consider all of God's laws, are we able to lead each law back to the same principles that God Himself had in mind when He gave each law? Or are we not able to discern the principles that motivated God to give a particular law?

As long as we are not able to lead every law of God, via the two great commandments, back to the principles that motivated God to give that law, so long it will be true that God's statement "My thoughts are not your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8) applies to us personally. As we learn to lead God's laws back to God's real intentions underlying every single law, so we will be starting to think a little bit more like God thinks, and so our thinking will be moving a little bit closer to the way God uses His mind.

And that brings us to something Paul mentioned to the Galatians.

Wherefore **the law was our schoolmaster** *to bring us* unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. (Galatians 3:24)

Do you know how the law is our schoolmaster? The law is supposed to guide us into understanding God's mind, how God thinks and reasons. The law is like training ground equipment. If we learn to lead every law back to God's underlying intentions for that law, then we are learning to understand the mind of Christ. Are we able to see past the wording of a law to the intentions underlying that wording, or are we restricted to the letter of the law in our understanding?

The purpose of the law, amongst other things, is to train our minds to understand God's thoughts. The law is in fact the key to understanding God's thoughts, provided that we are able to lead every law back to God's intentions for every law.

Well, do you now have a clearer understanding regarding what is meant by "the mind of Christ"?

Are you beginning to understand why all of God's laws and commandments "hang down" from the two great commandments? If so, then that understanding should become the basis for you to come to a clearer and deeper understanding of God and God's mind and the mind of Jesus Christ.

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