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THE CARNAL MIND

We are all familiar with the Apostle Paul's statement regarding the natural disposition of the human mind, as recorded in Romans.

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

The Greek expression "to phronema tes sarkos" literally means "**the mind of the flesh**". In modern language we would simply refer to this as "**the natural human mind**", a mind which has thus far never responded voluntarily and deliberately in a positive way to God's laws and God's way of life.

This article is about the natural human mind, which is in biblical terms known as "the carnal mind". We'll use both terms. This article is about how and why the human mind goes wrong.

The most basic point we need to understand is that the natural human mind has always been the same and will always be the same! **It doesn't ever change on its own.** The natural mind of people today is exactly the same as was the natural mind of all people before the flood; and it is exactly the same as the natural mind of people during Old Testament times; and it is exactly the same as the natural mind of people during the millennium; and it is exactly the same as the natural mind which people in the second resurrection will have.

The natural unconverted human mind is always the same!

Specifically, the natural mind of people before the flood was **perverse, depraved** and "**only evil continually**" (Genesis 6:5). Jeremiah added the fact that the human mind is also "**desperately wicked**" (Jeremiah 17:9). That has never changed, and **those statements are still true today**, and they will also still be true during the **millennium** and during the **100-year period** for those in the second resurrection.

Paul's statement is true for the natural human mind in any and every age!

Let's now look at the three attributes of the natural human mind that Paul happened to mention in this verse.

First and foremost, the natural mind is "enmity against God". This expression refers to **a hatred against God**. That hatred is spontaneous and completely unprovoked. There is no rationale or justification for this hatred. God has never at any time given the human mind a reason or an excuse to hate God! This spontaneous hatred goes way beyond logic. It is **the embodiment of Satan's attitude towards God**.

This is the most basic point we need to grasp about the natural, unconverted human mind, that it has a spontaneous and totally illogical and unprovoked hatred for God. This is the characteristic that needs to be completely rooted out of the mind of every single human being, and then replaced by a conscious desire to accept and to develop God's outgoing way of thinking, before God will be prepared to grant anyone membership in the immortal Family of God. Repentance involves rejecting this hatred for God.

Next, the natural human mind is "not subject to the law of God". This means that the natural human mind is **not willing to voluntarily take orders or instructions** from the law of God. It rejects the law of God.

The natural human mind decides for itself what is right and what is wrong; it is a law unto itself. That is what Adam and Eve did when they ate the forbidden fruit; they decided for themselves what is right and what is wrong.

Thirdly, the expression "neither indeed can be" tells us that the natural human mind is **not capable of grasping the real intent** of God's laws and it cannot really comprehend the principles underlying God's whole way of life. It completely lacks the ability to understand God's point of view.

Now we should understand that the second and the third characteristics are an automatic consequence of the first characteristic, of that hatred against God. It is that totally unjustified and unprovoked **hatred against God** that **is the real problem** of the natural human mind. If that problem can be resolved, then the other two characteristics will also disappear.

IN THE MILLENNIUM

Some people assume that when Jesus Christ rules over the whole Earth during the millennium, that then all people everywhere will repent and receive God's spirit, and simply wait out the time until they are changed into spirit beings.

But that is not the correct picture.

Consider something which some of you may not have considered before in the message to Thyatira.

And he that overcomes, and keeps my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: And **he shall rule them with a rod of iron**; as the vessels of a potter **shall they be broken to shivers**: even as I received of my Father. (Revelation 2:26-27)

I know that you had in the past noticed this reference to ruling with a rod of iron. But do you actually grasp the significance of these statements? Christ is talking about giving those in the first resurrection **power to punish nations during the millennium!** "With a rod of iron" is not how Jesus Christ or any member of His government will ever rule over nations that are made up of totally converted people. God doesn't break into "shivers" converted people who make genuine mistakes!

These verses about ruling over mortal human beings during the millennium are written from the perspective of **people at that time being just as rebellious towards God as they are now in this present age**, and as they were even before the flood, a time when Jesus Christ in person was walking on this Earth. And because many people in the millennium will be just as rebellious as they are now, therefore Christ's rule will be very strict, not allowing any opposition.

Resentful human nature doesn't change simply because the millennium has started!

When Jesus Christ made this statement in Revelation 2:26-27, He was not referring to a one-time isolated occurrence. Christ mentioned this aspect of those in the first resurrection ruling strictly over mortal human beings during the millennium because this is a situation that will repeat itself many times during the millennium. And the government of Jesus Christ will very firmly deal with any overt resistance or opposition.

Consider also something Jesus Christ inspired the prophet Isaiah to record.

I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth *in* righteousness, and shall not return, That

unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear. (Isaiah 45:23)

Paul quotes this statement in Romans 14:11 as referring to "**the Lord**", and in Philippians 2:10 as applying to **Jesus Christ**. (COMMENT: This is one more proof that Jesus Christ is indeed the God of the Old Testament. And Paul himself certainly believed that Jesus Christ was the God of the Old Testament.) This statement is also about life during the millennium. The implication of this statement is that the "bowing" is not necessarily voluntary. It really implies a "bowing" that is going to be enforced.

This is not a statement about nations of converted people who willingly and eagerly and joyfully bow before Jesus Christ in respect, reverence and awe. It is a statement about people who don't really want to bow, but who will be forced to do so. Such enforcing will invariably produce resentment in the natural human minds of those who are forced to bow.

It is helpful if we try to picture a portion of the physical people in the millennium with exactly the same kind of carnal mind that was the hallmark of people before the flood. The natural mind is always the same; it is always resentful towards the laws of God. The fact that Jesus Christ will be present during the millennium doesn't make any more difference than the fact that Jesus Christ was present and walked amongst people before the flood.

THE 144000 DURING THE MILLENNIUM

There is a reason why God determined that there would be exactly 144000 in the first resurrection. You already understand about the **positions of responsibility** (i.e. "in My Father's house are many mansions", John 14:2) that will exist in the government that Jesus Christ will establish.

You also already understand that Jesus Christ will give **real rulership** over "five cities" to many individuals amongst the 144000, and real rulership over "ten cities" to others at that same time (see Luke 19:17-19). Those cities need to be ruled, not because the inhabitants are so repentant and converted and so eagerly cooperative with all of Jesus Christ's wishes, but because **some inhabitants in all of the cities around the world will very likely never at any time really repent!** In many instances those rulers over ten or over five cities will indeed have to rule "with a rod of iron", i.e. very strictly **forcing** carnal minds to comply with all of God's laws.

I believe that the vast majority of the 144000 in the first resurrection will be responsible to rule over various areas of this planet, enforcing God's laws. They will all look for willing eager cooperation from the mortal human beings. But when they don't get that, then they will punish those who are rebellious and obstinate.

So here is the point:

During the millennium Jesus Christ will not tolerate any disobedience, except for one particular occasion. That one occasion is predicted in the Book of Ezekiel in Ezekiel 38-39. Let's have a look at that occasion.

For a start, while this is addressed to "Gog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal" (Ezekiel 38:3), it actually represents an alliance of nations including Persia and Ethiopia and Libya and Gomer (see Ezekiel 38:5-6). It represents an army of many millions of soldiers from a number of different nations. God says:

After many days thou shalt be visited: in the latter years thou shalt come into the land *that is*

brought back from the sword, and is gathered out of many people, against the mountains of Israel, which have been always waste: but it is brought forth out of the nations, and they shall dwell safely all of them. (Ezekiel 38:8)

This is speaking about a time during the millennium, after Jesus Christ has established peace and people are dwelling safely. This may well be 100 years or even 200 years into the millennium. God continued to say:

Thus says the Lord GOD; It shall also come to pass, *that* at the same time shall things come into your mind, and **you shall think an evil thought**: And you shall say, I will go up to **the land of unwalled villages**; I will go to them that are at rest, that dwell safely, all of them dwelling without walls, and **having neither bars nor gates**, (Ezekiel 38:10-11)

Sins always start with a wrong thought (excluding sins committed in ignorance). So these verses address sins that are committed during the millennium. During the millennium cities and villages are "defenseless" against any attack. Whatever wealth people may acquire, it will not be locked away or securely hidden in some bank vault. It will, for all practical purposes, be lying around openly. This will represent easy pickings for any invading army, who will view it as easy as "taking candy from a baby".

You can read the rest of that prophecy yourself in Ezekiel 38-39. My point is simply this:

Here we have an incredibly huge army of many millions of soldiers coming up to the area of Palestine "to take a spoil" (Ezekiel 38:12). What this reveals is that during the millennium, at a time when Satan is bound and unable to influence anyone, there will be **millions upon millions of people with a totally carnal attitude**. They are selfishly trying to take things away from other people who have been blessed by God for being repentant. The community is wealthy, not in money but in goods and possessions which they have worked to produce.

The fact that Jesus Christ and the 144000 will at that point have been ruling for decades, if not even for a century or two, doesn't seem to be any deterrent for these selfish and totally carnal hordes. Those hordes are just as carnal as were the people before the flood. Nothing has changed, as far as the natural human mind is concerned. And even in the total absence of Satan, people are quite capable of being utterly carnal.

This account shows that carnal human nature will be quite prevalent during the millennium. And above all, this account is a vivid example of the natural human mind's selfishness and hatred against God. That hatred is really the main motivation for this attack.

When God then destroys 5/6th of that army (Ezekiel 39:2), then there will be millions upon millions of carcasses to bury. That alone will take seven months (Ezekiel 39:12). After those seven months people will still look for any human bones that may have been missed, which bones will then also be buried.

[Comment: If you think about this instruction to bury every single human bone they can find, it should tell you something. It is not only assumed, but in fact it is absolutely certain that any human bones discovered anywhere must have belonged to someone in that army that was destroyed. There is no chance that any human bone someone may find at that time could possibly have belonged to anyone other than a member of that destroyed rebel army. This should tell us that during Jesus Christ's 1000-year rule no human beings will die, except for those that were a part of that rebel army. And therefore there will be no other human bones around anywhere for anyone to find.]

This lengthy procedure of burying those who had opposed Jesus Christ and burying any remaining bones will make a very profound impression on all those people who will still have carnal minds. For

them this will be a powerful deterrent to not engage in any more open rebellions against Jesus Christ's government for the rest of the millennium.

But that does not mean that they will let go of their hatred against God, not at all. Instead, the unrepentant people will outwardly comply with all of God's laws, while inwardly bottling up their hostility and resentment towards God. The key here is that **some people will never choose to have a change of mind**, no matter how many blessings God showers upon their converted and repentant neighbors. They will be like Cain, who resented that God blessed his brother Abel, but who at the same time was also unwilling to change his own ways.

To all the unrepentant, but outwardly seemingly obedient people during the millennium Jesus Christ says the same thing He told Cain, but applied to their thought-processes:

"If you think well, shall you not be accepted? But **if you don't use your mind the right way**, sin lies at the door" (adapted from Genesis 4:7).

A HATE-FILLED MIND IS NEVER RATIONAL

There is another lesson for us in this account. You and I might reason: surely anyone with half a brain would realize that attacking God is suicidal! There is no possibility whatsoever of attacking Jesus Christ in Jerusalem and somehow defeating Christ. So this attack on Jesus Christ's headquarters during the millennium is doomed to failure from the start.

The same is true for that incredibly huge army Satan rounds up after the millennium has ended. Their attack on Jerusalem is likewise doomed to failure from the word go. But that doesn't stop them from trying to attack and to defeat Jesus Christ.

The chances are that most of us have at one time or another seen exactly the same thing amongst people we know ... relatives, friends, neighbors, coworkers in the office, etc. **People are filled with hate and anger about something**, and they decide to do something incredibly stupid and self-destructive. We may have reasoned with them, or pleaded with them, or even threatened them, all in an effort to prevent them from doing something that was guaranteed to create huge problems for those people themselves.

In such cases, whether they said the following or not, in many cases their actual way of thinking was: **I don't care what the consequences are**; I am going to do this **even if it kills me**. They refuse to face the inevitable consequences their actions will have. Their anger and their hatred has blinded them, and at that point in time they are not capable of thinking logically and rationally. And **there is no way we can help them** to understand the magnitude of the consequences which their intended actions will have.

At that point they are in fact thinking exactly the same way Satan thinks!

So the people in that army in Ezekiel 38-39, and also the people who after the 1000 years follow Satan and seek to destroy Jesus Christ's headquarters on Earth, choose to banish from their minds **the inevitable consequences their actions will have**. They are bitter and filled with hatred for God, and they don't care what the consequences will be.

When 1/3 of the angels rebelled with Satan against God, the one thing that united all those angels with Satan was that they had all developed a hatred for God, their Creator. And that hatred in turn resulted in them losing the ability to think logically and rationally; their thinking became self-destructive. We need to

recognize that **hatred always distorts our thought processes.**

When they rose in rebellion against God, it is not so much that they thought that they could actually defeat God, as it was a hatred for their Creator that said: I don't care what the consequences will be, and if we end up going down, we will at least take this whole universe down with us. And they did indeed cause an enormous amount of damage to this physical universe.

The rebellious angels were in effect daring God, who had told them that He had created them with immortal life, to blot them out. They were provoking God to go back on His statement that He had unconditionally and in good faith given them immortal life. They had developed extremely perverse and hate-filled minds.

What about us, when we are provoked? Do we go back on our word?

Keep in mind that **being provoked is not the same as being deceived** or tricked, which was the case when Adonijah tried to deceive his half-brother Solomon regarding his real motivation for asking Solomon to give him (Adonijah) Abishag as a wife (see 1 Kings 2:13-22). Solomon immediately discerned that receiving Abishag as a wife was **the last component in Adonijah's plot to kill Solomon** and to take over the throne.

So Solomon had no compunction about going back on his word to his own mother (see 1 Kings 2:20) ... Adonijah had succeeded in very deviously deceiving Solomon's mother, and he attempted to also deceive Solomon. That is how Satan very commonly works: he deviously deceives us and lies to us, and then he demands that we keep our word. But **we are never bound to honor deception**. So in those deceptive circumstances there was nothing wrong in Solomon going back on his word to his mother.

But when people provoke us to anger then that doesn't necessarily involve deception. Regarding the angels that sinned, they provoked God, yes. But they had not deceived God into giving them an immortal existence. God had given them an immortal existence of His own free choice and without setting any conditions for retaining that immortal status. So their rebellion against God was a provocation for God to go back on His word. But God was not going to do that.

AN EXAMPLE OF THE NATURAL MIND'S HATRED

I have stated that the expression "enmity against God" means "a hatred that is directed against God". And that applies to every single carnal mind in any age: in the past, today and in the future. Consider this example from Jesus Christ's own ministry. This principle is something we need to understand when we deal with carnal people.

During His ministry Jesus Christ healed people. He helped people. He taught them God's way of life. On two occasions He fed huge multitudes. At no time did Jesus Christ ever do anything wrong or harm anybody. But He did represent God the Father, and He boldly stated that He was the Son of God.

So when the scribes and the Pharisees delivered up Jesus Christ to Pontius Pilate, Pilate wanted to release Jesus Christ because it was obvious that Jesus Christ was innocent of all charges. So Pilate said: "whom will you that I release unto you? Barabbas or Jesus who is called Christ?" (Matthew 27:17). When Pilate repeated his offer with "whether of the twain will you that I release unto you", **the whole multitude said "Barabbas"** (Matthew 27:21).

So then Pilate asked: "what shall I then do with Jesus who is called Christ?", and "they **all** say to him, **let**

Him be crucified" (Matthew 27:22). Pilate knew that Jesus Christ had not done anything wrong, and certainly did not deserve to be put to death.

Now notice the carnal human mind, which hates God and anything that stands for God. Here we see the "I don't care what's right or wrong" attitude of the carnal mind when it is motivated by bitterness and by hatred.

When Pilate asked "**why** (should Christ be crucified), what evil has He done?" (Matthew 27:23), the whole multitude **went berserk**, threatening to start a riot. They "cried out the more, saying, let Him be crucified" (same verse). They were totally irrational and out of control!

Now the point here is that irrespective of how much the chief priests and elders (verse 20) may have "persuaded" the multitude, every single individual in that multitude who uttered the words "let Him be crucified" was accountable for making that statement. The fact that many people in that multitude had witnessed some or other part of Jesus Christ's ministry didn't stop them from demanding His death.

What we have in this incident is the carnal mind's spontaneous hatred for God, that enmity Paul referred to. Pilate's question "why, what evil has He done?" didn't cause anyone in that "persuaded multitude" to step back and say: "hey, you've got a point there; there isn't actually any evil in Jesus Christ", etc. All Pilate had asked was "tell me why I should crucify Jesus Christ" and the people just went crazy.

The point is: **that multitude**, which was willing to be persuaded by the priests, **was simply not willing to be persuaded by Pilate's sound reasoning**. Their carnal minds wanted a crucifixion for someone they knew was innocent, but who represented God. Their reaction was the carnal mind's hatred for God; that's the mind that is "**only evil continually**" and "**desperately wicked**".

And sometimes that same hatred may focus on us, because we represent God. As Jesus Christ said "because you are not of the world ... therefore **the world hates you**" (see John 15:19).

So let's understand something:

People can be nice people; they can be kind, generous, considerate, helpful, outgoing, loving, etc. But if they have not at some point repented (i.e. changed the way they use their minds), then they too will cry out "crucify Him" if those circumstances were to arise.

The carnal human mind never changes on its own. It is only real repentance that can produce a changed mind. But God is the One who has to "**lead**" people to repentance. And so people, even "nice people", who have not repented will in fact hate God and God's ways, though they themselves usually cannot even see that hatred.

Under normal conditions that hatred is usually well hidden, even from the people themselves. **It takes unusual circumstances to bring that hatred out into the open**. And that is why Satan is loosed for a short time after the 1000 years of Christ's rule ... to bring about the unusual circumstances that will bring a hatred for God out into the open for every single unconverted person alive at that time.

ANOTHER LOOK AT THE MILLENNIUM

There will be millions of mortal human beings who will live through the events at Christ's second coming, as opposed to only eight individuals living through the flood at Noah's time. Those millions will be the first generation to experience the millennial rule of Jesus Christ.

None of them came to a real repentance before Christ's second coming. But after the seven plagues have been poured out (Revelation 15 & 16), many of them may quite possibly be ready to then submit their lives willingly to Jesus Christ. Many may by then be fairly close to repentance. But that will not be the case for everyone who lives into the millennium.

Many of the ancient Israelites very readily and very quickly rejected God's instructions. That is because **miracles are not able to produce a genuine change of mind in unconverted people**. The Israelites rebelled even while the pillar of cloud was before them every single day, and the pillar of fire was in their midst every night. People who live over into the millennium will have the same type of mind that the ancient Israelites had.

Nothing from the outside can change the human mind's spontaneous enmity against everything that stands for God. The only way to get rid of that hostility is to make an active, conscious, firm, deliberate and committed decision to change our way of thinking towards God and towards God's laws and God's ways. We ourselves must generate a desire to want to change our way of thinking. Repentance involves making decisions.

That's where the 144000 enter the picture, to help people make the right decisions. They will be in a position to work one-on-one with all those mortal human beings who show a desire to change their way of thinking. They will work one-on-one with such people in the cities that they rule over.

But human beings themselves must make the decision to want to change their minds to a different way of thinking. And for those human beings who do actively express a desire to want to change, for those people the 144000 will provide all the help and guidance that those human beings may need. Those are the people who during the millennium will then "walk with God", i.e. with a resurrected member of the God Family.

THOSE WHO NEVER CHANGE THEIR WAY OF THINKING

All of the angels saw God personally from the day they were created. They all went through a period of testing their character. At the end of that testing 1/3 of all the angels had developed a serious case of what we today can identify as having "a totally carnal human nature".

Obviously, the nature of that one third of the angels wasn't "human" and neither was it "carnal" (i.e. fleshly). But they had developed a nature that is 100% identical to the natural mind of the typical unrepentant and unconverted human being.

Now here is the point I want to make:

When individuals are created with totally free and independent minds, and this applies to both angels and human beings, then some of those individuals have always chosen a mindset that is in opposition to God's outgoing way of thinking. And **those free and independent decisions to reject God's way of thinking were completely independent of external circumstances!**

In other words:

Some minds will reject God's ways whether those minds can regularly see God or not. Seeing God in person, seeing miracles take place, seeing God's blessings on those who choose God's ways, being ruled over by God personally, or alternatively being ruled by greedy, selfish, devious and perverse politicians, being well off or being in poverty, etc. ... none of these things have a deciding influence on

whether those free and independent minds will choose God's ways or not.

The angels saw God personally and witnessed God's creative powers. Yet one third of them rejected God's ways. People before the flood saw Jesus Christ walking amongst them. And yet they, including the "nice" people amongst them, almost universally rejected God's ways. Since the flood people have not seen God personally. But in coming out of Egypt the people of Israel saw miracle after miracle after miracle. They had visual evidence of God's presence amongst them by day (pillar of cloud) and by night (pillar of fire). Yet they too almost universally rejected God's ways.

When Jesus Christ started His ministry, **the Jewish people** alive at that time could once again see God (i.e. the second member of the God Family) walking amongst them. Vast numbers of them witnessed monumental miracles, from the dead being raised to all kinds of sick people being cured to hungry multitudes being fed. Yet they still overwhelmingly rejected God's ways.

Since Jesus Christ's resurrection people have not seen God personally (excluding the generation of the first apostles). And today humanity also overwhelmingly rejects God's ways. **During the millennium** people will once again have the opportunity to see God (i.e. members of the God Family), and they will experience life in compliance with all of God's laws. And yet a vast multitude will rebel against Christ at some point during the millennium (that's Ezekiel 38-39), and an even greater multitude will rebel after the 1000 years have been completed.

In every age, and under every possible set of circumstances, **there will always be a certain number of free minds that will reject God's ways.** It doesn't matter whether they can see Christ or not. It doesn't matter whether they can witness miracles or not. It doesn't even matter whether some of them were personally healed of serious health problems by Jesus Christ. And all of those free minds that reject God's ways will be the sons or daughters of other people who do repent and who do change their way of thinking.

Note!

The attitude of the human mind towards God is not influenced in a major way by any external circumstances to which that mind may be exposed, be it miracles or personal healings or demonstrations of mind-boggling power or even personal examples of parents or other relatives. **Outside factors are simply not what causes people to change their attitude towards God.**

If any particular set of outside factors or circumstances could increase the rate of people repenting, i.e. increase the rate of people changing their attitudes towards God, then God would surely expose every single human being to those particular factors and circumstances, to increase the success rate for His plan.

Understand the following point:

A major reason why far more people will come to repentance during the millennium than during man's entire period of existence before the millennium will be that **instead of ONE Teacher** for mankind (i.e. Jesus Christ) as in previous ages, **there will then** (during the millennium) **be 144000 "teachers"** who will be members of the God Family to work with mankind. That team effort, which is something God the Father and Jesus Christ decided upon very likely in the years leading up to the flood, is what will produce the huge harvest for God's Family during the millennium.

THE SUCCESS RATE FOR DIFFERENT APPROACHES

Let's consider an overview of God dealing with human beings in different ways and at different times, and what kind of positive response rates were achieved. The figures I will give are purely theoretical and for illustration purposes only. My intent here is to put things into some kind of perspective. But I don't wish to imply that the figures I present here are accurate, because I am confident that they are not accurate. They are only for purposes of perspective.

Here we go.

1) BEFORE THE FLOOD

I believe that in the 1656 years before the flood there must have been well in excess of one billion people. They all lived for many centuries and had a large number of children per family. In that time period Enoch was possibly the youngest person to ever die (of natural causes?) ... and he died at age 365 years (I am obviously excluding Abel who was murdered, and also the "young man" who was killed by Lamech, see Genesis 4:23). Thus I believe that quite possibly there may have been as many as two, three or even four billion people. But let's assume that **one billion people** lived before the flood. All of those people could theoretically have chosen to "walk with God".

The success rate for that period was **three people**: Abel and Enoch and Noah. So the success rate for that whole period was approximately **1 in 300 million** (rounded off, since we are only working with theoretical figures anyway). That was a very discouraging success rate.

2) AFTER THE FLOOD

120 years before the flood **God the Father and Jesus Christ decided that They needed to modify the plan in some major ways**. Some of those modifications were:

They added **the sacrifice of Jesus Christ** as Savior for mankind to the plan. This was designed to give all people the opportunity to recover from foolish or weak conduct that did not involve an open hostility directed at God Himself, by forgiving sins in response to a genuine change of mind (i.e. upon repentance).

As already indicated, God the Father and Jesus Christ also added **the second resurrection** to the plan, to give all those people They would not work with in this lifetime a genuine opportunity to also receive immortal life in the Family of God at a future time.

While God modified the plan after the flood, those modifications had no influence at all on the perverse automatic hatred of the human mind for God and for anything that stands for the true God. So human nature that was "only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5) before the flood continued to be "only evil continually" unabated after the flood. People were just as evil after the flood as they had been before the flood. The reality of **carnal human nature** was always going to depress the success rate for God's dealings with mankind.

It greatly grieved God when by the time of the flood the success rate turned out to be a very, very tiny fraction of 1%. That was a huge disappointment for God.

So God the Father and Jesus Christ decided that after the flood They would restrict access to God to a selected and limited group. They decided to **work with the descendants of one particular family** grown into a group of nations. The patriarchs of that family would first be carefully tested by God, and only after thorough testing would their descendants grow into a group of nations, with whom God

intended to work. We are talking about Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and the nations of Israel.

From the time of the exodus from Egypt up to the ministry of Jesus Christ, a period almost as long as man's total time before the flood, or approximately 1500 years, the population of the descendants of Israel that remained in the Middle East seemed to remain fairly constant in the range from two million to four million people. So by the start of the New Testament perhaps there had been in the range of **one hundred million Israelites**. (I am here excluding the Israelites from the so-called "lost ten tribes of Israel".)

The success rate was somewhat better than before the flood, but it was still abysmally unsatisfactory, and still extremely depressing. Already very early in His working with the nation of Israel, still in the days of Moses, God lamented:

O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever! (Deuteronomy 5:29)

God's success rate was limited almost exclusively to the people God was working with in a direct relationship: the patriarchs, Moses, Joshua, some judges and prophets and certain righteous kings. For the estimated 100 million people of Israel as a whole over that 1500-year period the success rate was very likely in the region of **1 in 1 million**. That amounts to about 100 people for the entire Old Testament period of God's dealings with the people of Israel. While better than for the period before the flood, this was still a very discouraging success rate.

So God was going to make another change, to increase that success rate. Here is how God's dealings with mankind developed with God's three different approaches:

GOD'S THREE DIFFERENT APPROACHES

First, for the period before the flood, God tried working with **all the descendants of one man who had failed the test**, Adam. The results were very bad and quite discouraging.

Second, after the flood, God decided to restrict His work to working with **the descendants of one thoroughly tested man**, Abraham. God's underlying reasoning seems to be expressed in God's statement to Abraham before God destroyed Sodom.

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

This was **God's hope** when God decided to work with Abraham's descendants. God's reasoning, as revealed in this verse, was that if God could start with one righteous and thoroughly tested man, instead of starting with a failed candidate, then **that process could be replicated** over and over amongst the descendants of that one righteous man.

God is always positive, God always expects the best. And so God's assumption here seems to have been that if Abraham's descendants would be taught God's ways from early childhood, then they would joyfully accept God's ways and in due time teach them to their own children, perpetuating **the cycle of righteous parents producing righteous children**. That was God's goal.

But, just as before the flood, this approach also didn't work out as God had anticipated. Abraham's personal influence only went as far as Isaac and Jacob. By the generation after Jacob (i.e. the sons of Jacob) they didn't really "keep the way of the LORD" as God had hoped. And by the time of Moses the descendants of Abraham were character-wise no better than any other nation. This was another huge disappointment for God.

God tried time and time and time again to work with the people of Israel. God really wanted to make it work. But the nation of Israel didn't even remotely turn out as God had hoped. God's hope as expressed in Genesis 18:19 was **never achieved**. So eventually God "divorced" Israel, because it just wasn't working out.

Through His dealings with the people of Israel God had learned that in dealing with carnal human nature, the success rate is only increased very marginally when working with all the descendants of a righteous man, as opposed to working with all the descendants of a totally carnal man. God had learned that **genetic heritage only has a very marginal effect on predicting which carnal human beings will come to repentance**, and which carnal human beings will not come to repentance.

That understanding is expressed in God's statement in the Book of Ezekiel, when God said:

Though these three men, **Noah, Daniel, and Job**, were in it, they should deliver *but* their own souls by their righteousness, saith the Lord GOD ... these three men ... shall deliver neither sons nor daughters; **they only** shall be delivered, but the land shall be desolate. (Ezekiel 14:14-16)

You might have thought that these verses are just a random statement from God. But that misses the real message of these verses.

You see, back at the time of Abraham, back in Genesis 18:19, God had expressed the reasoning that the descendants of a righteous man would also "keep the way of the LORD". Here in Ezekiel, over 1000 years later, **God has abandoned that line of reasoning**. Here God states quite clearly that the descendants of a righteous man don't have any kind of advantage over other people. And the obvious implication is that the descendants of a righteous man aren't themselves necessarily going to be righteous, as God had hoped over 1000 years earlier.

So God was getting ready to once again change His approach in dealing with mankind.

Third, from Jesus Christ's ministry onwards, God abandoned the approach of restricting His dealings to the descendants of the one righteous man (i.e. Abraham). But the concept of restricting or limiting His dealings to certain people as opposed to dealing with all people is something that God retained. So restricting access to God received **a different focus** from the focus in force before Jesus Christ's ministry.

Instead of limiting His dealings to the descendants of the one righteous man Abraham, where God had no control over the character, personality and integrity of all physical Israelites who would be born, God expanded the "manpower pool" to include all nations. But then God **restricted** His dealings to those people that God would call from amongst all people and all nations.

The weakness in the plan to work with the descendants of the one righteous man Abraham has been that it had not been possible for God to do any character-vetting of people before they were born as physical Israelites.

Over 1000 years of history with the descendants of Abraham had proved that there was no guarantee that a righteous father would have a righteous son. So there was no guarantee that the sons and

grandsons of righteous men like Moses and Samuel and David and Josiah and Hezekiah, etc. would also turn out to be righteous. **That was a great weakness in a system that relied on a genetic line of descent to find righteous people.**

So with this third approach God restricted His dealings to people whose character was already exposed to God **before** God would call them. This approach allowed God to not even call people who had depraved, perverse and evil character, and who already lacked any real integrity. This approach still did not remotely guarantee a 100% success rate, but it was a huge improvement over the two previous approaches in seeking to lead human beings to salvation. But even this is still not God's final approach for leading human beings to salvation. We'll look at the fourth and final approach shortly.

For now let's look at this third approach more closely.

SINCE JESUS CHRIST'S MINISTRY

Beginning with Christ's ministry, God was not going to restrict His working with human beings to the ethnic descendants of the nations of Israel. Instead, God's new approach was now going to be to call people from all nations and all races. Christ's apostles were to go and **"teach all nations"** (Matthew 28:19).

But there was going to be **a limiting factor**. This approach is based on God selecting specific people Himself, and offering them the opportunity for salvation. This new approach is based on the principle Jesus Christ expressed when He said "no man can come to Me, **except the Father** who has sent Me **draw him ...**" (John 6:44). This had not been the case for Israel in Old Testament times, when God had really intended to work with all Israelites. This limiting factor with God's third approach we usually refer to as "God calling people".

This third approach was not going to guarantee a perfect success rate, since some people's character would change in a negative way after God had started to work with them; but it would at least produce a vastly improved success rate over the previous two approaches.

Let's keep in mind that Jesus Christ was spelling out this third approach when He said **"many are called, but few are chosen"** (Matthew 22:14). The implication of Christ's assessment in this verse is that the overwhelming majority of those who are "called" still never get to the point of being "chosen", i.e. they never get to the point of becoming converted Christians in whom dwells God's holy spirit.

It is difficult to put a success rate figure on this group. But perhaps the success rate amongst all those who have been called in this New Testament age (that includes the seeds by the wayside, amongst thorns, and also on stony ground, the seed being representative of God calling people) might be **1 in 100?**

These figures are obviously not accurate. But hopefully they can present a perspective. To summarize the **success rates** for three successive time periods:

- 1) For all people before the flood = 1 out of 300,000,000
- 2) For the nations of Israel in OT = 1 out of 1,000,000
- 3) For those who hear God's call = 1 out of 100

There is one thing I have thus far left out of this picture. And that is this:

God's rate of success is always far greater, **approaching 100%**, when God works one-on-one with human beings. Thus:

1) When Cain and Abel were born, **there were only very few human beings on Earth**. And because Abel was willing to respond to God, therefore God could work closely with Abel for a considerable time. Seth was the replacement for Abel who had been killed by Cain. Now since Adam was already 130 years old when Seth was born (Genesis 5:3), it implies that Cain and Abel may both have been 120+ years old when Cain killed Abel. That was a time when Cain himself feared that other men (i.e. his own brothers, nephews and their children etc.) might kill him (Genesis 4:14). So human society had already developed and expanded for a century or more before Cain killed Abel.

My point is that by the time Abel was killed, God may very possibly have worked with Abel for around 100 years. Abel was a success for God, and Abel had walked with God.

2) Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Joshua, specific judges and prophets and righteous kings all had the benefit of close interactions with God. When people were given the benefit of such close contact with God, then the success rate was **approaching 100%**, with only the occasional failure.

3) Jesus Christ, in addition to preaching the gospel, also trained 12 very carefully selected men, **the twelve apostles**. With His ministry Jesus Christ may have reached from 20,000 to perhaps 50,000 people or more. Let's just say that He reached **24,000 people** with His preaching (more people will only make my point more forcefully, so I am certainly not opposed to a larger number). Here is what we then have for Christ's ministry:

- For the total number of all the people Jesus Christ preached to, the success rate was 120 (Acts 1:15). 120 represents **1/2%** of the 24,000 total. If the total was greater than 24,000, then the success percentage becomes even smaller than 1/2%.

- But for working with the apostles, the success rate was 11 out of 12. That is a success rate of **more than 90%**. **Christ's personal dealings with the 12 apostles produced the first highly successful return for any approach God had taken until then.** Therefore God was going to replicate that successful approach on a massive scale. When you find a successful strategy, then you go with it.

Jesus Christ working personally with the 12 apostles represents the fourth and final approach I referred to above.

Before we come to the millennium, here is a brief overview of the success rate of God's dealings with us human beings:

In dealing with mankind in general, the rate of success has always been unacceptably low, starting with 1 in **300 million**, to 1 in **1 million**, to eventually perhaps 1 in 100 for those who are called in this age. But **interspersed throughout all those periods God has worked one-on-one with specific individuals**, but mostly with only one person or a very few persons at a time. With this approach the success rate approached 100%.

At His first coming **Jesus Christ expanded that approach** to dealing simultaneously with 12 hand-picked men, and the success rate for that particular aspect of His ministry was still over 90% (i.e. 11 out of 12).

[COMMENT: All of the people who heard Jesus Christ during His ministry were exposed to "God sowing

the seed"; i.e. they all heard God's call. With a success rate of less than 1% for all those who heard Jesus Christ in person, I feel it is reasonable to assume a similar rate of around 1%, or even less, for all the seed that has been sown around the world since Christ's resurrection. I don't think that any minister since Christ's resurrection has achieved better results than Jesus Christ achieved for His ministry. And if 50 million people or more have been exposed to God's "seed" over the past almost 2000 years, then the 144000 in the first resurrection likewise only represent a small fraction of 1% of that total.]

It is thus abundantly clear that in order to get a very high success rate, **God has to work one-on-one with a very large number of people.** That will be God's fourth and final approach.

And that brings us to the millennium!

THE MAIN JOB FOR THE 144000

God planned that during the millennium **the 144000 will work personally with small groups of again hand-picked people** in the cities that they will rule. Perhaps all 144000 will work with groups of 12 or so people for around three and a half years per group? That would mean $144000 \times 12 = 1,728,000$ individuals worldwide every three and a half years. That process could go for over 250 cycles (that would be 875 years). In those 250 cycles over 430 million people could receive an intensive three and a half year one-on-one training experience with a member of the God Family, **like the original apostles who had received** their training from Jesus Christ personally.

Now the groups could perhaps be increased to more than 12, and the cycles could perhaps vary from 3-5 years? So the number of people trained in this one-on-one way could perhaps be a billion people for the whole millennium?

These figures here are purely for illustration purposes and not meant to be speculation figures. They are not meant to imply numeric accuracy. My main purpose for these theoretical figures is to illustrate **the importance God has in mind for the 144000 people in the first resurrection.** They are not window-dressing for Christ's rule on Earth. They are not there just to give orders and to rule.

God has an extremely important job for them. That job is to work one-on-one with people during the millennium, leading them to the point of repentance, the point of permanently accepting a different way of thinking.

That responsibility is why we today have to go through more intensive testing than will be the case for people during the millennium. That is also why the 144000 "marry" Jesus Christ, becoming His "wife". This is not just some nice sounding title or designation. It has real meaning.

Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and **his wife has made herself ready.** (Revelation 19:7)

It is the wife that actually bears the children. And in the building up of the Family of God it will be these one-on-one efforts of the 144000 (the wife), following the example of Jesus Christ training His original 12 apostles, that will lead to "children" being added to the Family. I suspect that when the Family of God has been completed, all of the members of God's Family, except for the 144000 themselves, will have been added to the Family during the millennium and during the 100-year period as a direct result of those one-on-one efforts by the "wife", by those 144000 individuals who were in the first resurrection.

Put another way: Jesus Christ's personal efforts will produce 144000 members for the Family of God, and then the 144000, the wife, through their efforts will produce all the other children for God's Family. Jesus Christ's efforts will produce the first harvest (Pentecost), and the 144000 will then be instrumental in producing the latter great harvest (Tabernacles plus Last Great Day). And that will then complete the building of the Family of God.

Jesus Christ's ministry was the pilot program for how the 144000 will work with people during the millennium!

They will be responsible for producing "children". That is why they are called "the wife of the Lamb". It is **His seed** (the holy spirit) and **their efforts** (working one-on-one) that will produce all the "children" for God's Family. And then Jesus Christ can present His "wife" and all Their "children" up to God the Father, referred to as "delivering up the kingdom to God the Father" (1 Corinthians 15:24).

That is a very profound responsibility for all those who will be in the first resurrection.

Now you may say: wait a minute. Even if your scenario takes care of 500 million people, or even a billion people getting this one-on-one training, that still doesn't take care of everybody who will live during the millennium. What if in the course of the millennium there are two, three, four or five billion people? Don't they all get the benefit of this one-on-one training with a member of the God Family?

And the answer here is: **NO, THEY DON'T!** Not everyone in the millennium will get this one-on-one training.

The numbers I have mentioned above (i.e. 500 million or a billion) are meaningless in themselves, and not meant to be accurate. But the concept is this: a very large number of people will get such one-on-one training with a member of the 144000 during the millennium, and also during the 100 years. But **not all people alive** in those two periods **will get such personal training!** That is because people will have to meet a condition in order to be eligible for such personal teaching and training.

The requirement for receiving this type of personal training, which really amounts to "walking with a member of the God Family", is that the individuals involved must first repent; they must change the way they use their minds.

Unrepentant people will not be accepted into the "walking with God" programs around the world.

That is because unrepentant people simply don't agree with God. And as far as God is concerned, two cannot walk together unless they are agreed. So unrepentant people cannot walk with God.

For that matter, unrepentant people wouldn't even want to be "walking with God" because that would make them uncomfortable. Understand that during the millennium **some people will walk with God**, and **other people will not walk with God**. And only those who walk with God will take part in the "walking with God" program.

That's the way it was back in the beginning ... Abel chose to walk with God and Cain chose not to walk with God. Enoch, Noah and Abraham likewise walked with God. And the 12 apostles walked with God. The one-on-one training always requires people to walk with God. It will not involve sitting in classrooms or in colleges. It will involve walking with God.

And while all people during the millennium will be compelled to live by God's laws, not all people will choose to make any special efforts to seek to understand God's mind and God's way of thinking.

Again, please understand that all of the numbers I have given in this context are not intended to be my guesses. **I am not trying to guess any numbers**, not for the number of people involved, not for the length of one-on-one training periods, and not for the size of groups. All the numbers here are simply **illustrations**, but they are not intended to be accurate guesses. In themselves these numbers I have given here are meaningless and certainly without accuracy. But I hope **they illustrate the concepts** I am trying to convey.

And the one point I would like to emphasize over and over is that **there are going to be vast numbers of people in the millennium, who never at any time come to a real repentance**. Obviously once again I don't know the exact percentages involved, but I suspect that anywhere from 30% to 60% of all people during the millennium and during the subsequent 100-year period will never repent.

The army of rebels in Ezekiel 38-39 is huge. And the army Satan rounds up after the 1000 years is "**as the sand of the sea**", an absolutely staggering number of people. These groups represent sizable chunks of humanity, if not even an outright majority of all people alive at that time.

Regarding "the sand of the sea", we might just keep the following point in mind. A very tiny stretch of beach 6 feet long by 6 feet wide by 6 feet deep will contain far in excess of **300 billion grains of sand!** If you walk on a sandy beach for only **30 seconds**, you will have crossed over **trillions of grains of sand**. The number of grains of sand on a beach that is, say, 5 miles long is mind-boggling, and literally **multiple billions of times greater than the total number of human beings that will ever be born**.

I think we should keep in mind that the statement "as the sand of the sea" is a description that **God** provided to the Apostle John in Revelation 20:8. Yes, I accept that God was using hyperbole here in this statement. But the question is: **why** did God resort to using this hyperbole?

I believe the answer is: because that rebellious army is far, far greater than we tend to imagine in our speculations. God didn't use this type of hyperbole for the army of 200,000,000 in Revelation 9:16. So I can only conclude that the army that is "as the sand of the sea" is going to be far greater than the army of 200,000,000 in Revelation 9:16. It will be a mind-boggling sized army, which I personally fear will exceed a billion people.

Now with the angels the failure rate had been one third. If anything, I suspect that the overall failure rate with human beings is going to be greater than it was with the angels. I don't know that, and I certainly don't hope that. But I fear that it will be greater.

[Comment: We need to distinguish between the failure rate with all human beings overall, and the failure rate with those human beings who had the benefit of a one-on-one training experience with a member of the God Family. For any human being to move from the general category to the one-on-one training category requires that human being to first change his way of thinking towards God. But these two groups have vastly different success rates ... a very low success rate for humanity as a whole, and a very high success rate for those who go through the one-on-one training.]

Here's why I think that the failure rate for human beings overall will be greater than was the case for the angels.

THE PERVERSITY OF THE CARNAL MIND

The history of evil seems to always follow the same pattern, which is one of constant escalation.

What starts out as **a single drop** soon becomes **a little trickle**, then it becomes **a small stream** and eventually it ends up becoming **a raging torrent**.

Someone sets a bad example. Soon a few people copy that bad example. Then eventually it becomes accepted as "normal" (e.g. homosexuality). Then someone else goes a step or two further down the road of rebellion, perversity and depravity, setting a new example. That too is then emulated and in time accepted as normal. And deeper and deeper we go into rebellion against God.

Now the point is this:

When the human mind "accepts" a new level of depravity and rebellion against God, then it has become more set in its hatred of God's ways. Some simple examples of this that you can witness in our world today are:

1) Where the anti-abortion people try to reason with those who are for abortion, **the pro-abortion people hate those who oppose them** in any way! **Reasoning** from the one side is met with **hatred** from the other side.

That's what the natural human mind is like!

2) Where the appeasement "**All Lives Matter**" people try to reason with the "**Black Lives Matter**" people, the "**Black Lives Matter**" people themselves are largely motivated by hatred for those who oppose them, as evidenced by slogans in reference to the police like "pigs in a blanket, fry 'em like bacon", etc. Once again **reasoning** from the one side is met with **hatred** from the other side.

And as we have already seen, where Pontius Pilate tried to reason with the Jewish people regarding Jesus Christ's fate, the people in that mob were motivated by a hatred for God, that spontaneous hatred of the carnal mind. Again, reasoning from one side was met by hatred from the other side.

That's what the carnal human mind is typically like!

If you give it some thought you can probably think of several other examples yourself, where sound reasoning from one side is met with hatred from the other side. You can even see this scenario in the political arena: one side is endlessly appealing to reasoning why various courses of action are either right or wrong, where in many cases the other side is really motivated by **a hatred for those who oppose them**. Obviously, that sort of situation can never be resolved without first getting rid of the hatred. Also keep in mind that people who are motivated by hatred are never able to think logically about the subject on which their hatred is focused.

We need to understand that **facts mean absolutely nothing to a mind that is motivated by hatred**. To a hate-filled mind facts are totally meaningless, because that hate-filled mind will simply not consider the facts.

Keep in mind that we are talking about the natural human mind's response to God and to God's ways.

Hatred is something that Satan inspires in people in order to motivate us to engage in illogical and self-destructive conduct. If Satan can get us to fill our minds with hatred, then Satan knows that we will not be able to reason clearly and logically. With minds that are motivated by hatred we are doomed to engage in self-destructive behavior. And that is Satan's goal.

So consider this advice:

Only an idiot would ever try to reason with hatred!

The sad thing is that we've all tried it at some or other time, haven't we? We've been confronted by someone filled with hatred and bitterness, and we tried to reason with them and to appease them. In those instances we were the idiots. Trying to reason with hatred not only doesn't work; in most cases such reasoning **only makes things worse**, because the more we try to present sound logical reasoning to them, the more those filled with hatred will entrench themselves in their attitudes. They know that their actions cannot be justified by sound reasoning, and therefore typically **they become angry when they are confronted by sound reasoning**. That's what happened with the mob when Pontius Pilate presented sound reasoning to them.

God never reasons with those who hate Him. It would be futile. The closest God came to reasoning with a hate-filled individual was to reason with the Prophet Jonah, whose mind was filled with hatred for the Ninevites (see Jonah 4:9-11).

We need to learn to not even try to reason with people who are motivated by hatred. Hatred is something that always needs to be repented of; i.e. people need to seriously change their thinking. Only then can we reason with them. The people who hate must first change, but that happens only very seldom.

My point here is this:

Evil, hateful and resentful attitudes towards God are far more **entrenched** in carnal human minds today than they have been at any time in the past. It was really bad before the flood, and **the carnal mind has only gone downhill ever since**. So where does that leave us today?

And hateful attitudes towards God during the millennium will be considerable. Just how great must the hatred for God be when people, in spite of knowing that a God with incredible powers resides in Jerusalem, decide to attack that God (Ezekiel 38-39) in order to satisfy their greed?

During the millennium many people will repent and walk with God, i.e. with the 144000 in the "walk with God" programs. And many other people won't repent and they will hate God. And their hatred is likely to be deeply entrenched in their very beings. That deep entrenchment is evidenced by the two huge rebellions we have already repeatedly referred to. It is impossible for a hate-filled person to repent without first getting rid of the hatred.

SO HOW CAN PEOPLE THEN REPENT?

Repentance means that we change the way our minds work. But that is something we can't do on our own. We ourselves are the ones who have to make that change in the way our minds work. But **we need help** from God to change our way of thinking.

Let's look at some Scriptures.

When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then has God also to the Gentiles **granted repentance** unto life. (Acts 11:18)

"Granted" here is the Greek word for "given". So here **"the people"**, meaning Jews in the Church, concluded that God had "given repentance" to the non-Israelites. And while these people in the Church were very sincere, their doctrinal understanding was still extremely shallow. Those are the people who were upset with Peter for having eaten meals with non-Jews, and they were only placated after Peter

had explained the whole story to them.

But my point here is this:

We don't get an understanding of the truth from what "people" say, especially people whose understanding of the truth is still extremely shallow!

We can get spiritual understanding from what Jesus Christ or a prophet of God or any servant of God may say. But what "people" say is never a valid criterion for establishing the truth of God. People are not the ones who establish the true doctrines of the Bible.

It is easy to understand what the people meant when they made this statement that Luke recorded. They meant that **some non-Israelites had come to repentance**, which was a staggering revelation for these people. However, that does not mean that these people correctly understood the process by which Cornelius and those with him had come to repentance. So when they said that God "has given repentance" to those people, that doesn't mean that they understood the process correctly. They in fact didn't understand it correctly.

The facts:

Cornelius had made a point of seeking God. **Cornelius took the initiative** to try to change from his past way of conducting his life. Acts 10:1-2 shows how Cornelius conducted himself. His case was a clear example of "ask and it shall be given" (Matthew 7:7). He was already seeking contact with God.

The reason I am making a small issue out of this "God has given repentance" statement in Acts 11:18 is because the whole account makes very clear that God "granting repentance" was not a process that God initiated in the mind of Cornelius! The account makes clear that **God "granting repentance" to Cornelius was a response to what Cornelius had already done!** Cornelius had already made the effort to seek God, and God responded to that effort by helping Cornelius to understand what God required from him. This was a case of "seek and you will find".

To be quite clear:

Cornelius was seeking God, and in response to that search God opened the mind of Cornelius and gave him the ability to comprehend repentance, and what he had to do. **It was not a case of:** God granting repentance to Cornelius, whereupon Cornelius then started to seek contact with God.

This is something that most people in God's Church have never really understood correctly!

Granting repentance to any human being is always a response from God to certain actions on the part of the person that is involved. God responds to certain frames of mind. But God **granting repentance is never an initiating contact** between God and the person involved. Granting repentance is always God's response to something that has gone before.

Cornelius wanted to change, but he needed help. And so God then provided that help, which help in turn enabled Cornelius to actually repent. That help from God opened the eyes of Cornelius to a better understanding.

Let's look at the next Scripture.

Or do you despise the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that **the goodness of God leads you to repentance?** (Romans 2:4)

This was written by Paul. Paul had a much better understanding of the true doctrines than both "the people" in Acts 11, and also than Luke who wrote the Book of Acts.

So Paul didn't say that God "gives" repentance. Rather, Paul said that God "leads" us to repentance. In other words, Paul said that **God shows us the way** to get to a real change of mind. That is not the same as people saying that God "gives" or "grants" repentance.

If I "lead" you to a cabin by the lake, that means that I will show you the way. But you yourself will still have to do the walking to get there. When someone leads us somewhere, then we still have to do everything ourselves to get there. For that matter, we ourselves still have to decide whether we actually want to go to that cabin by the lake, or whether we are not really interested in going there.

By itself, someone showing us the way doesn't get us to a destination. But showing us the way **makes it possible** for us to reach that destination.

Back especially in the 70's and 80's I visited many people, who had contacted the Church and shown an interest in learning more about God's way of life. So I would "lead" them by answering their questions and showing them what God requires from us. If they were willing to put out the effort, then I was going to show them the way to become reconciled to God.

The great majority of all those people I visited never came into God's Church, because "leading them" couldn't get them there. I showed them where they needed to change if they really wanted to become a part of God's Church. But they themselves then had to act on the knowledge and understanding I was making available to them on those visits. And most of them never did act on that knowledge.

Being "led to repentance" never makes the process of repentance itself any easier!

The only thing that being led to repentance makes easier is the understanding of what God actually requires from someone who is determined to repent. But the actual process of repenting, the actual process of changing the way our minds work and spontaneously respond to God's instructions, **that process remains a serious challenge for the natural human mind** even after we have been shown the way to true repentance. However, that understanding, which God leading us to repentance has made available to our minds, is certainly helpful.

To repeat: we need to seek God, and then God responds by giving us the understanding that we need in order to really repent, as opposed to merely being sorry for certain sins we may have committed.

Let's look at another Scripture.

In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will **give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth**; (2 Timothy 2:25)

Whereas in Romans 2:4 Paul was explaining something about repentance to the Church, here Paul was not writing to the Church in general. Here Paul was instructing a junior minister regarding how to deal with certain situations that arise when new people are visited. This verse is a very specific instruction to another minister.

And Paul did **not** say "if God peradventure will give them repentance"!

What Paul said was "if God peradventure will give them **repentance to the acknowledging of the truth**".

There is a difference between "repentance" as a standalone statement, and the statement "repentance to the acknowledging of the truth". The expression "to the acknowledging of the truth" gives Paul's instruction to Timothy a very specific focus.

Repentance means "to change one's thinking". In this verse Paul is speaking about people who want to argue about what the Scriptures mean, **people who would disagree with the explanations that Timothy would provide**. And so Paul told Timothy:

Explain the Scriptures in plain easy-to-understand language, in a non-offensive way and without being sidetracked by any foolish arguments, so that "peradventure" God will open their minds enough for them to recognize that the explanations you are giving them are correct, and that **their own ideas about the Scriptures are wrong**. But actually discussing repentance is very likely still quite a way down the road for such people who "oppose themselves".

That's the instruction Paul gave Timothy in this verse.

Paul's focus was on dealing with the argumentative attitude of such people, and not on whether or not those argumentative people would spontaneously repent and come into God's Church.

In my time of visiting new people who had contacted the Church, I have faced this type of situation described in 2 Timothy 2:25 many times. It applies to dealing with people who think they understand the Bible better than God's servant and so they argue with the minister. Paul's advice here is sound, good and helpful for any minister visiting new people.

But this is certainly not a statement about God "giving repentance" to anyone. It is talking about God helping certain people to understand the truth of the explanations for the Scriptures that a minister may be presenting to them.

Keep in mind that the carnal mind cannot really understand the truth of God. And many people who contact the Church are still as carnal as the day is long when they make that first contact. They'll argue to support their own pet ideas, thereby "opposing themselves" to the truth.

Right, we have now looked at Acts 11:18 and at Romans 2:4 and at 2 Timothy 2:25. These are the verses people turn to when they claim that God "gives" repentance to people. **That is simply not true!** And I hope you can see that from this examination of these three verses.

The truth is that God will "lead" us to repentance, by opening our minds sufficiently to help us understand what repentance actually is, and precisely what it is that God expects from us when we repent. This "leading" by God is always a response from God to a searching and willing mind. **It is never** an initiative from God, where God supposedly starts the ball rolling by "giving" us repentance, or even "giving us the ability to repent", and then (supposedly) we respond to having been "given" repentance. That is not how the process works.

THE MAIN PROBLEM WITH THE "GOD GIVES REPENTANCE" IDEA

The main problem with this false idea is that **it removes all responsibility** from the people who never repent! And that is what people always want to hear ... that they are not responsible for whatever.

In this case, if a relative or a good friend who has had considerable exposure to the teachings of God's Church remains friendly but never makes a move to become a part of God's Church, then we like to

console ourselves with the idea: "well, God simply hasn't given him or her repentance; so it isn't really their fault that they have never become a part of God's Church; they'll get their chance in the second resurrection".

The truth is that God has never at any time given anyone repentance! Every single adult who has ever come to a real repentance had of his or her own initiative adopted a way of thinking that was open and receptive to listening, and to teachings and instructions from God. Every one of those minds had of its own choice started the "ask ... seek ... knock" process of Matthew 7:7.

It is always in response to that "ask ... seek ... knock" attitude that God will lead people to repentance.

What this means is that in a way **we ourselves are responsible** for whether or not God calls us in this present age. God is looking for sincere minds that have the "ask ... seek ... knock" attitude, because that is a part of their character, and those are then the ones God will "lead" to repentance.

To be quite clear: Even people who are on Satan's wavelength, i.e. people who are still carnal, can have an integrity that has an "ask ... seek ... knock" attitude. People can be carnal and have an inquiring mind. They may not have this attitude for everything in their lives, but if they have this searching attitude for even some areas in their lives, then that opens the possibility for God to "lead" them to repentance.

On the other hand, people who on their own initiative do not embrace an "ask ... seek ... knock" attitude are not really "callable" in this present age. And God simply does not give anyone an ask ... seek ... knock attitude. Either we ourselves develop and embrace this attitude, or we will simply never have it.

When Moses saw the burning bush, he had to choose. Should he walk away and ignore it as an insignificant incident? Or should he look into it? Notice:

And Moses said, I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, **why** the bush is not burnt. (Exodus 3:3)

We should notice that God didn't simply make contact with Moses. Rather, God confronted Moses with something to see how Moses would respond. Did Moses have an inquiring mind or not? Did he have that "ask ... seek ... knock" attitude or not?

Notice the next verse.

And **when the LORD saw that he turned aside to see**, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here *am* I. (Exodus 3:4)

It was only "**when God saw**" how Moses responded to this situation, **then** God spoke to Moses. What if Moses had shown no interest at all in that burning bush? Would God still have used Moses? Hard to know, since this is a purely theoretical question.

But the point we should note is: Moses did have that inquiring attitude, and therefore God did then speak to Moses, "calling him" to a very specific job.

You know the parable of the sower sowing seeds. Well, without the "ask ... seek ... knock" approach there is no way that the seed can ever take root in a person's mind.

Regarding the process of coming to repentance, there are two things we need to be clear about. We need to understand **what** God does, and we need to understand **how** God does it. The "what" is addressed in John 6:44, 65. God "draws" a person by showing that person something, like God "showed" Moses the burning bush. The "how" is addressed in Matthew 13 in the parable of the sower.

God spreads "the seed" in many different situations.

Let's not minimize the responsibility many people (though obviously not all people) have for why it seems that they have not been called into God's Church in this present age. Their minds provided nothing better than "the wayside" for the seeds that God spreads around. It is their own way of thinking that could have provided "good ground" for God's seed. But they weren't inclined to ask, seek and knock. And in their cases it is not that they weren't called; in their cases it is that they chose to totally ignore the calling that confronted them.

God is looking for minds that are seeking the truth, not minds that are willingly ignorant.

Have you ever heard someone say: "**I don't want to know that**"? Perhaps someone was planning to do something illegal, dubious or unethical, and the hearer was not necessarily opposed to the questionable activity, but he simply wanted to be able to say "I didn't know what they were going to do", so that he (the hearer) could keep out of trouble.

And that is the essence of this statement. People will interject and say "I don't want to know that" **in order to escape being responsible** in some way for the things that are going to be said.

Some people have approached the truth of God in this way. They deliberately don't want to look into certain teachings or customs or beliefs so that they will supposedly not be responsible for acting on the things they would learn. So **they deliberately never look at certain things**, in the mistaken belief that in so doing they can appeal to ignorance when God will ask them to give account for their conduct and actions.

Such people don't understand that we cannot play games with God! If we refuse to look into something, because deep-down we fear that we might have to change in some way, then we become accountable for the thing that we deliberately refused to face up to. Clever tricks like "I didn't know that, Lord, because I never actually looked into it" don't get anywhere with God.

Before God we become accountable for anything we refused to look into because we feared that we would have to change. **We always become accountable for willing ignorance!** Planned ignorance is never accepted as an excuse by God. Rather, that is just one more of the perverse ways that the carnal human mind likes to deceive itself.

Over the past half century there have been very many people who never came into God's Church because they were willingly ignorant; they made a point about refusing to be exposed to any information that might require them to change their lives. Typically, though not always, the people in this type of situation were family or close friends of church members. And they were afraid of learning more because they would then have to keep the Sabbath and start tithing, etc. So they made sure they remained ignorant. That wasn't good.

Deliberate ignorance is the same a knowing rejection!

Anyway, as far as repentance is concerned:

It all starts with a person having an "ask ... seek ... knock" attitude. God responds to that attitude by granting a certain amount of understanding. It then depends on what the person does with the understanding God has made available. If the person is willing to act on whatever new understanding God may have made available to their minds, then God makes more understanding available ... and the process of God leading the person to repentance is well under way.

ANOTHER LOOK AT THE NATURAL MIND

The most significant attribute of the human mind is that **"it is deceitful above all things"** (Jeremiah 17:9). Our natural minds desperately want to deceive other people, and even more desperately our minds want to deceive us ourselves.

For example, the human mind will vigorously deny that it hates God. The human mind doesn't have an honest correct picture of itself. If it were to see a reflection of itself in the mirror, the human mind would say **"that's not me, no way do I look like that"**. It has a completely false image of itself.

Human nature actually sees itself as an attractive and pretty young woman, and in the dimmed lighting of a night club atmosphere it can even appear to be so. But human nature will not face up to the fact that in broad daylight and without a ton of make-up it is nothing more than an old washed-up hag with deep wrinkles of resentment and bitterness and hatred liberally etched into its face. It is the contrast between Snow White and the Evil Queen that exists between how human nature sees itself, and what human nature is in reality actually like. Human nature is in fact extremely ugly!

That deceitfulness of the natural mind is something that God will never, under any circumstances, accept or work with. God will never work with a mind that is deceitful! That means that **God will never lead a deceitful mind to repentance.**

In addition to recognizing the carnal mind's deceitfulness, we also need to understand that **the mind is incredibly stubborn and resistant to change.** There is no outside force of any kind that can force the human mind to change. Not even God can force the human mind to change its way of thinking. The human mind is totally and absolutely autonomous in the decisions it will make. Yes, outside influences can certainly make an impression on the mind and arouse the desire to follow a certain course of action. Those outside influences can make an impression, but they cannot actually force any action on the human mind.

In analogy:

Advertising can arouse desires in us, to want to have things or to do certain things. Our minds are influenced by such advertising. But no advertising can actually force us to do anything or to buy anything. In the end it always depends on us ourselves, whether we buy or don't buy the advertised products. Advertising can create a strong wanting and coveting in our minds for the advertised products, but we ourselves still have to make the decision to fall for the advertising or to refuse to buy the product, even when we really would like to have it.

The carnal mind can be exposed to "advertising" from Satan and also to "advertising" from God. Because the carnal mind starts out with Satan's point of view for everything, therefore Satan's "advertising" is readily accepted by the human mind, commonly misidentified by the human mind as factually correct "advertising", and then also very frequently acted on. But that does not mean that the human mind is forced to act on Satan's "advertising". The mind is autonomous and free to reject some or even many and ideally all of Satan's suggestions.

God's "advertising", by contrast, doesn't really find a ready acceptance in the natural human mind, because the mind has a built-in bias against anything to do with the true God. However, in spite of that bias the mind does have the power to decide to examine (i.e. ask-see-knock) God's "advertising".

In that type of situation, whether to accept God's or Satan's "advertising", nobody can force the human

mind to decide one way or the other. Satan will pressure the human mind, but he cannot force it to go a certain way. Satan cannot force any human mind to stay tuned to Satan's wavelength.

We ourselves are the only ones who can dial our minds to a different frequency, by for a start facing up to the deceitfulness of our own minds. We have the power to face up to our spontaneous resentment and enmity towards God. But **we need God's help to kick-start that process.**

On our own we wouldn't recognize our spontaneous resentment and enmity. So God's part in this process is to help us see the deceitfulness of our minds, to see some aspects of that resentment and enmity and hatred. In other words, **we need God to open our eyes** to see these things.

In analogy, we want to go to that cabin by the lake. But on our own we wouldn't find the way, and neither would we correctly identify it if we saw it next to a few other cabins. So God has to show us the way, and God also has to identify it for us. But to start with, we ourselves must have the desire to go to that cabin by the lake.

Once God has shown us the way, then it is entirely in our own power to continue as we have always been, or to change our way of thinking. Outside powers can pressure us (that's what Satan does), but no outside power can force us either to change or to stay the same.

And while all those people who come to a real repentance have themselves made the decision to change, **there are also many other people who decide to never change, no matter what happens.** They have set their minds to stay as they are for the rest of their lives.

For such people there is **no cure!** There is nothing, no miracle and no display of power, that can get them to permanently change their way of thinking, change their outlook on life, throw out their hatred for God's ways. As Jesus Christ told the rich man in the parable, "if they hear not Moses and the prophets, **neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead**" (Luke 16:31). And for that reason God needs to permanently blot out the existence of such people, which blotting out will happen in the lake of fire.

So during the millennium, when Satan will be bound and unable to influence even a single human being, some carnal minds will come up with the same attitude of hatred for God that Satan would broadcast if he was free. At the same time other carnal minds will reach the decision to change their attitude towards God, and they will willingly seek to obey God and to learn His ways. Those are the ones that cease thinking in carnal ways, and they will end up in one of the "walking with God" programs.

Now the difference between these two groups has nothing to do with how many miracles they have seen; it has nothing to do with how many opportunities they may have had to personally talk with one of the 144000. It has nothing to do with any outside factors.

The difference between these two groups lies in very deliberate decisions they made with their own minds. The one group are those who decide to never change their way of thinking, no matter what happens and no matter who may talk with them. **They don't want to change** because they cannot see past the totally selfish "me first" mindset of the carnal mind. No matter what may happen, in their own minds they will always put self first.

The other group consciously decided to start willingly submitting their own minds to God's will. They consciously decided to seek God's will and they seek to understand God's mind. **They very firmly want to change** away from their naturally selfish way of thinking to the way of thinking that always sets God's will above everything else. They clearly see the need to change their way of thinking. They also see the supreme wisdom in a life being lived in accordance with God's laws and ways. They are extremely

desirous of learning God's ways.

Now certainly, outside factors can have a profound influence on some people, causing them to decide to change their way of thinking. But we should recognize the following:

The identical outside factors that lead one person to forsake the past and to change their way of thinking, those same factors have no influence at all, as far as leading to changes is concerned, on some other person. The difference does not lie in those outside factors that prompted one person to repent, while the other person didn't repent. **The difference really lies in the absolutely and unconditionally free will that both of those individuals have.**

There is something in the mind of the individual who is motivated to repent because he was exposed to certain situations, which something is absent from the mind of the other individual who was not motivated to repent by the identical situations.

That "something" in the inner minds of human beings is what God is seeking to identify and to bring to the fore. That "something" tells God whether or not God will be able to work with that mind and to really trust that mind and to co-exist with that mind for future eternity.

That "something" identifies to God whether or not we really "love God" with all our heart and soul and mind, or whether we simply do what we have to do to get by, because that is expected of us.

There is a lot more we could look at when we talk about the carnal human mind. But this is a good start.

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