

Church of God, The Eternal

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Dear Brethren:

There has never been anything so challenging to God's people than learning to live in this world without being consumed by it. God's way is not compatible with the ways of this world. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD" (Isaiah 55:8). We were all born with carnal minds which by nature resist God's revealed direction. Therefore, when God calls us out of this world and instructs us to live a totally different way, we automatically become embroiled in the most difficult battle of our lives. Not only do we have to fight continually to suppress those natural urges that still roar within us, we have to do so in the midst of the same old world that offers so many temptations to bring us down. While some have tried to escape the world by living a totally reclusive lifestyle, that was never God's intention for His people. "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil" (John 17:15). The challenge is learning to continue living in this world, but no longer being *part* of this world—heart and mind.

We probably most feel the stinging contrast between God's way and the way of the world when we return home each year from keeping the Feast of Tabernacles. For eight glorious days—when we have done all that God commands and then make sure we are in one of those places He has truly placed His name—we enjoy a foretaste of the Kingdom of God under the rule of Jesus Christ. We saturate ourselves with the spiritual things of God, including inspired messages and fellowship with those of like mind. We live for that short period of time in a kind of blissful cocoon in which God gives us a reprieve from all other cares. But then when it is over we are plunged back into the reality of our physical responsibilities in this world, and what a shock it is.

During the Feast we are able to rise above the smog that blankets Satan's world and see things clearly for just a brief moment. During that short time of crystal clarity, it is common to make all manner of spiritual resolutions to do better in putting God first, stay in contact more with scattered brethren, and set about overcoming some of those nagging weaknesses in our lives. But then how long does it take—once we are plunged back into the

polluted atmosphere of the world—before we find ourselves distracted and overwhelmed by our day-to-day necessities and those worldly influences which steal that spiritual clarity we had just savored? Very often, it does not take long before we are right back where we were before, finding it difficult to resist the temptation of worldly pulls. What we are describing is the very battleground God knew we would encounter and has allowed to test us for reason.

What Is the Real Christian Mission?

The sum total of responsibility of any true Christian can be summarized in one simple admonition of Jesus Christ, "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matthew 6:33). What is required for salvation of those called out of this world and given the Truth? What do we have to do to receive the promise of eternal life? To come to value what God is offering so much that we are willing to make any sacrifice necessary to make that coming Kingdom the most important goal in our lives. It means to make the attainment of Sonship in God's Family literally our number one priority. All other pulls must be subjugated to that overriding purpose.

You see, the God we serve is a very jealous God. "Jealous" is actually one of His names! "For thou shalt worship no other god: for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God" (Exodus 34:14). This perfect, righteous Creator God is Jealous, and that means He requires unquestioned loyalty from anyone who wants His favor. He demands to be *first* in priority, not second or third on the list. He gets to choose to whom He will give eternal life, and He has chosen to give it only to those who prove they love Him enough to sacrifice all else to make Him most important in their lives. Now then, men may disagree with that and think it is not fair, but so what? God can do what He wants. No one tells Him what He "must" do.

For I know that the LORD is great, and that our Lord is above all gods.
Whatsoever the LORD pleased, that did he in heaven, and in earth, in the seas,
and all deep places (Psalms 135:5–6) [emphasis mine].

So men can contend with God all they want, but it will do them no good. He makes the rules, and He determines what is required for human salvation. If this Jealous God chooses to require our undivided loyalty and devotion as a condition of favor, who in his arrogance thinks he will change that condition? God does not have to give us anything. He can do with us what He wills. The *wise* children will come to accept this forthright requirement God has imposed and then set about to fulfill that demand to seek *first* the Kingdom of God.

Is God's Kingdom Really First for Us?

Millions of people on this planet lay claim to Jesus Christ as their Savior. But is using Christ's name enough to garner His favor? "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 7:21). We have already seen that the will of His Father is to make the coming Kingdom of God very first in priority. That requires more than talk or pious profession of devotion. It requires actions that prove what we claim! Those millions who have not even been called by God cannot truly seek Him because they do not even yet know Him. But even among those few who have been given that priceless chance, are we proving we value that calling above all else? Talk is cheap. "For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified" (Romans 2:13). Notice further:

But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed (James 1:22–25).

This is really just another way of saying, "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God." If God's Kingdom is really the single most important thing in our lives, it will be manifested by our fruits—being doers of the things God requires of us. If instead we cannot seem to muster the strength to obey God's commands—even after we know and understand what He expects of us—it is a strong indication God's Kingdom is not really first in our priorities. Jesus Christ said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments. . . . He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him" (John 14:15, 21).

But obeying God's commands will automatically put us in opposition to this world. The individual who is called and given the opportunity to do things God's way is immediately faced with a flood of contradicting pulls and will be fighting upstream against a very strong current. What then are some of the key areas vying for priority in opposition to our faith?

Other Things We Make First

The first and most immediate challenge to God's people is the lust of the flesh, enticing us toward the hedonistic things offered by Satan's world. Since God gave us each

the very same nature that Satan possesses, we are drawn naturally to the things God calls abominations. And since Satan is the god of this world, he has influenced men to condone these natural urges more and more in the construction of their worldly societies. In these last days, there is very little that remains taboo among men, and we are quickly approaching the time when God will consider that those sins have come to the full. Just as in the days of Lot, although we may recognize that so many things around us are wrong, it is very difficult not to be tainted in various degrees by the influences of those societies. With all of these factors at play, is there any wonder Jesus Christ gave a very stern warning about this weakness?

And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man (Luke 21:34–36).

But unfortunately, these cares of the world—originating from natural lustful pulls—are one of the key factors prophesied to cause God's true people to take their eyes off the Kingdom of God.

And these are they which are sown among thorns; such as hear the word, And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful (Mark 4:18–19).

While we are at the Feast of Tabernacles, we are usually more insulated from these pulls, focusing our time on spiritual things. Spending our time with God's converted children gives us a boost of positive influence. "Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend" (Proverbs 27:17). But once we are thrust back into the world, we can easily be weakened by the negative influences around us.

In spite of this tendency, God wants us to fight to put aside those evil influences and prove that His Kingdom really is the thing we love most. That requires our willingness to call upon the power of God's Holy Spirit and fight with everything within us to crucify those natural lusts. If there are things we have been allowing that we know are not right, we must do whatever it takes to put that temptation aside. God gave us a formula to resist successfully the lusts of this world.

There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear

it. Wherefore, my dearly beloved, *flee from idolatry* (1 Corinthians 10:13–14) [emphasis mine].

Idolatry includes *anything* we allow to be more important to us than seeking God's Kingdom. And how are we going to conquer those lustful, idolatrous pulls? We must flee from them—keep out any influence that adds to temptation. "Flee fornication. . . . (1 Corinthians 6:18). This means put aside contacts with people, places, or things that will result in compromising God's law. Whether we are talking about sexual perversion or any of the other lusts that so easily consume man, the solution for God's people is to expunge those influences from our lives—to flee from them.

But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is [a] root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness (1 Timothy 6:9–11).

Now if a desire for riches is our weakness, it is not possible to get rid of our money and all possessions to solve the problem. In that particular case, we must mentally flee from these goals of having more and more, and learn to be satisfied with what God has given us. But no matter what the temptation may be, there is a plan of action God wants us to identify in order to conquer it—to lessen the influence of that particular worldly lust.

As we have already seen, Christ did not intend for us to be taken completely out of this world, but that does not mean we should then allow those worldly influences to saturate us either. An old saying goes, "You can't keep the birds from flying overhead, but you don't have to let them nest in your hair." There are many things we can all do to limit the influence of this world in our lives. Are we fleeing from these negative influences, or are we inviting them into our homes? What are the areas where you may be giving in to weakness, allowing an idol of lust to be given priority over God's commands? What are you willing to do to make sure the Kingdom of God really is first in your life's priority?

Fear of the Future

The next major weakness that causes so many of God's true children to take their eye off the Kingdom of God is fear. Inherent in that carnal nature God gave us is an overwhelming desire for self-preservation. It is our "instinct" to do anything necessary to preserve these physical lives. We extend this protective instinct to include those people and

things in the physical realm that we love most. Is there any stronger impulse than for a parent to try to save a child? We want to live. We want our loved ones to live. That impulse for self-preservation is so strong it is very likely the greatest threat to our spiritual salvation. Why is this true? Is it wrong to want to live?

No, but it is wrong to compromise *any* of God's laws in order to save the self, someone else, or something else we love. To obey many of God's laws requires a subjugation of the natural fear that dominates us mentally.

For example, what if keeping the Sabbath and Holy Days threatens one's livelihood? Is it not natural to want to do whatever is necessary to feed, clothe, and house our families? When there is an immediate threat to our security, is it not "natural" to neutralize that threat? Human wisdom screams at us to work on the Sabbath or stay home from the Feast to preserve that "lifeline" of income for our families. But preserving a job is never an acceptable reason to disobey God. There is no acceptable reason to disobey God. God requires we obey Him implicitly, and then *trust* that He will provide for our needs.

Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith (Matthew 6:25–30)?

What is our real problem? Lack of faith—lack of confidence that God will provide all that we really need if we will just become unconditionally obedient. Human beings will not do that by nature. They want *proof* they will be better off for doing *anything*. They do not want to put their families "at risk" by keeping the Sabbath and Holy Days, and then having to trust "blindly" that God will make it all come out all right. They do not want to tithe as God commands, because that too seems to threaten their ability to make ends meet and provide for their families. So many will rationalize, "Surely God would not want me to put my family at risk to pay tithes. I believe in tithing, and I will do so when I can afford it without jeopardizing my family." Or, "Surely God would not want me, my wife, or my child to die from withholding medical treatment that could save us in a crisis." In every case, it is a compromising rationalization rooted in the compunction to save ourselves from a

terrifying future. But as Christ emphasized at the end of the lesson, we are not to live in dread of the unknown future, but to trust God!

Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof (Matthew 6:31–34).

According to the flesh, we do not really trust that God will honor His promises, so we take matters into our own hands. This is exactly what ancient Israel did time and time again.

And they said unto Moses, Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? wherefore hast thou dealt thus with us, to carry us forth out of Egypt? Is not this the word that we did tell thee in Egypt, saying, Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness (Exodus 14:11–12).

And so it is that God's people have always thought it better—by nature—to compromise with the world than to obey God and risk what appears to be impending doom. It was precisely this overwhelming urge for physical self-preservation that kept that first generation out of the Promised Land:

Say unto them, As truly as I live, saith the LORD, as ye have spoken in mine ears, so will I do to you: Your carcases shall fall in this wilderness; and all that were numbered of you, according to your whole number, from twenty years old and upward, which have murmured against me, Doubtless ye shall not come into the land, concerning which I sware to make you dwell therein, save Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun. But your little ones, which ye said should be a prey, them will I bring in, and they shall know the land which ye have despised. But as for you, your carcases, they shall fall in this wilderness. And your children shall wander in the wilderness forty years, and bear your whoredoms, until your carcases be wasted in the wilderness. After the number of the days in which ye searched the land, even forty days, each day for a year, shall ye bear your iniquities, even forty years, and ye shall know my breach of promise. I the LORD have said, I will surely do it unto all this evil congregation, that are gathered together against me: in

this wilderness they shall be consumed, and there they shall die (Numbers 14:28–35).

So the Israelites were consumed with the desire to preserve themselves and their families so they might have good things. They were afraid they would be slaughtered by the Canaanites, so they would not obey God's command to cross the Jordan River. But ironically, by depending upon their own wisdom and refusing to trust God and believe He would honor His word and take care of them, they actually brought death to themselves—the very thing they feared. Is this not exactly what Jesus Christ said is the choice before each one of us, as part of spiritual Israel?

Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works (Matthew 16:24–27).

Is this not a restatement of the very principle we have been addressing—seek ye first the Kingdom of God? Christ was expanding upon this same principle to show that those without faith to trust God and obey Him implicitly would fall into the very trap they were trying to avoid. Those who will compromise God's commands out of fear—to save themselves physically—will actually *not* save themselves at all! But those who step out in faith and say, "Yes, Lord," no matter how ominous the future seems to be by that act, will be saved miraculously. Does this mean God will always reward us with good things physically? If we do not seek medical treatment from this world's doctors when our lives are in jeopardy, will God always save us from physical death? Of course not. Although we have witnessed many instances of incredible healing in God's church for those who have put their total faith in God, He has also chosen at times not to save. There are some He intentionally chooses to take out of the way.

The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart: and merciful men are taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from the evil to come (Isaiah 57:1).

Is our faith weakened when God chooses not to save one of our beloved ones from physical death? Of course it is impossible not to grieve for that incredible loss. But do not the called of God actually have reason to rejoice when one of our own has died in the faith? And what about for ourselves? Is our hope really in doing anything necessary to make sure

we can have just one more breath, or can we willingly place ourselves into the Father's hands and say as Jesus Christ did, ". . . Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:42).

Job's Example

This was the very same sentiment expressed by Job in the midst of his own sore trial, when he could not understand at all why God was allowing him to suffer. Remember, God said Job was a righteous man. "There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil" (Job 1:1). So Job was more obedient to God's commands than any other human being at the time. This is why God singled him out as a good example and why Satan sought to destroy him. And in spite of his faithfulness, God allowed him to suffer. Satan believed Job was only being obedient because God was rewarding him richly in the flesh, and would curse God if he were plagued (Job 1:9–11). But Satan was wrong, and in spite of Job's utter frustration in not understanding God's *purpose* for allowing him to suffer, he never cursed God or rejected the need to obey His commandments. He knew he had to put God first no matter what, even when he felt God was not being fair to him.

This determination to hold fast to God's Truth no matter how much he had to suffer is summarized in Job's single statement, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him: but I will maintain mine own ways before him" (Job 13:15). *Adam Clarke's Commentary* accurately interprets Job's sentiment as, "I have no dependence but God; I trust in him alone. Should he even destroy my life by this affliction, yet will I hope that when he has tried me, I shall come forth as gold." It is a reflection of Job's focus on something much beyond the physical realm. Job understood there would be a resurrection of the dead—a coming Kingdom of God.

If a man die, shall he live again? all the days of my appointed time will I wait,
till my change come. Thou shalt call, and I will answer thee: thou wilt have a
desire to the work of thine hands (Job 14:14–15).

What does it take for a human being to be willing to suffer so much in the flesh today, not even understanding why God may be allowing it? There must be a mental priority for something beyond the here and now—the physical accouterments of this world. There must be a hope for something so much better in the future that makes any sacrifice today worthwhile. That is precisely why God tells us to seek *first* His coming Kingdom. Those who have truly learned to *love* God's plan for the salvation of mankind and recognize their role as part of the firstfruits of that Kingdom, should be willing to make any sacrifice

required today. This is what Jesus Christ demonstrated by His willingness to make the ultimate sacrifice for us. This is also the same orientation shown by Job in refusing to curse God during his trial. When we allow fear of death to drive us to try and save ourselves through compromise, we are really telling God that self-preservation in the flesh is more important to us than His Kingdom.

Is Our Faith Conditional?

We all like to believe we have real faith. But how often do we put conditions upon God? How long are we willing to trust God alone when we have financial difficulties, and Sabbath keeping or tithing seems to be an albatross around our necks? Likewise, those who acknowledge the faith once delivered know we are to trust Him alone as Physician and Healer. But how long will we trust Him when we (or a family member) are sick, getting worse, and threatened by impending death? Do we demand God heal according to our timetable? Do we require God intervene in the way we choose—and within a certain time-frame—or else we feel abandoned and "forced" to seek man's intervention? Is this not exactly what Israel did in the wilderness? They did not like what suffering God subjected them to, so they sought to take matters into their own hands and go back into Egypt.

And wherefore hath the LORD brought us unto this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey? were it not better for us to return into Egypt? And they said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt (Numbers 14:3–4).

How often do we take our eyes off of the Promised Land—the Kingdom of God—and seek to return into spiritual Egypt when the going gets tough? Physical Israel failed because they had no faith (Deuteronomy 32:20; Hebrews 4:2). Unfortunately, the majority of spiritual Israel—God's church—has been repeating that very same history. When we are fearful about the future and allow that fear to make us compromise God's laws, are we not doing exactly what our forefathers did?

By comparison, the ones whose hearts are truly set upon the glorious future awaiting us—the Kingdom of God—will be able to face the fears in this physical life without allowing them to turn their heads. They will be able to endure whatever God requires of them without doubting—patiently waiting. And if it is not God's will to save immediately, since that is His decree, we will be able to accept that without weakening our faith.

Lessons From the Patriarchs

How many of God's faithful servants in times past received enormous promises from God which they never saw fulfilled in their own lifetimes? If their hearts had been set upon receiving an immediate *physical* reward, they would never have endured the suffering God allowed.

Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience. Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy (James 5:10–11).

Referring to Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and Sarah, God recorded:

These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city (Hebrews 11:13–16).

Why would any human being ever accept a course in life that would require him to suffer so much in the flesh, especially when he would never even receive the real reward before he died? They were either utter fools, or else they hoped for a *spiritual* reward at the time of the promised resurrection, and that spiritual promise of God was more valuable to them than all the benefits they might ever derive in the flesh. This is exactly what Abraham did:

By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God (Hebrews 11:8–10).

Abraham actually traveled in the Promised Land which would later become the inheritance of his descendants. But he did so during the years in which it was controlled by

Canaanites. So he was in the land of promise, but hundreds of years before God would make it a blessing. Therefore, he was a stranger and wandered all the rest of his life, and never had a place of his own where he could feel safe and secure. The only reason he was willing to make that sacrifice was because his sights were set on a much greater promise—a spiritual promise—the Kingdom of God.

What Is Our Real Priority in Life?

Remember the account of the wealthy, pious man who asked Christ what he must do for salvation?

And when he was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life? And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God. Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honour thy father and mother. And he answered and said unto him, Master, all these have I observed from my youth. Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me. And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions. And Jesus looked round about, and saith unto his disciples, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! And the disciples were astonished at his words. But Jesus answereth again, and saith unto them, Children, how hard is it for them *that trust in riches* to enter into the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God (Mark 10:17–25) [emphasis mine].

Many have misunderstood and applied this story as a condemnation of the wealthy. But notice Christ was really speaking about those that *trust* in riches! This can apply to anyone, rich or poor, who has his *confidence* in the mammon of this world. For the rich, it may be the desire to preserve wealth, or for the poor, it may be the lust to become wealthy. Either way, Christ was condemning anyone who was not willing to sacrifice all in this physical life to put God first—seeking the Kingdom of God. Then notice what happened next, from Matthew's account:

Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore? And Jesus said unto them, Verily

I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life (Matthew 19:27–29).

It is to those who are willing to sacrifice anything in this life which may put us in opposition to God's will who will receive that great reward in the future. Do we really cherish the Kingdom of God as our primary goal? Is our treasure truly in heaven, or are we still consumed by the cares of these physical lives in Satan's world? Returning from the fall Feasts of God, we have all been hit again with the realities of that world and the tug-of-war between the flesh and the Spirit. Will we allow that world to consume us, or will we learn to keep our hearts and minds focused on that greater spiritual goal in the coming year, no matter what?

Dear brethren, we have every reason to rejoice, even in serious trials and persecutions which God may allow us to experience, if our confidence and hope is focused on the spiritual reward of God's glorious Kingdom to come.

Yours with respect and devotion in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Jon W. Brisby". The signature is fluid and elegant, with a large initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.

Jon W. Brisby