

Church of God, The Eternal

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Dearly Beloved Brethren:

As we draw closer to the time of the return of Jesus Christ, we as God's called are commanded to "forget not all His benefits." It is a much-needed reminder because all too many of God's called have forgotten how to receive all of God's benefits.

Psalm 103:2 says, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits."

"Forget" here means: to mislay, to be oblivious of, from want of memory or attention. The word rendered "benefits" here (#1576 in the *Strong's Concordance*) means: an act or work. Consequently then, the reward—or what a man deserves—comes from his act or work of obedience.

Obedience to God's law results in a tremendous blessing. God's law provides an unchanging standard for all human conduct, which when obeyed can prevent the suffering of sin's consequences. God's spiritual law regulates relationships between God, man, and man's neighbor. But God also put into effect physical laws that regulate the smooth functioning of all things physical—including our human bodies. Just as keeping God's spiritual law will result in the receiving of God's Spirit and the fruits that will produce righteousness and spiritual well-being, so living in accord with God's physical laws of health and the principles of healthful living will produce zest-filled, abundantly good physical health. An exact parallel can be made between spiritual and physical law.

The world today is abounding with lawlessness, both spiritual and physical. Also, many of God's called are tormented by temptation and test on every side, to which we often succumb—intentionally and unintentionally—because of our physical and spiritual conditioning. Failing to reap the blessings and benefits of keeping God's law (both physical and spiritual) demonstrates the measure to which that law is being broken.

When we forget to establish God's spiritual and physical health laws—to make them active and operative in our lives—are we or are we not forgetting all His benefits? Benefits

require an act or work of obedience to God's law. God offers the benefit of forgiveness when we repent and forsake our spiritual sins. Another benefit God offers is the Spirit of Christ in us to produce the fruits that will raise us up in the first resurrection.

Likewise, when we repent, forsake, and are forgiven of our physical sins—our lack of proper diet, rest and exercise—God promises and guarantees that He will "raise us up" (James 5:14–15). That means He will heal us of our afflictions provided we have established God's principles of healthful living by making them active and operative in our lives.

God's Promise to Heal

Healing is one of the benefits God gives to those in whom faith has established obedience to God's health laws. Faith to be healed is made perfect when we observe the principles of healthful living. Faith and healing are benefits God gives us along with salvation.

In the booklet *The Plain Truth About Healing*, Mr. Armstrong wrote, "Both Christ's true gospel message and miraculous healing have today been restored in God's true church." These are wonderful benefits for God's called. The Church's healing doctrine is based on this promise:

. . . If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the Lord thy God, and wilt do that which is right in his sight, and wilt give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I am the Lord that healeth thee (Exodus 15:26).

Notice the phrase, "I will put none of these diseases upon thee." This scripture is more than a promise to heal! It is God's promise to protect His faithful, obedient children (those who keep themselves spiritually and physically fit) from disease—from getting sick in the first place. Exodus 23:25 makes the same promise: "And ye shall serve the Lord your God [through the principles of spiritual and physical conditioning], and he shall bless thy bread, and thy water; and I will take sickness away from the midst of thee." God blesses our bread and water when we are in obedience to what He has revealed to us of what is right and good for us to eat and drink.

God wants His people to be happy and healthy. He wants us to remember all His benefits through the act or work of obedience. "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it [including physical life] more abundantly" (John 10:10). Abundant living

comes only through Christ's dual sacrifice—when we keep ourselves spiritually and physically fit. "Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth [as you prosper spiritually]" (3 John 2). "Above all things" is better translated "in all respects." In the first verse we see that Gaius was clearly a dear friend of John. His physical health was as important to John as his spiritual health. Poor physical health can have a detrimental effect upon our ability to stay spiritually fit. It is often harder to pray and eat Christ daily when we are sick. Prosperity and health are two areas in which God's people are tested very heavily. We cannot judge one another, because God, to test our faith, has allowed each one of us our "gap in time" to be tested in these areas of prosperity and health. If we want ultimate prosperity and health, we must above all forget not all God's benefits through the act and work of obedience to His health laws.

Because of the degeneracy of the world around us, we can be subject to many of the effects of broken physical health laws—air pollution, tainted food and water, and highly-processed denutritified foods. But have we allowed those facts to lull us into a lackadaisical attitude toward God's physical law and His promises regarding our physical well-being?

As Mr. Armstrong said, these are powerful promises restored to God's Church today! But they are conditional promises. In exchange for such fantastic blessings, we must do what is right in God's sight, not according to our own human reasoning. To receive the blessing of good health, God expects us to diligently hearken to His commandments and keep all His statutes, including diligent obedience to His principles of healthful living in proper diet, rest, and exercise. That is something we must not take lightly.

Physical Blessings and Curses

These promises (of healing and not getting sick in the first place) were first given to the nation of Israel, but they failed to meet God's conditions. Rather than receive God's tremendous blessings through faith and obedience, they suffered curse after curse after curse, until they were eventually cut off from God due to their lawlessness (Deuteronomy 28:15–68). Many of God's called are making the same mistake today. They will suffer the same curses, but with even greater intensity. Deuteronomy 28:59–61 describes some curses that will soon fall upon the physical health of God's rebellious people:

Then the Lord will make thy plagues wonderful [meaning extraordinarily difficult], and the plagues of thy seed, even great plagues, and of long continuance, and sore sicknesses, and of long continuance. Moreover he will bring upon thee all the diseases of Egypt, which thou wast afraid of; and they shall cleave unto thee. Also every sickness, and every plague, which is not

written in the book of this law, then will the Lord bring upon thee, until thou be destroyed.

Why? Because many of God's people have forgotten how to receive the benefits described in Psalm 103:4: "Who redeemeth thy life from destruction [literally from the pit of corruption and perverted truth on healing]. . . ."

God redeems us from the curse of poor health through the investment of physical and spiritual conditioning. Many of God's called are being destroyed today because they refuse to make God's spiritual and physical law active and operative in their lives. Not only is physical destruction, or death, at stake but so is eternal destruction, or spiritual death.

Concerning physical health, Mr. Armstrong wrote that healing today is for the people of God's Church, as per James 5:14–15. I repeat: There are two conditions to healing—commandment-keeping and faith.

And whatsoever we ask [according to God's will], we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things [making God's health laws active and operative in our lives] that are pleasing in his sight (1 John 3:22).

And the prayer of faith [that God has given] shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up: and if he have committed sins [undoubtedly referring to physical sins], they shall be forgiven him (James 5:15).

Commandment-keeping has been offered to God's Church today and therefore we should manifest faith which is a gift of God. But we are almost out of faith today, and when we are out of faith we are separated from God! It seems so much easier today just to go to a doctor and trust in man—man cut off from God—than to rely on Christ and His promises.

Satan has been successful at largely destroying the commandment-keeping and faith of God's people since the apostasy of 1974. Our greatest test will be to retain the way of ultimate health and salvation and reject what our past priesthood has perverted.

What About God's Called?

Are we applying the truth about healing in our lives? Are we establishing and making operative the principles of healthful living in our lives so that God will give us the faith that is made perfect for our healing and our sickness prevention? If we, like the saints in Corinth

(1 Corinthians 11:30), are weak and sickly—with some dying prematurely because they were caught up in the result of cause and effect, which continually scourges Christ anew—then we need to look into the mirror of reality and not forget what kind of person we are. Are we applying the faith that is made perfect by establishing God's health laws, or not?

Deception Can Destroy Us

Mr. Armstrong taught:

When a person is sick or has contracted a disease, he is simply paying the PENALTY of transgressed physical law in his body.

One may not himself have broken a physical law. It could have been an accident. It could have been from a contagious disease contracted without his knowledge. In the case of Job (Job 2:6–7), Satan was the cause of Job's ailments for a special purpose, by God's permission. Nevertheless, sickness and disease are the penalty being paid for broken physical law. . . . The penalty for physical transgression is physical punishment—sickness or disease, physical impairment, pain and suffering or physical death.

Compare that with what Mr. Armstrong taught about spiritual sin:

On the other hand, spiritual sin, which imposes the penalty of the second death—eternal death—is the transgression of the spiritual law (Romans 7:13–14), the law summed up by the Ten Commandments (from the same booklet cited above).

The point here is that Satan loves to combine truth with error. His purpose and goal is to twist or pervert vital truths so that we continue to sin without even realizing it, or without considering the full consequences of our actions. Concerning our physical well-being and abundant living, Satan's deception might go something like this: Flesh and blood cannot inherit eternal life (true). Your time and effort would be better spent on the spiritual aspects of God's laws (also true). Therefore, don't be so concerned with physical laws or the quality of your health. Don't let the pursuit of good health (proper diet, rest and exercise) keep you from gaining eternal life (wrong conclusion!).

The truth is, we should be striving to keep the complete law of God, physical and spiritual, in letter and spirit. Yet Satan would have us believe that only the spiritual is important. Such thinking leads us to ignore, or willfully break, many of God's laws, especially those most obviously relating to our health. The attitude could become, as one

person told me, "I love junk food and I don't care what Mr. Armstrong taught about a faulty diet or the principles of healthful living. I will accept the consequences for breaking that physical law, just as long as I make it into the Kingdom of God. That is all that matters." If we think like this, our conscience is free to break any number of laws we consider to be only physical.

Spiritual Sins vs. Physical Sins

Mr. Armstrong wrote that 1 John 3:4 properly translated from the Greek reads: "sin is defined as the transgression of LAW." It does not refer to or say the spiritual law of the Ten Commandments only. It is referring to the entire body of law instituted by God as opposed to man-made codes. So physical sin refers to the laws of physical health (such as proper rest, diet and exercise). But they are still God's laws—not man's! How can we claim to love God and His way of life if we ignore or carelessly break God's laws because they are only physical? Day in and day out bad habits concerning the principles of healthful living can bring destruction upon our physical bodies *and* our spiritual well-being.

For example, are we eating what is right in God's eyes? What we eat and drink obviously will affect our physical health on the installment plan. The removal of sickness from our midst is linked to God's promise to bless our food and water. That is why we ask God to bless our food before every meal. But what kind of food are we asking God to bless? Are we inviting sickness by not choosing our food carefully? Has our human reasoning seduced us into willfully committing physical sin? Luke 4:12 tells us: "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." God is only going to allow us to tempt Him for so long—then we are going to reap what we sow, which may cause us to forsake our own salvation. Physical pain and suffering can drive us to the god of Ekron (the medical profession) for relief of suffering.

The fact is, physical sins and spiritual sins are intricately intertwined. Take the physical act of adultery—a spiritual sin against the seventh commandment (which immediately involves breaking a number of other commandments). Breaking these spiritual laws always brings an automatic spiritual penalty—that is, unless it is confessed, repented of and forsaken, in which case the blood of Christ covers that penalty.

But notice: Each of these broken spiritual laws may also lead to any number of physical sins against our bodies and many accompanying physical penalties—sexually transmitted diseases, the loss of a job, public shame, or a broken marriage. The chain of events that began with David's adulterous encounter with Bathsheba ultimately brought the death of Uriah. These sins brought further physical penalties from God against David's family, including the death of their first child (2 Samuel 12:9–18).

Jesus Christ taught that we can commit adultery without any physical contact whatsoever (Matthew 5:27–28). Surely if we are only breaking the "spirit of the law" and not the "letter of the law," there could be no physical penalty to pay, right? Wrong! What about the emotional aspects of spiritual sins? Doctors and mental health professionals generally agree that emotions such as guilt, stress, anger and sorrow have a detrimental effect upon our physical health. Of course, the opposite is also true. A weak or sickly physical body can also have a detrimental effect upon our ability to stay in good spiritual condition.

James 2:10 puts it this way: "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all." Why? Because the breaking of any of God's laws does not show love toward God or love toward our neighbor. The law of love is spiritual, and that must be our primary motive for keeping every law of God! (1 John 5:3). The point is, not only is physical and spiritual sin inseparably intertwined, but so are physical and spiritual penalties. Breaking any of God's laws can have harmful effects on both our spiritual and physical well-being.

Our focus must be on obedience and the faith of Christ and His sacrifice. Mr. Armstrong did not teach us about physical and spiritual sin so we could best decide which of God's laws to break or ignore! In fact, Mr. Armstrong was so adamant about the need to obey all of God's laws that he was often accused of teaching salvation by works rather than by faith. He was often referred to as "Mr. Confusion" by the world. Of course, the called of God know this is not true. Mr. Armstrong only wanted us to place our primary focus on obedience and the faith of Jesus Christ and His sacrifice.

Next, we need to understand how God heals. From the same booklet, Mr. Armstrong wrote:

And we need to see, further, how both the gospel and healing tie together. Both operate on the same principle—one being spiritual, the other physical. . . . There can be no law without a penalty for its transgression. And God never compromises with His laws or their penalties. Once a law is transgressed a penalty is incurred. Once a penalty is incurred it must be paid. God never suspends the penalty. . . . Then how do we get FREE from that penalty? How may we avoid paying it? By the fact that Christ paid it for us.

Thus, it is Christ's death that paid that penalty. What about the penalty for physical sin? Mr. Armstrong continues:

Healing is the forgiveness of physical sin. None but God can forgive sin. None but God heals! God is a jealous God. He is not going to allow anyone else to heal. Medicines and drugs do not, cannot HEAL!

Why cannot anyone else heal? Because they cannot forgive sin. Only God can forgive sins. Mr. Armstrong continues:

Healing [the forgiveness of physical sin] does not mean that God suspends the penalty so that no penalty is paid. Instead, Jesus has already paid it for us. Therefore God may legally remove the penalty from the human sufferer. But it is nonetheless a MIRACLE! . . . Jesus Himself took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses—BUT NOT ON THE CROSS. They scourged Jesus, beat Him, breaking open the flesh of His body, before taking Him to Golgotha to be nailed to the cross.

Now here is the vital conclusion Mr. Armstrong reached: "I think it vitally important that we realize, at this point, two things: 1) What a TREMENDOUS price God Himself, through Christ, paid in order that He might perform for us this MIRACLE OF HEALING. 2) HOW IMPORTANT it is to God NEVER to compromise His law." It is critical that we understand Mr. Armstrong's point here.

Discerning The Lord's Body

Our Father and our Husband were willing to pay a great price to satisfy the requirements of all the commandments and statutes concerning our physical health. Surely the called of God, the wife of Christ, must have the same zeal and desire to obey those same commandments and statutes. At Passover, when we eat the broken unleavened bread, we accept Christ's beaten and broken body so that we may be healed. Can we claim to love the Eternal God when He dies for us, yet disregard our health and continue to indulge ourselves in the sinful habits for which He was beaten and scourged? Can we continue to scourge Christ anew? That is not taking the Passover in a worthy manner. That is not discerning the Lord's body properly.

Jesus Christ never broke any of God's laws—physical or spiritual. It was His complete sacrifice—His beaten body and His death—that makes possible the forgiveness of all our sins. But that sin is not forgiven until we become aware of it and confess and forsake it before God. Then He is "faithful and just to forgive us our sins" (1 John 1:9). It is because "confess" means change and assent to God's way of thinking about our sins. We will not be motivated to confess and forsake the sins we consider unimportant, especially when we are willing to bear the penalty ourselves. Many of the sins relating to poor health are just far too enjoyable to stop or too difficult to change. The truth is, many of God's people like to indulge their fleshly desires to excess! How do you think God feels when we refuse to forsake some of these physical sins that are continuing to destroy our health?

Psalm 103:2–3 says, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases." If we continue to indulge ourselves and fail to repent and forsake the sins that are affecting our physical health, are we not forgetting some of God's benefits? We surely are! When we sin willfully, there remains no more sacrifice for sins, meaning no more forgiveness and no more healing. Remembering all God's benefits is serious business. If we use God's spiritual tools the way we should, we will think more like God and we will not have the out-of-control desire to sin willfully.

Spiritual muscle comes from spiritual and physical conditioning—it is not automatic! We must act and work at obedience to remember all of God's benefits. We must continuously make God's spiritual and physical laws active and operative in our lives.

We Must Overcome the Flesh

Again from Mr. Armstrong's healing booklet, in reference to Psalm 103:2–3, he wrote that God has promised salvation and eternal life on the same conditions He promised healing—obedience and faith. Jesus paid our penalty making possible eternal life by His shed blood on the cross. He paid the penalty for physical broken law making possible our healing by His stripes (Isaiah 53:5 and 1 Peter 2:24). If you cannot believe the one, how can you believe the other?

Can we grasp the significance of what Mr. Armstrong is saying? Our faith and obedience regarding God's healing is a strong indicator of our faith and obedience as relating to spiritual salvation. If we have less faith in Christ's beaten body than we do in His pierced-through dead body, can we expect to receive all of His benefits—including the benefit of spiritual salvation? We cannot separate our faith in physical healing from our faith in spiritual salvation! They are one and the same!

"Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates [or rejects]?" (2 Corinthians 13:5). These physical bodies are tools by which we are to prove our faith. Remember, faith without works is dead. We must show our faith by our works in overcoming the flesh, not by giving vent to the flesh (James 2:17–18). Do we, after looking at ourselves in a mirror, forget what kind of person we are? Do our physical actions prove that Jesus Christ is living in us?

The only way to prepare to eat and drink the Passover worthily each year is to set our minds throughout the year to keep all of God's laws through obedience and faith—the same conditions by which we received the Holy Spirit at baptism.

God's law is a tremendous blessing when we act and work at obedience and thereby "forget not all his benefits." To receive all His benefits, we must remember that obedience to God's law includes those physical laws as well that preserve our health and well-being. May God continue to guide and inspire you to "forget not all his benefits" in all aspects of your lives.

With much love and care,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Robert J. Litz".

Robert J. Litz

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jon W. Brisby".

Jon W. Brisby