

Church of God, The Eternal

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Dear Brethren:

A very hearty hello from the Texas brothers and sisters. By the time you get this letter, most, if not all, of us will have come together in a solemn assembly to commemorate the death of our Savior Jesus Christ by observing the Passover.

To commemorate His death seems rather strange to this world. After all, celebrating His arrival into the world (Christmas) is much more emphasized than celebrating His death and departure. Even their Easter observance celebrates His rising rather than His death and still takes a back seat to Christmas. Remember when we worshiped just the same as the world does? Decorating that tree with silver, gold, glitter, all of the icicles and little angels, we thought celebrating His birth would surely give us a special place in His heart. After all, He did say in John 14:1, "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me."

They put great importance upon the birth of baby Jesus. To celebrate His birth is for the world (Jeremiah 10:1–5). But when God began to show us His plan by the gift of His Holy Spirit, observing His Holy Days really began to make more sense. Knowing the true meaning of Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread gives us great peace of mind.

I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also (John 14:18–19).

Death has been, and will continue to be, an experience that will affect everybody in one way or another. But for the called of God, there is understanding which this world does not have, that helps us recover better from the loss of a loved one with peace of mind.

Therefore the redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head: they shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away (Isaiah 51:11).

Notice what Christ said to His disciples just before His death:

Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid (John 14:27).

The world cannot receive this peace (the mind of Christ).

The Lord also will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble (Psalm 9:9).

In this world of darkness, some never recover when a loved one dies; the shock is simply too much. They do not really know if their loved one has "gone to heaven" where, they have been told, is only great joy, happiness, no more sorrow, no more pain.

In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also (John 14:2–3).

Sounds very convincing to them. But there is still that haunting question, what if their loved ones are not accepted into heaven? Will they be given a place somewhere in between earth and heaven called purgatory where they must undergo temporary punishment for purification before they can be accepted? Or for an even worse scenario, will they be turned over to Satan where they will spend eternity in a lake of fire and brimstone and never be able to die? Or will they just lie in the ground, turn to dust, and never be seen again? These are very disturbing questions to this world.

He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given (Matthew 13:11).

I attended a funeral once when three young adults (the oldest was eighteen) lost their father in a head-on collision. During the graveside service a young calf wandered inside the graveyard fence, probably to see if we had put out some feed. After smelling around a bit and finding no feed, it lowered its head, made a bully-like sound, pitched up and down and round and round, which immediately got everyone's attention. Sadness suddenly turned into laughter. The three young adults who had suffered such a terrible loss "knew" right then and there that their father's spirit had returned, entered the calf and caused it to walk right up to the grave site and do its little thing to cheer them up and assure them everything was just fine with him. It was a great relief to his three children. They just knew that frolicking little calf was telling them that their father was in good hands.

Without doubt, more tears are shed over the loss of a loved one than any other experience in this journey through life. Even the religious-minded of the world are not sure what is going to happen after death. I have heard statements such as, "God has just added another flower to His beautiful garden," or "God has just added another flower to His bouquet, or (with hesitation) "Just look where he/she is now, in the loving arms of Jesus."

Ye know that ye were Gentiles, carried away unto these dumb idols, even as ye were led (1 Corinthians 12:2).

Brethren, this is just one reason why there is no greater blessing than to be the begotten children of God, to be able to understand His awesome plan of love for humankind, to be able to understand about life and death and what lies beyond. Even though God has given us this understanding, death nonetheless has its sting.

O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:55–58).

It certainly is not my intention to open old wounds, but instead to give hope and comfort to anyone who has suffered loss of family or friends. Notice that even in tribulation, knowing Jesus Christ our Passover gives us a certain peace of mind.

These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world (John 16:33).

But though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies. For he doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men (Lamentations 3:32–33).

But the salvation of the righteous is of the Lord: he is their strength in the time of trouble. And the Lord shall help them, and deliver them: he shall deliver them from the wicked, and save them, because they trust in him (Psalm 37:39–40).

Remember, brethren, God has chosen us and is training us for special responsibilities of teaching this world His plan and bringing about real lasting peace, if we do not give in to the pressure of sorrows and grow tired of well-doing.

The heat is being turned up, pressure is building and is soon going to explode into great tribulation.

For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened (Matthew 24:21–22).

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).

Remember, brethren, to *die in Christ* is a great blessing.

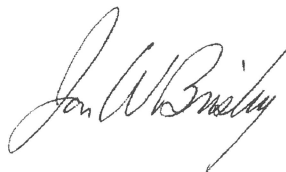
Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed (1 Corinthians 15:52).

We can have peace of mind because this old, troubled world is finally going to have everlasting peace, and Jesus Christ is going to use us to help bring it to pass.

With much love to all of you from all of us,
Your servant in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "John R. Byrd".

John R. Byrd

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

Jon W. Brisby