

February 2011

Dear faithful brothers and sisters in Christ:

Warm greetings to all of you from twenty-three brothers and sisters of God's faithful remnant who meet every Sabbath in a small cottage here in Maryville, Tennessee.

I have been very busy since the Feast rearranging our church cottage a little bigger to accommodate our growing congregation. I also added on a huge covered deck for people to use for fellowship when the weather is nice. It is winter here now in Tennessee, and I have never seen more snow or as much cold weather since we moved here from Minnesota five years ago. We moved here to get away from the cold and snow, but sometimes I hear that it is colder here than in Minnesota.

Another reason we moved here was to serve the brethren in this area and to be close to the Feast site in Townsend, Tennessee—which is only a twenty-minute drive from our house—on the edge of the beautiful Smoky Mountains National Park; the most visited park in the United States, especially during the fall season when all the leaves are turning color.

The days and weeks seem to be flying by, and before we know it the Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread will be here once again. As we look forward to these spring Feast days, we must remember to structure each day so as not to lose focus on our goal of becoming the children of God. To do that, we need to apply our hearts to wisdom and be redeeming the time because the days are evil (Ephesians 5:16).

Considering the brevity of the time in which we live, Moses prayed: "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom" (Psalm 90:12). We gain this heart of wisdom by using our time wisely. Sometimes we can become so busy trying to make a living and caring for the things of this world, that we neglect our spiritual responsibilities as the children of God. We must never let this happen if we expect to be in God's Kingdom.

I recently began meditating on these questions: What if I were Satan? How would I keep God's precious remnant from attending church every Sabbath? How would I keep them from reading their Bibles and learning the revealed truth of God? How would I keep them from forming an intimate relationship with their Savior and with God's elect? Satan knows that once we gain a close relationship with Christ and the church, his power over us is broken by Jesus Christ living in us.

If I were Satan, I would steal their time by distracting them from gaining hold of eternal life and maintaining that vital connection with Jesus Christ through prayer and Bible study and fellowship with God's people.

I would invent numerous schemes and ways to occupy their minds, keeping them so busy in the nonessentials of life that they would not have time to perform their spiritual responsibilities.

If I were Satan, this is what I would do: I would tempt them to spend, spend, spend and borrow, borrow, borrow. I would keep sending them credit cards and free checks so they would keep spending money they did not have. Then they would become slaves to the banking system.

Next, I would persuade the wives to go to work for long hours and their husbands to work six, even on occasion, seven days a week; ten, twelve hours a day, so they could afford their empty, extravagant lifestyles that they think are so important. This, of course, would keep them from spending time together as a family, and they would begin to fragment. Soon their homes would offer no escape from the pressures of work and society. Their children would come home to empty houses and, with unsupervised time, would get into trouble.

I would overstimulate and flood their minds with noise so they could not meditate on spiritual things. I would entice them to play the radio, CDs or cassette player wherever they drive, and to keep the TV, the VCR and their PCs going constantly in their homes, and see to it that every restaurant and store in the world plays Christmas music or rock music constantly. This would jam their thinking and fill their minds with the sounds of this world.

Then, I would fill all waiting rooms and coffee tables with magazines and newspapers, pound their minds with the news twenty-four hours a day, invade their driving moments with billboards and road signs, flood their mailboxes with junk mail promoting sweepstakes and contests of all kinds, and every kind of newsletter and promotion offering free products, services and false hopes. Order-by-mail catalogs would also be very useful in getting them to lust for things they do not need or cannot afford to buy.

I would use sex to advertise everything, and of course, this would be accomplished by using skinny, beautiful models on the magazines and TV. This would cause the men and boys to lust, and they would begin to believe that outward beauty is more important than inward beauty. Husbands would become dissatisfied with their wives, and women and young girls would become depressed trying to measure up to those touched-up skinny models. I would give the wives headaches and keep them too tired to love their husbands at night. When they did not give their husbands the love they needed, some husbands would begin to look elsewhere. That would fragment their families quickly.

Then, I would make processed food more available and cheaper to buy than real food. With all the chemicals and artificial flavors making the processed food so tasty, they would begin overeating and become obese. With the mothers and wives all working, it would be so much easier to stop and pick up some fast food on the way home than to

take the time to cook something from scratch. This would lead to poor health and cause them to become depressed, unproductive and less likely to study their Bibles or fast.

And when they meet together for church services and spiritual fellowship, I would involve them in gossip and small talk such as sports events, plays, concerts, movies and the weather, instead of the things of the Spirit. Soon they would be working from their own physical strength because they failed to stir up the Spirit in good spiritual fellowship.

I would keep God's people so busy with physical things that they would not have time to develop the spiritual mind of Christ. They would soon begin to forget what they were taught, and then I would begin to introduce false doctrine into the church. I would misinterpret 2 Corinthians 3:7–8, to trick them into thinking that God's law is done away.

But if the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of the glory of his countenance, which glory was passing away, how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious?

With these verses I would teach them falsely that it was the Ten Commandments written and engraved on stones that was glorious, but it would pass away and be replaced by the new ministry of Christ.

I would use verse 17—"Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty"—to teach that no one can keep the Ten Commandments, and that Christ kept them for us, thereby setting us free. But this is a lie, because what was written and engraved on stones (2 Corinthians 3:7–8) was the ministry or the ministration of death, *not the Ten Commandments*.

The Ministration of Death

God's commandments were holy, righteous, just and good (Romans 7:12), and they were also spiritual laws (verse 14), and spiritual laws can never pass away. What was written and engraved on stones were the curses for not keeping the law of the Ten Commandments. Deuteronomy 27:1–10 makes this quite clear.

Now Moses, with the elders of Israel, commanded the people, saying: "Keep all the commandments which I command you today. And it shall be, on the day when you cross over the Jordan to the land which the LORD your God is giving you, that you shall set up for yourselves large stones, and whitewash them with lime. . . ."

The *Authorized King James Version* says, "plaister them with plaister." Why were they to plaster these great stones or pillar stones with plaster? "You shall write on them all the words of this law. . . ." "This law" is referring to the curses of the law of God, because

these great stones were to be set up on Mount Ebal, which was the mountain that held the curses of God's law.

We can see this as we continue in Deuteronomy 27:4: "Therefore it shall be, when you have crossed over the Jordan, that on Mount Ebal you shall set up these stones, which I command you today, and you shall whitewash them with lime." So these stones were not the tables of stone God wrote upon in Deuteronomy 34:1, but these were the "great stones" according to Strong's #1419, meaning: high, long or tower-like. It was on these pillar-like stones that Joshua wrote this law, referring to the curses which were represented by Mount Ebal (Deuteronomy 11:29).

Verses 5–7 are inset verses, not part of the story flow. They describe the altar made of whole stones on which the people were to offer sacrifices, and they could not use any iron tool on them in building the altar. So, let us continue with verse 8 to get the story flow: "And you shall write very plainly on the stones all the words of this law." "This law" again is referring to the curses pronounced from Mount Ebal as recorded in Deuteronomy 27:11–26.

Did the people do as Moses instructed them to do under Joshua when they entered the Promised Land? Yes! Joshua 8:30–35 verifies this:

Now Joshua built an altar to the LORD God of Israel in Mount Ebal, as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded the children of Israel, as it is written in the Book of the Law of Moses: "an altar of whole stones over which no man has wielded an iron tool." And they offered on it burnt offerings to the LORD, and sacrificed peace offerings. [Remember, Mount Ebal was the mountain which would contain the curses.] And there, in the presence of the children of Israel, he [Joshua] wrote [engraved] on the stones [not the whole stones of the altar on which no man wielded or lifted any iron tool, but these stones were the great pillar-like stones on which he inscribed a copy of the law of Moses, referring to the curses or penalties for breaking God's spiritual law, the Ten Commandments] a copy of the law of Moses, which he had written. Then all Israel, with their elders and officers and judges, stood on either side of the ark before the priests, the Levites, who bore the ark of the covenant of the LORD, the stranger as well as he who was born among them. Half of them were in front of Mount Gerizim [the mountain of blessing] and half of them in front of Mount Ebal [the mountain containing the curses], as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded before, that they should bless the people of Israel. And afterward he [Joshua] read all the words of the law, the blessings and the cursings, according to all that is written in the Book of the Law. There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded which Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel, with the women, the little ones, and the strangers who were living among them.

So we can plainly see that in 2 Corinthians 3:7–8, the law written and engraved on stones was not the Ten Commandments, as the *Believers Commentary* says, and which I heard taught in Worldwide Church of God (WCG) before we left that organization. But it was the ministration, or the ministry of death, that would pass away and be replaced by the ministry of the spirit, which would be more glorious because it offered forgiveness and not death.

You might ask what made the ministration of death so glorious that the children of Israel could not steadfastly behold it—this glory on the face of Moses which he received from God on his second trip up Mount Sinai, and which he was responsible for administering. It was glorious because it impressed upon the Israelites the seriousness of sin by adding a death penalty. So it was a motivator for them to keep the law, at least in the letter, which was for their own good. But they failed even to do that, so it also impressed upon them that they needed help to keep God's spiritual, everlasting law. That help would come later by the ministry of the Spirit which would be more glorious because it would give life instead of death by producing righteousness. It would be more glorious because many who would be called into the salvation process would be transformed into the image of God by the Spirit of God in them. This transformation would move them from one glory to another glory (2 Corinthians 3:18); from the ministry of death to the ministry of life through the Spirit which would be much more glorious. This spiritual help that would transform us would come after the death of Jesus Christ, because by His death, which was a sacrifice for sin, He would redeem us from the curse of the Law by becoming a curse for us. We can now receive the blessing of Abraham, which is Jesus Christ, through faith in His redemptive work (Galatians 3:13–14). Now instead of receiving the death penalty for our past sins, we can repent, be forgiven, and come under grace because Christ has become a curse for us, paying the penalty for sins that are past.

Taking for Granted Time for Repentance

The third thing I would do, if I were Satan the Devil, to deceive God's people and cause them to backslide and miss out on the Kingdom of God, is to cause them to misunderstand one of the great qualities of God's love—His great mercy and forgiveness. Do we misunderstand? Is not this where we test God the most—in the area of His mercy and forgiveness—where perhaps unknowingly we can mistake God's mercy for weakness, or in some way begin to act as if God will do neither good or bad regarding our sins?

And it shall come to pass at that time [during the Great Day of the Lord] That I will search Jerusalem with lamps [symbolic of men with the Spirit of God in them], And punish the men Who are settled in complacency [or as the *AKJV* says, "settled on their lees," or on their dregs, meaning their sins], Who say in their heart, "The LORD will not do good, Nor will He do evil" (Zephaniah 1:12).

I like how the *Living Bible* puts this verse: "I [God] will search with lanterns in Jerusalem's darkest corners to find and punish those who sit contented in their sins, indifferent to God, thinking he will let them alone. They are the very ones whose property will be plundered by the enemy, whose homes will be ransacked; they will never have a chance to live in the new homes they have built. They will never drink wine from the vineyards they have planted." Why? Because they did not use the time they were given to overcome their sins. They believed Satan's lie that God would accept them "*just as I am*."

God gives us time, time to do good or evil. He gives us time to work out our own salvation, time to overcome our spiritual weaknesses with the help of God's Holy Spirit. God grants us time to repent of our sins. He corrects and warns us through His Word and His ministry not to settle into a continuous pattern of sin and rebellion.

[B]ut exhort one another daily, while it is called "Today," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end, while it is said: "Today, if you will hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion" (Hebrews 3:13–15).

Is time running out on us? Are we settling into a wrong pattern of behavior, of sin or neglect, or of worldly, physical pursuits? Are we going the way that leads to death? Do you know that the process of our overcoming—changing and growing spiritually—is limited by one commodity? *Time*. Yes, building godly character takes time.

Notice what David said in Psalm 39:4–6:

LORD, make me to know my end, And what is the measure of my days,
That I may know how frail I am. Indeed, You have made my days as
handbreadths, And my age is as nothing before You; Certainly every man at
his best state is but vapor. Selah Surely every man walks about like a
shadow; Surely they busy themselves in vain; He heaps up riches, And does
not know who will gather them.

Yes, time is short. So are we heaping up physical riches that someone else will gather when we die, or are we storing up treasure in heaven? No matter how high the demand for time goes, remember that it is perishable and cannot ever be restored. Yesterday's time is gone forever and can never be replaced. So ask yourself, "Am I using my time wisely?"

I wonder if we have ever really understood what it says in Revelation 22:11. "He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still." The implication here is that it is too late for the wicked to change and qualify to be in God's Kingdom. Time for them to repent and change has run out! They will now have to suffer the plagues of God mentioned in this book—the curse of disobedience—because they were not willing

to change when they had the time. How can we avoid that problem? The answer is to never, never, never lose the sense of urgency with the time we have left. Since our life did not end last year and may not be over in the next two or three years, does that mean that we now have more time? What deceptive reasoning! Sound logic would show that we have less time now than ever before. Each passing day brings us one day nearer to the return of Jesus Christ or the end of our lives.

The majority of us have had years in God's church. That time is gone forever, never to return, nor can we ever bring it back. Every passing second gives us not more time, but less time. This, believe it or not, is the hard, cold fact, and miscalculations can never add to time. Maybe God in His mercy has permitted our time to go on longer because we need it to qualify to be in God's Kingdom. But still it is "borrowed time." Do you consider this as another cry of "wolf?" If you do, you may be in serious trouble.

For many years now, the true ministers of God have thundered this same warning—time is short! Can you believe it? Peter said the coming of Jesus Christ was imminent in his day because God inspired him to interpret the prophecy of Joel 2 as applying to the New Testament church from the first century to the very last days (Acts 2:14–21).

But Peter, standing up with the eleven, raised his voice and said to them, "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and heed my words. For these are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 'And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your young men shall see visions, Your old men shall dream dreams. And on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days; And they shall prophesy. I will show wonders in heaven above And signs in the earth beneath: Blood and fire and vapor of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, And the moon into blood, Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD, And it shall come to pass That whoever calls on the name of the LORD Shall be saved.'"

About 5 A.D. the Apostle Paul wrote an urgent letter to the Corinthian church warning them that the examples in the Old Testament were written for their admonition and warning because the end of the age was close at hand (1 Corinthians 10:11). At this, the old-timers probably rolled their eyes and began to question Paul's credibility. I am sure some even began to question Paul's veracity or honesty, literally. Paul had been preaching this same message for years. They probably smiled to themselves and could not understand why he was getting so uptight about their conduct. They probably thought he was getting a little too old. I am sure some even in this remnant church thought this of Raymond Cole, and I know many in WCG thought this of Herbert W. Armstrong.

Sounds like an old familiar pattern, does it not? It was only a short time after Paul that James warned God's people to be patient for the coming of the Lord was at hand.

Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand (James 5:7–8).

Was Time Really Short?

You can be sure that by now some of the old-timers who had heard this message many times before yawned and probably went back to sleep. Even Peter warned his people time and time again just before 70 A.D.: "But the end of all things is at hand" (1 Peter 4:7). By now you can be sure that a lot of disillusioned, cynical people could not believe that old familiar warning—time is short! After all, it was almost forty years after Peter made his first statement in Acts 2:17 that the time of the end was near. I suspect that even Peter by this time had to fight to keep from losing his sense of urgency.

By the time John completed the Book of Revelation—which was about sixty-five years after Peter first quoted the prophecy of Joel 2 as applying to his day and age—it is probable that there were not too many people left around who took the message seriously. Probably only a remnant like we have today in the Church of God, The Eternal. But remember, time ran out for every one of them. They must have thought that God's mercy would extend forever, but it did not. The grace period to repent finally ran out for them. Some of them died along the way before the end came, while others died when the calamities at the very end began to occur, as will happen in our time. Therefore, we had better be busy building godly character and getting rid of sin while we still have time to do so.

"Is this not laid up in store with Me, Sealed up among My treasures? Vengeance is Mine, and recompense; Their foot shall slip in due time; For the day of their calamity is at hand, And the things to come hasten upon them." "For the LORD will judge His people And have compassion on His servants, When He sees that their power is gone, And there is no one remaining, bond or free. He will say: 'Where are their gods, The rock in which they sought refuge? Who ate the fat of their sacrifices, and drank the wine of their drink offering? Let them rise and help you, And be your refuge. 'Now see that I, even I, am He, And there is no God besides Me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; Nor is there any who can deliver from My hand'" (Deuteronomy 32:34–39).

Can you comprehend the significance of these words? Punishment is laid up in store with God for those who have allowed their feet to slip by not drawing close to Him during His time of grace. But that grace period will eventually run out, and then in a

sudden and calamitous way this whole nation will be upended and rewarded according to their evil deeds. Modern Israel—God's apostate church today—I do not believe will turn to God right away because of what it says in Isaiah 9:12–17.

The Syrians before and the Philistines behind; And they shall devour Israel with an open mouth. For all this His anger is not turned away, But His hand is stretched out still. For the people do not turn to Him who strikes them, Nor do they seek the LORD of hosts. Therefore the LORD will cut off head and tail from Israel, Palm branch and bulrush in one day. The elder and honorable, he is the head; The prophet who teaches lies, he is the tail. For the leaders of this people cause them to err, And those who are led by them are destroyed. Therefore the LORD will have no joy in their young men, nor have mercy on their fatherless and widows; For everyone is a hypocrite and an evildoer, And every mouth speaks folly.

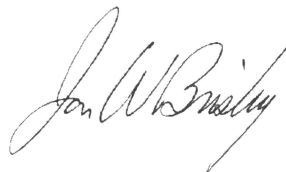
In conclusion, brethren, if you are overly familiar with God's truth and His church, and begin to take that knowledge for granted, then you could suffer with God's apostate church, or you could die—disapproved of God—before that time. This is why I admonish you to never lose your sense of urgency. Analyze yourself. Have you grown lethargic, lukewarm, dulled, and apathetic? All of these are symptoms of the fatal spiritual sickness of familiarity. The time to change is now before God's grace period runs out.

So, do not allow Satan to cause you to become too busy to pray and study God's Word, or you may forget what you were taught. Continually review what you were taught in the beginning, and realize that the time to grow and develop godly character is now. God's forgiveness is only extended to those who repent and overcome now with the help of God's Holy Spirit.

Love you, brethren, until next time,
I remain your servant in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Richard W. Litz".

Richard W. Litz

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Jon W. Brisby".

Jon W. Brisby