

February 2014

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Warm greetings from all of us here in Maryville, Tennessee, to all of you during this period of time that is winter for some and summer for others.

Time is sure flying by, and before you know it we will be observing the Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread once again.

Speaking of the brevity of this human life, how are you using the time God has given you? Are you using it wisely?

In Psalm 90:12, the prayer of Moses is recorded: "So teach us to number our days, That we may gain a heart of wisdom" [*New King James Version* throughout]. How? By spending our lives developing the mind of Christ. Why? So that we can learn to do good, something only God in us can do.

Have you ever done something bad and wished you could have the chance to do it over again? Or maybe, you saw a horrible disaster take place in your life and wished you had the power to change it.

A few great disasters have occurred during my lifetime. The bombing of Pearl Harbor by the Japanese was one; the Holocaust during WWII was another; and the destruction of the 9/11 attack on this country was another.

But there was another disaster that most of the world did not even notice. It was the apostasy that happened in God's true church beginning in 1974 when the Day of Pentecost was changed from Monday to Sunday, causing God to withdraw His Holy Spirit from the Worldwide Church of God (WCG)—the Spirit that gave the brethren the power to overcome sin.

This disaster caused many tears, heartache and misery among God's called-out brethren. It caused many families to split up and the children of members to lose faith in their parents' religion. That is what happened in our family. Would it not be great if we could go back in time and correct these events? My wife and I have often thought: What could we have done differently to keep our family together as the church was disintegrating around us?—not realizing that the apostasy was part of God's plan.

Remember the popular movie, *Back to the Future*, with Michael J. Fox? It was about time travel—something that is impossible in the flesh, but it was exciting to imagine the possibilities. Michael and his scientist friend found a way to travel back in time to correct a disaster which occurred in his family. This was not the first time that time travel was used in a story. In 1843, Charles Dickens used it in the story, *The Christmas Carol*.

If time travel were possible in the flesh, what would you change in the history of your life to create a better outcome? Would you try to be a better person by correcting the mistakes of the past? What if Adam and Eve had not eaten of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil? Would we be the better for it by escaping the curses placed upon mankind because of their mistake? Can mankind really be good?

I believe the answer lies in Matthew 19:17, where Jesus said to the rich young ruler after he had asked Christ what good thing he could do to have eternal life: "Why do you call me good? No one is good but One, that is, God."

Many times I have heard a child pray, "Please God, make me good." I think as adults we make this same mistake, asking God to make us good, not realizing that He cannot or will not answer. God will not make us good because only by having God in us can we be good.

In Jeremiah 13:23, God *in this way* inspired Jeremiah to write to His people in Jerusalem because of their great pride—a pride in themselves that caused them to believe that they could be good in the flesh without the help of God. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots?"—meaning, is it possible for a man who is black to change his skin from black to another color, or can a leopard change its spots to stripes? The implied answer is No! It is not possible! But if it were possible, Jeremiah continues in verse 23, "Then may you also do good who are accustomed to do evil"—meaning, it is impossible really to do good according to God's standards separate and apart from God.

Pride in ourselves can cause us to become self-righteous, which is like filthy rags to God (Isaiah 64:6). Only God can remove pride from us, which clings like a girdle or a sash. That is the message in Jeremiah 13 to those who are lifted up with pride in themselves, a pride which can cause us to resist the Words of God (Jeremiah 13:10). This mystery can be understood only by the called of God, His saints.

[T]he mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. To this end I labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily (Colossians 1:26–29).

This mystery of Christ living in us is the hope of glory, because only Christ living in us can cause us to do good in perfecting God's righteousness. Flesh of itself cannot become good. Neither can flesh be good except Christ is living in that flesh through the indwelling of God's Spirit. This means we must crucify the life of the flesh that is in our human nature and ask God for the indwelling of His Spirit to make us good as God is good.

We are so programmed to sin that we cannot help ourselves. Paul realized this and speaks of it in Romans 7:14–25:

For we know that the law is spiritual [referring to the Ten Commandments], but I am carnal, sold under sin. [Meaning that sin had such power over him that he could never overcome in the flesh. Flesh of itself cannot overcome sin.] For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do [Paul is saying: I do not understand myself at all, for I really want to do good, but I cannot]. If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me [Paul agrees here that the spiritual law of God is good, but it is against his human nature to obey because of the law of the flesh]. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now If I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.

Paul is saying there is nothing within his flesh that can cause him to do good in obeying God's spiritual law. This means there can be no progress in the salvation process as long as we are trying to overcome sin in the flesh alone by will power. The flesh here means our evil, corrupt nature that is within us from birth.

To confirm the hopelessness of the flesh, the apostle mourns that although he has the desire to do right, he does not have the resources in himself to translate his desire into action. This is the trouble we can all experience when we cast our anchors inside our own boats instead of in Christ, leaving us to drift about.

Although Paul delights in the spiritual law of God after the inward man, he finds no power to accomplish the good. In other words, he is trying to accomplish what God has declared to be an utter impossibility—namely, making the flesh subject to God's holy law.

He finds that the flesh minds only the things of the flesh and is enmity against the law of God to do good.

Paul feels as if he has been burdened down with a decomposing body strapped to his back. That body, of course, is the old nature in all its corruption. In his wretchedness, he finally has to admit that he is unable to deliver himself from this offensive load of bondage. Then finally, after much discouragement in trying to overcome sin in the flesh, he realizes that there is deliverance which comes through inviting Christ to live His life in him. This causes Paul to burst out with thanksgiving for his deliverance. The very deliverance Paul now explains is in Romans 8:1–14:

There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you. Therefore, brethren, we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

So sonship is promised to all those who are willing to live according to the Spirit, by putting to death the deeds of the flesh through the power of God's Spirit, and allowing Christ to live His life in you.

Are you willing to give up this life in the flesh in order to inherit eternal life? The fear of death in the flesh can cause us to panic and to reject the path that leads to spiritual life, choosing rather to suffer longer by trying to save ourselves in the flesh.



Matthew 16:25 says, "For whoever desires to save his life [physically] will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it." What Jesus is saying here is that if you are hugging your physical life for selfish purposes you will never find real fulfillment in Christ; but if you are willing to sacrifice that life as Christ did for others, you will find your life as a Son of God and live forever in the God Family.

How can we know that we have God's Holy Spirit and that Christ is living His life in us to do good?

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world. You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. They are of the world. Therefore they speak as of the world, and the world hears them. We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error (1 John 4:1–6).

Are we proving Christ has returned in the flesh by the way we live our lives, or do our actions reveal the way of an antichrist? If we say we know Christ, should we not be walking as He walked? (1 John 2:6)

According to 1 John 2:18–23, there are many antichrists in the end time who say they are of God, but because they *went out from us* they have identified themselves as antichrists in that they deny that we are of the true Christ.

Mr. Raymond Cole has said many times in his "Faith" sermon series that those who deny that Christ has come in the flesh—by living lives that are antichrist—are not of God. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses, or demonstrates, that Christ has come in their flesh, (by their good behavior) is of God. On the other hand, those who live contrary to God's law are antichrist.

If we can think spiritually now for a moment, we can travel back in time by God's grace and correct the tragedies and the mistakes of the past by asking for and obtaining forgiveness. David did this in his prayer of repentance, recorded for us in Psalm 51, verses 10–12. "Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from Your presence, And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me." Notice David did not ask God to make him good in the flesh, but he asked that God would renew a right, steadfast spirit in him to make him willing to obey God *in the spirit*. With that help, he

could do the good by maintaining the paths of righteousness—which he could not accomplish in his flesh alone.

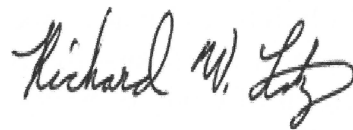
Note what God caused Jeremiah to write in Jeremiah 17:5: "Cursed is the man who trusts in man [himself] And makes flesh his strength, Whose heart departs from the Lord."

I believe many of God's people today are struggling to do good in the flesh alone, because they may have departed from the Lord's help, not realizing it. If this is the case, you can only experience a life of discouragement, despair and hopelessness. So why not travel back in time and ask God for that first love of the truth that you had years ago—that excitement to study God's Word and to learn how to follow His ways. God will surely give it to you if you ask Him.

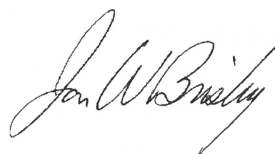
So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him! (Luke 11:9–13)

It is truly significant that the gift God is most willing to give us is the gift we most need in order to experience victory over the flesh. This gift of the Holy Spirit is the power that enables us to live the Christian life, and that is why God is so anxious to give this power to those who ask in faith, so they can truly be good as God is good.

Your servant in the Christian fight,

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