

March 2015

Dear Brethren:

In spite of conditions deteriorating around the world, I give a very warm and special greeting to all of you from all of us here in Maryville, Tennessee. Our prayers and thoughts are with you continually as we hold fast to the revealed Truth in these troubled times.

Today, even as I write this *Monthly Letter*, a sense of terror is being generated by ISIS guerillas around the world who are continuing to slaughter, torture and even behead and crucify the enemies of their false god. It is finally becoming very clear to the leaders of America and the world that these Islamic terrorists mean business! News reports say that because of the gold and cash these rebels have taken from banks, and because of the millions of dollars of military hardware they have seized in recent months, this so-called "Islamic State" is now regarded as the best-financed, most heavily-armed terrorist group we have ever faced in this world in their attempt to convert the whole world to Islam.

Right now, in this end-time, in these last days just before the return of Christ, there are many news reports of a massive takeover of much of the Middle East by this terrorist organization. This "Islamic State" is a growing threat not only to Europe but also the United States and Britain to whom they refer as the "Great Satan" and the "Little Satan." We are truly entering into a time prophesied in Jeremiah 30:7 as Jacob's trouble—when Esau's descendants would become restless and gain dominion for a short while in the last days (Genesis 27:40).

Jacob took advantage of his older brother, Esau, when he was very hungry and weary after hunting, and was able to get Esau to sell his birthright to him for a pot of red stew. Therefore Esau was given an alternate name, "Edom," which literally means "red soup." Esau despised his birthright for the immediate gratification of a pot of red stew (Genesis 25:29–34).

The Same Enmity Continues Today

When we realize that it is the global ambition of Esau's descendants, who are mostly of the Islamic religion today, to bring the whole world under Sharia Law and to force the worship of Allah—which in their minds is the only true god to worship—it makes us realize that this prophecy is coming true.

The rampaging terrorists of ISIS are already responsible for murdering thousands of men, women and children, even among their own people if they befriend those who do not believe in their cause. They behead, crucify and often horribly torture those who are declared infidels of the faith. Thousands of wives and daughters have been sold as sex slaves or used for other evil purposes by these wicked men.

Now, throughout the world a sense of terror is being generated by this organization which started four years ago. The Arab Spring uprising was widely hailed at the time by the United States as a popular progressive democratic movement that we supported by helping them remove their dictators. However, subsequent events have shown this view to be naive and far from reality, with violence, bloodshed and harsher forms of oppression than when the dictators ruled.

History has proven that the most stable Arab governments have been those ruled by strongmen or kings with near dictatorial powers to suppress unrest and discord. The rare times that the Arabs have largely been unified were when they were forced to live at peace under dictatorships or were allies in arms against a common enemy. That common enemy includes anyone who portrays the Prophet Muhammad in a negative way, just as the newspapers in Europe have done, bringing terrorist acts upon them. The most recent one was the deadly shooting of twelve at the satirical newspaper, *Charlie Hebdo*, in Paris—what France is calling the deadliest attack in more than half a century. Another act of exceptional barbarism committed by al-Qaida in Yemen because of a caricature of their Prophet Mohammad resulted in radical Islam calling the United States the great Satan of the world. This is not without some merit because in fact the US is not setting a very good example of being a God-fearing nation today.

Modern Israel Deserves Its Curse

Every day brings more news of various judges in the United States trying to legalize "same-sex marriages." This is something which would have been absolutely inconceivable a few years ago. There was a time in my life when this behavior was solidly condemned by society as an abomination to Almighty God (Leviticus 18:22). But today, because of a tidal wave of homosexual pressure from those who practice this vile behavior, one element of society after another has capitulated under the pressure of political correctness into accepting this kind of perverted lifestyle.

Even in the New Testament, the Apostle Paul was inspired by God to describe the intellectuals of his day: "Professing to be wise, they became fools" (Romans 1:22). Then he goes on to say in verses 26–27:

For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due [*New King James Version* throughout].

That penalty includes the millions who have suffered from various sexually-transmitted diseases, especially AIDS.

Also, more disturbing is the disintegration of the traditional family—which is the very foundation and strength of a God-fearing society.

And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them (Romans 1:28–32).

As more and more of these vile practices continue taking over men and women, even those who have known the Truth, they will be cut off from God by their perverted thoughts and actions. It is because of these perverted behaviors that the God of heaven and earth will intervene and bring on the Day of the Lord to correct them.

I am seventy-four now, which means I grew up during the Great Depression and World War II, and in my youth there was a deep respect for the family and for the Ten Commandments. Back then, the very mention of men and women cohabiting before marriage was actually embarrassing, and most embarrassing was the notion of people performing perverted acts with members of the same sex. I remember it being disgusting and unthinkable. Nearly everyone in my life understood that God had created us male and female for the purpose of marriage and family. Most people I knew certainly understood and agreed with the instruction God gave to ancient Israel when He said, "You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination" (Leviticus 18:22).

Now our liberal theological seminaries—or better called "cemeteries,"—are rethinking God's instruction and have gone after modern attitudes about sex, and are effectively poking fun at God and His inspired Word. Their new interpretations actually pervert the statutes and judgments of God. Then many wonder why so many things are going wrong in our nation and why there is terror in the world.

The Creator God foretold that this very thing would come upon the people of God if we turned away from Him.

But if you do not obey Me, and do not observe all these commandments, and if you despise My statutes, or if your soul abhors My judgments, so that you do not perform all My commandments, but break My covenant, I also will do this to you: I will even appoint terror over you, wasting disease and fever which shall consume the eyes and cause sorrow of heart. And you shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it. I will set My face against you, and you shall be defeated by your enemies. Those who hate you shall reign over you, and you shall flee when no one pursues you (Leviticus 26:14–17).

And why do we flee when no one pursues us? The first cause is fear (terror)—resulting from "terrorism"—and it is happening all around us today. This, fueled by famine, disease, earthquakes and religious persecution, will cause many to rethink their faith in the one true God.

Spiritual Applications From the Book of Revelation

The book of Revelation, sometimes called the "Apocalypse" because of the terrifying events described in this last book of the Bible, is most important to think about in this time of trouble. The Apostle John, while in exile on the isle of Patmos off the shores of Southwestern Turkey which the Romans were using as a penal colony, was inspired to write the book about 95 A.D. He was sent there because of preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ. John had already written three of the epistles that would become part of the New Testament, but now God was inspiring him to write more while he was in captivity. While there, John received a vision from God and was told to write down a message that would be important for the last-day church. John sent the record of his vision to seven churches on a common mail route there in Asia Minor. The messages to those seven churches have real meaning for us today. They were Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea (Revelation 1:11). Today one can still visit the archaeological sites of these cities in Western Turkey.

The Vision regarded the spiritual condition of these seven churches. Religious persecution had instilled fear in all those who were trying to live God's way of life. In Revelation chapters 2 and 3, the Revelator, Jesus Christ, encourages us to hear and learn lessons from what would befall these seven churches. Seven times—once for each church—Christ tells us: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." In other words, let these messages penetrate into your minds as a warning to overcome these character flaws. The word "churches" is used because they represent God's one true church in different geographic areas. I wonder if any of these church descriptions depict your spiritual condition in these last days before the return of Christ.

Jesus describes the first church at Ephesus this way: "Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love" (Revelation 2:4). The heading in the *New King James Bible* labels Ephesus as the "Loveless Church." Jesus warns this church by saying: "Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works" (Revelation 2:5). The works He is referring to are the works of overcoming sin and repenting of backsliding from their first love. We do that by continuing to resist the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which apparently were deeds of compromise in disobeying the Truth. Their bad behavior in the area of sacrifice to God was probably a stumbling block for those who were trying to obey God (Revelation 2:14–15). In the message to Smyrna the deeds of the Nicolaitans were described in more detail, but at Ephesus this first love of the Truth was probably lost soon after the death of the apostles. This spiritual condition can also result when a beloved servant of God, like Mr. Raymond Cole, is taken out of the way by an unexpected death. Also, Mr. Leon Whitaker, who was a beloved elder in the Vancouver, WA, church was taken quite suddenly from us a few years ago. Some can remember what happened when Mr. Herbert Armstrong was effectively taken out of the way, for us, in 1974 when revealed Truth was compromised, and then for much of the rest of the church after his death in 1986. Many lost their first love for the Truth that was once delivered to the saints (Jude 3).

So what about you? Have you lost your first love for God's way of life? Hopefully not, but if so, you can get it back through drawing close to God by cleansing your hands (or actions) and purifying your hearts before your Lord. Do this through prayer and Bible study but also by meditating on the early years when you were first called into the Truth. Call to remembrance the trials you went through when coming out from the world—in some cases even separating from family and friends who resisted your calling. God promises to draw near to you again and lift you up if you will draw near to Him (James 4:8–10).

Smyrna, the next church in Revelation 2:8 is labeled, "The Persecuted Church." Jesus states:

I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich) [meaning, they possess the revealed Truth of God]. . . . Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life (Revelation 2:9–10).

This sounds as though some will be persecuted and die trying to obey God. Persecution and death of others may cause us to forget our first love for the Truth and begin to compromise—giving in to false doctrine out of fear or giving up the truth altogether. Experience teaches that a man cannot know his true self until he experiences adversity, pain, or fear. The presence of danger can often obscure the promises of God to protect. In 1 Samuel 27:1, David forgot he was God's anointed to become a future king and began to fear Saul. We also are promised kingship, so why should we fear what man can do to us? Perfect love in the promises and commandments of God can, and will, cast out fear (1 John 4:18).

So have you faithfully withstood suffering and persecution in holding to the revealed Truth of God? If so, you will receive a crown of life that no one will be able to take from you.

Pergamos, the third church, is labeled, "The Compromising Church." In the New Testament, Peter speaks of false teachers who have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam (2 Peter 2:15). Many ministers in the Worldwide Church of God who once knew the Truth began to preach false doctrine out of fear of losing their paychecks. We saw this happen! Jude speaks of backsliders who "have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit" (Jude 11). Balaam's error was greed and covetousness. He was well paid to bring a curse upon God's people by getting them to sin against God's revealed Truth. The doctrine of Balaam acted as a stumbling block before God's people in getting them to worship false gods. This included taking foreign wives and divorcing the wives of their youth (Malachi 2:14–16). God hated this putting away because it worked violence against the revealed Truth of God and destroyed the family.

The next church is labeled, "The Corrupt Church." Jesus proclaimed to Thyatira: "I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last are more than the first" (Revelation 2:18–19). This means their works were increasing in quantity but not necessarily in quality. That is because some were tolerating, and falling

victim to, a corrupt way of life in the assembly of God's true church. The character, behavior, and doctrine of Jezebel was becoming very apparent within the church, which was partly due to pride and not being able to take correction. God gave them time to repent of their perversion of the Truth, but they would not, so God rewarded many according to their works by casting them into a sickbed of tribulation. To the rest who did not fall victim to the doctrine of Jezebel, God said to "hold fast what you have till I come. . . . I will give power over the nations—He shall rule them with a rod of iron" (Revelation 2:25–27).

The next message is to the Sardis church, which is labeled, "The Dead Church." Jesus warns this church: "I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead" (Revelation 3:1). Sardis, the dead church, was like the whitewashed tombs that appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness (Matthew 23:27). Its thriving, healthy-looking appearance masked the inner decay and defilement of their righteous garments. For this they received a very strong warning that Christ would come upon them as a thief in the night because they would not know the hour He would come to correct them. The problem was in their watching. Their minds were too focused on their outward physical appearance, and they were not mindful of the spiritual things of God in their conversion process. This behavior, if not repented of, would result in having their names blotted out of the Book of Life because God does not look on the outward appearance, but judges with righteous judgment (John 7:24). This means that God does not see as man sees in his carnal state, "but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7).

Now we come to the church of Philadelphia which is labeled, "The Faithful Church." Christ promises this church:

Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial [or day of the Lord's wrath] which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. Behold, I come quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown (Revelation 3:10–11).

Christ goes on to say in verse 12 that those who have held fast will become the pillars in the New Jerusalem that comes down from heaven from God.

Remember, pillars stand alone and are only strong as long as they stand upright with a rock or a capstone placed upon them to keep them in place. Our capstone, or rock, is Jesus Christ who also has the key to the House of David, to open or close the entry into that house, or Kingdom, of God. He will be that nail, or peg, in a secure place in His

Father's house, and all others who claim they are that peg will be carried away with a mighty captivity as was Shebna, who God threw violently away into a large country in the Day of the Lord at His return (Isaiah 22:15–25).

This brings us to the last message to the church of Laodicea, "The Lukewarm Church." Jesus says:

I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. . . . So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will [spew] you out of My mouth (Revelation 3:15–16).

Why, you might ask? Because over time like a glass of cold or hot water becomes lukewarm, many in God's church over a long period of time lost their enthusiasm for the revealed Truth and consequently their total commitment to hold fast to their calling. Because of its lukewarm attitude this church is not commended. The lukewarm person does not become greatly disturbed or offended at the hearing of false doctrine and is not vigorous in the defense of the revealed Truth of God. This lukewarm spirit of indifference is the most tragic thing that can happen to a church, and it often happens when it is being physically blessed. It happens when times are good—when they begin to say: "I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked" (Revelation 3:17).

Cold water is refreshing when the body needs to be cooled, whereas hot water is very comforting when the body needs to be warmed, but lukewarm water is undesirable. By analogy then, the person who becomes lukewarm in conduct and attitude over time will be spewed out because the Lord rejects the half-hearted efforts of a self-satisfied child of God. The Laodicean church was spiritually self-deluded, thinking it was wealthy and needed nothing when in reality it was spiritually impoverished and bankrupt. How? They reasoned that if one was covered with expensive garments he was clothed, but in reality he was spiritually naked. They believed that physical sight was sufficient, but they were actually blind to spiritual realities. What they needed was eye salve from Christ to heal their vision of themselves. Fortunately, Christ provides spiritual gold and pure white garments. This results after He rebukes and corrects those He loves (Revelation 3:18–20; 7:13–14; 19:7–8).

God's love for His children manifests itself in rebuke and correction when we go astray. This means that the intent of the Lord's discipline is for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness (Hebrews 12:10). Of course, the proper response to God's loving correction is to repent, change and be willing to move away from a lukewarm spiritual condition to seek spiritual riches and rewards instead.

Behold, I stand at the door and knock [picturing the Lord Jesus seeking entrance into His own church for the purpose of renewed fellowship]. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine [or sup] with him, and he with Me (Revelation 3:20).

Jesus wants us to listen and take note of all seven of these messages to the churches. They may reveal changes we need to make in our lives so that we are not found poor, blind, and naked when Christ returns. Seven times Jesus tells us: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." To dine with Christ during the upcoming Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread will require that we take these messages to heart and overcome by humble obedience to God's laws—even to the destruction of the exalted self. God promises a royal position in His Kingdom for those who overcome and humble themselves in obedience. Then we will be able to take part in ending all the terrorism, and bring peace to a sick and dying world plagued by war and unrest because it has forgotten the true God of Peace.

In 1863, Abraham Lincoln, the sixteenth President of the United States said:

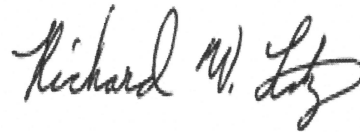
It is the duty of nations as well as of men to owe their dependence upon the overruling power of God; to confess their sins and transgressions in humble sorrow, yet with assured hope that genuine repentance will lead to mercy and pardon; and to recognize the sublime truth, announced in the Holy Scriptures and proven by all history, that those nations are blessed whose God is the Lord.

President Lincoln was quoting from Psalm 33:12, which says: "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, The people He has chosen as His own inheritance." Quoting those words in today's America would likely get Lincoln hauled into court and condemned by "politically correct" politicians, reporters, and judges. But he was right when he went on to say:

We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of heaven; we have been preserved these many years in peace and prosperity; we have grown in numbers, wealth and power as no other nation has grown. But we have forgotten God and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own.

Today, because so many have forgotten the true God, we are fast entering into a time in history spoken of in your Bible as Jacob's trouble (Jeremiah 30:7), a time when it will be impossible to govern a people, a nation, or the world according to the principles of the Founding Fathers. This government "by the people" cannot work when there are so many conflicting ideas, opinions, and beliefs as to what is right, morally. It can only lead to more and more conflict because man does not know the way to peace. Only Christ's return will bring peace to this world, and assuredly it will not come about through a democracy of the people, but through a government that rules with a rod of iron (Revelation 2:27). If you allow yourself to be converted with the sword of the Spirit now, while there is still time, you will be part of that ruling government that brings peace to this world.

In sincere Christian love,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Richard W. Litz". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first name being the most prominent.

Richard W. Litz

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Jon W. Brisby". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first name being the most prominent.

Jon W. Brisby