

July 2016

Dear Brethren:

From time to time, God seems to present us with circumstances to assist us in verifying how much we are truly "in tune" with His revealed doctrines—*the faith once delivered*. It is one thing to nod our heads and profess that we agree with the doctrines of the Church as given by Jesus Christ through a chosen servant, but it is quite another to be so *well rooted* in those teachings that they become part of our very thinking and personal responses, especially under pressure.

We can agree philosophically that Saturday is the weekly Sabbath, and we can concur that it is holy time as appointed by God. But that "agreement" is shallow indeed if it is not followed by *actual doing* to hallow the Sabbath through our choices not to work, not to pursue our own pleasures, to convoke before God, etc. It is one thing to "agree" that we are commanded to keep the Feast of Tabernacles for eight days in one of very few appointed places on this earth, but it is quite another actually to *pull out all stops* to make sure we are there! Human beings, by nature, attach themselves to all manner of ideologies, but the choices they make *in the real world* prove what they really value most.

So too is the doctrine of God concerning health and healing. The original teaching of Jesus Christ through His chosen servant, Mr. Herbert Armstrong, is well documented. Modern medicine is *not* the instrument of God to fulfill His promises to heal! Other than for "binding up a wound," setting a bone, etc., we are to avoid seeking physical salvation through *Satan's counterfeit medical system*—a system inspired as *an alternative* to God's promise to heal His people. By the mid-1970s, God's church had corrupted that original teaching, beginning to say that God honors His promises to us *through* modern medicine. What an abomination! But whether you agree or do not agree with that conclusion, there is ample written proof of *the original teaching* in God's church vs. that very different doctrine that took root in the 1970s. *A change did take place*. That is a fact! Study it out if you do not believe it. And then weigh this doctrinal change against *every other doctrinal change* that took place in the Worldwide Church of God during that same time frame. You cannot logically hold to a Monday Pentecost (for example) or the original teaching on marriage and divorce—on the basis of divine revelation of Truth from the beginning—if you then want to justify the *post-apostasy teaching* on health and healing. Those doctrines either stand or fall together. The only question is, what is the real truth of the matter? What does God really want us to do? Does He truly consider that using modern medicine is bowing before a false god—the god of Ekron—when we ingest their pharmaceuticals and submit to their invasive probings and surgeries? That was *the faith once delivered*, and that is also what this ministry will continue to proclaim.

But assuming the audience for this letter is mostly composed of those who agree with the original faith about medicine and healing, to what degree are we really convinced? And to what degree are we really focused on the goal of *life eternal* in God's Kingdom, as opposed to *more life in this physical realm*? There is nothing like the death of ones we know and love in the church to put these concepts to the test in our own lives. Death makes the question very personal. Do we really have faith—the kind of faith God requires for salvation?

Recently, we have experienced the loss of several longtime members of the church. Most of them were well past the age of seventy, and in those cases, in our minds, we are typically more accepting. After all, once one surpasses *three score and ten years*, at best there is a reduction of the overall quality of life anyway as these bodies get weaker.

The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away (Psalm 90:10).

We consider these loved ones to have lived *full lives*. And which ones of us will ever escape death? We all realize God's promise was not to sustain physical life indefinitely, for God said, ". . . it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (Hebrews 9:27). So we are usually OK when someone of advanced years dies.

But what about when one who is much younger is taken from us? That is when the natural questions begin, and for some, even doubts about the will and purpose of God.

At what age do you accept that God has fulfilled His promise to provide long life? Is seventy the minimum benchmark? What about sixty-nine? What about sixty-five, or even sixty? Where will you draw the line in your own mind? At what threshold would you begin to conclude that someone has been "cheated of promised years"?

God Promised to Heal

One of the promises that God gave to ancient Israel was that they would have health in body and not be plagued with the diseases of Egypt.

And said, 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).

First, note, as Mr. Armstrong always emphasized, this promise is conditional. Receiving the special blessing was always contingent upon *obedience*. Sickness always involves the violation of physical laws *in some way*, because this is how God established our living environment upon this earth. (The intent of this letter is not to provide a detailed proof of all of these points. That can be done by reading our technical articles and the old writings of the church on health and healing. Here, we are simply *reminding you* of the concluding points that are part of that revealed Way of Life.) Being "healed" is having sin *forgiven*.

But knowing that God is good, loving, merciful, and ever willing to heal, when one of His called children is trying very hard to overcome and has made tangible strides to walk in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, should not he always be healed? Should not he always have his health preserved and his life extended to "a ripe old age"? And if someone does die "early," is that not a sign that something is wrong? These are the thoughts and questions that immediately enter, and it is certain that many of you are asking them. What is the answer?

If it is true that Exodus 15:26 is proof that none of God's people should ever die before age seventy, if they are doing what is right, then what would that mean if a church member does die early? It would mean either, 1) God is not honoring His promises to heal; 2) the individual was not healed by God because he had not really repented of sin in some way, perhaps harboring secret sins; or 3) perhaps the church member was mistaken in choice of fellowship and separated from God by being in the wrong church. These are the major categories of thought that come to our natural minds. What is the answer?

God's Promise to the Church Today

The answer is found in rejecting the premise of the very first conclusion! *It is not* always God's intent to give long *physical life* to His faithful spiritual children!

Recall that ancient Israel was a *physical nation* of carnal people. They were indeed God's "church in the wilderness," but they were only *a type*—a foreshadow—of God's *real work* with *spiritual Israel*, the Church. Yes, God promised physical health and healing to the ancient Israelites. He promised them long life (Exodus 20:12). He also promised to give them a beautiful *physical homeland*, a peaceful and prosperous land, flowing with milk and honey (Exodus 3:7–8). And that is what they received. They

could never hold on to all of those blessings, because they would never obey God consistently. But the point is, the only things they were ever promised were *physical* blessings—physical health and longevity, physical peace, and physical prosperity in a physical land. They were never offered any spiritual reward!

But to the Church—the Body of Jesus Christ, the firstfruits of His *spiritual* Work—He has offered *eternal life* and a crown of glory in His *immortal Family*. That was never part of His covenant with ancient Israel. But it is supposed to be the reward that we are all focused upon attaining (Matthew 6:33). God has not promised us—today—great physical property and peace from our worldly enemies. In fact, God promised that those who will walk in the footsteps of Jesus Christ will suffer in this world even as He suffered:

For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake (Philippians 1:29).

For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. . . . For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted (Hebrews 2:10, 18).

The whole purpose of our time on earth right now is to develop the very character of Jesus Christ through the power of His Holy Spirit. That is hard work. It is often brutal work. It requires the crucifixion of the self—including our own personalized concepts—and the submission to a way of thinking and acting that will never come naturally. There is a reason that path to salvation is called a narrow, tortuous way (Matthew 7:13–14). Anyone who thinks the promise of being one of God's called children in this world should manifest the *physical* blessings of a blissful existence (as ancient Israel longed for) is missing the point of God's work in our lives.

Physical Blessings Also Promised

Please do not misunderstand. Yes indeed, the physical promises of the past *do indeed* apply in part to the Church today. But why and how? In many cases, those physical blessings of good health and long life are available *to any human being* who is willing to obey *the physical laws* which God laid down on this earth. It is just that very few in this world are willing to obey! Only those called of God have a *greater chance* of *actually living* according to those laws and therefore receiving the blessings.

Remember, sickness and premature death are the consequences of physical sin! If you disagree with that, you need to go back and review the very foundation of all we were taught by Jesus Christ through a chosen servant. It is true! And that means that *anyone* who chooses to obey God's physical laws will automatically avoid many physical penalties for sin (Romans 2:14–15).

God does not sit upon His throne, looking down upon us, spying opportunities to "catch us" making mistakes. He does not then cast methodical lightning bolts at us when we sin. No, He has *built in to the very fabric of this universe* a set of laws that *automatically* function as if on autopilot. When you jump up, God does not have to make a conscious action to make you come back down again. His *Law of Gravity* works automatically to do that. So do all of His other laws, whether recognized by men or not (including the Sabbath command). In essence, God could "go on vacation," and His laws would automatically work on their own, because He has *set them into motion*.

That includes the laws which govern health in these human bodies. God dictated what is the proper fuel to make these bodies perform well. The "diet laws" are not some arbitrary set of rules for "Jews." They are the rules that apply to *all human beings*! Egypt symbolizes rebellious humanity which shuns God's commandments and insists upon doing things their own way. But by violating cardinal principles God laid down, they *automatically* reap serious penalties, especially in the form of sickness, disability, and premature death. The "diseases of Egypt" are not just special curses God rains down upon a particular nation. They are the *automatic curses* that befall *all human beings* who refuse to obey God's laws!

And that likewise applies to *anyone called of God* who still refuses to obey the physical laws, even after they have been taught. When we suffer in the flesh, there are reasons for it. Yes, some of these penalties might have come from the sins of our ancestors (Exodus 20:5). And we are all certainly suffering from a polluted environment which might be beyond our control to mitigate. The point is not to assess blame or pass judgment, but to reconfirm that *all* illness, disability, and premature death is a result of broken health laws *in some way and some fashion*. And even those deceived people of this world who choose to recognize cardinal principles of health (whether they recognize the source of those laws or not) are always better off by far than those who thumb their noses at those laws. There are some people in this world who actually have a better quality of life, physically, because they discipline themselves in diet, exercise, sleep, and other personal behaviors. They are the automatic recipients of God's blessings.

However, the people of the world do not now, for the most part, have access to God's promise to *remove miraculously* the penalty for sin. They suffer the cause and

effect from either obeying or disobeying God's laws. And when they suffer, He has not promised them His immediate benefit of divine intervention. That *special promise* has been given to the Church only! And there have been many in God's Church over many decades who have received divine healing. It is one of the promises that God gave to His called children.

Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases (Psalm 103:2–3).

The great miracles that Jesus Christ performed to relieve afflictions of all kinds was a testament to His ability and willingness to heal. And this same God is still, as a loving Father, ever willing to bless His children:

Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him? (Matthew 7:7–11)

What is the ever-consistent requirement to receive these special favors?

And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight (1 John 3:22).

So again, obedience is the first requirement. But what about when we see those in the church—who apparently have been very sincere and devoted to putting God first—still suffering, and even dying prematurely? Do we conclude "something must be wrong"? It is always wise to ask that question and consider all things soberly. Many times God does indeed use physical trials as a means of getting our attention. If we are on the wrong path, He may use serious physical trial to get us to reconsider and to change course. But again, if you automatically assume the existence of a serious trial indicates one must be on the wrong path, be prepared to start lurching from path to path, never finding a firm foundation:

That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive (Ephesians 4:14).

Sadly, many of God's people have fallen into this trap, because they are seeking *physical signs* as their proof of the doctrine. And anyone seeking after signs is destined to become deceived. The foundation of our confidence must be the faith *revealed with purpose* by Jesus Christ to His Church.

Faith in the Face of Death?

Is it a failure of some kind when one of God's children dies as a young person (far short of age seventy)? This is not a new question. In fact, even during the twentieth century when God's people in the Radio Church of God were experiencing many special healings in the 1950s and '60s, there were still instances of the death of babies, small children, and adults who should have been in their physical prime. Did God fail then? Were secret sins always at issue? Take time to read an article published in the February 1965 issue of *The Good News*. It is entitled, "Do You Have Faith in the Face of Death?" It will prove to you that the church, even in its heyday, was still grappling with these very issues. Here are a few excerpts from that article:

All of the heroes in the Bible have died. The really great men about which the Bible speaks—those who walked and talked and ate with the Logos—are dead. They "knew the score," however. They knew what the ultimate reward is going to be. They knew where life came from and they knew who had control over it. They were intimately associated with the God who is The Healer. But they didn't become all wrapped up in mere physical existence—vaporious, temporal life—every last one of them—Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, and all of the other faithful who are listed in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews—looked forward to a *better* RESURRECTION. . . .

God is the God who heals but physical healing is only a first step in His Plan. It is spiritual healing which is really important.

Christ died—remember that! And He is our example. We need not fear death when we have a Saviour that has shown us we can come out of death into immortal life. . . .

But understand further that faith to be healed of physical infirmities is *only the very first step toward absolute faith*. It requires much more faith to believe—*really believe*—THAT THE DEAD WILL COME TO LIFE, THAT THE DEAD WILL BE HEALED. Each one of us has to be willing to enter death in faith *knowing* that our healing is assured. And so when you hear about someone in the Church who has died don't be in despair or

dismay. Don't wonder whether God is still powerful. Don't wonder about the faith of the individual who has died. Don't wonder—*just have faith*. For faith will provide the solution. Faith raises the very dead. Faith provides for healing—COMPLETE HEALING, ABSOLUTE HEALING, THE HEALING OF DEATH ITSELF.

And a Christian may have to die to prove his faith in that!

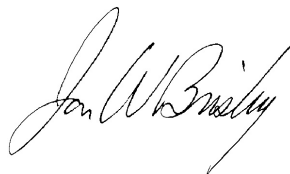
So, brethren, recognize that these issues have always been a source of concern within God's church. But God's answer is always the same, in every time and in every age.

When one of our beloved brethren dies "too young," it is an excellent opportunity to test your own orientation in relation to the Work of God. What does it mean to "just have faith"? We are not talking about some sappy platitude intended to gloss over things we do not understand. Real faith is *believing* what God is doing and *being onboard* in heart and mind with that very Plan. Are you truly focused on the Kingdom of God to come, or are all of your real hopes and dreams caught up in this physical domain? If you are too physically oriented, then premature death of a friend or family member seems "wrong." But if you truly have your hope in that promised resurrection, then you recognize that physical death of those who have completed their course in God's plan is a real blessing.

Recall the final statement from the article quoted above concerning hope in the resurrection: "And a Christian may have to die to prove his faith in that!" Perhaps one particular beloved one who has just recently died in our own fellowship has done precisely that. And what if that example of *being willing to die without compromise* with this world—even when so many thought that modern medicine had the power to "do something"—was a witness that all of the rest of us needed? Yes, very likely so.

With long life will I satisfy him, and shew him my salvation (Psalm 91:16).

With love and affection through our faithful Savior,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Jon W. Brisby". The signature is fluid and elegant, with a large initial "J" and a stylized "B".

Jon W. Brisby