

September 2019

Dear Brethren:

As we approach the autumn Holy Day season, which pictures the completion of God's glorious work with mankind, it is a good opportunity to take stock of our real hopes and aspirations for the future. For the most part, people of this world live in a state of hopelessness and despair because they do not know that a loving and purposeful God is carrying out a Master Plan for their ultimate good. Without that divine knowledge, man is left to try to solve his own problems and to create his own "happy ending." However, every attempt over the last six thousand years has been utterly disappointing. Is there any wonder that depression, despondency, and increased feelings of hopelessness prevail? How blessed are the called of God who have been given a *legitimate antidote* to this condition of emptiness and utter futility.

The Acid Test for God's People

Knowing what you know, and believing what you believe, is it accurate to say that you have a more positive outlook and mental perspective than does the world? Mr. Raymond Cole used to emphasize the "acid test" of being able to manifest *real joy and abundance of life*, in spite of our trials. Do we?

The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward (Psalm 19:7-11).

If God's revealed Way of Life is indeed so precious, is that what we are each reflecting as we make our way through this temporary existence in the flesh? We all fall short of that kind of true appreciation and feeling of satisfaction. But do we really feel a greater sense of *hope and contentment* than do those despairing in this world? If not, why not?

My Problems Excuse Me from Joy?

Many in God's Church in times past have seemed to wear their personal burdens like badges of honor, drawing attention to how much they have "given up" in the course of obeying God's Commandments. It is usually unintentional, but nonetheless the fruit is not that of real joy and appreciation for the coming Kingdom of God, but a lament for everything they have been "forced" to sacrifice in order to put God first. Rather than living lives of inspiration, and radiating "joy" to others around them, the lasting residue of contact is one of frustration, "perpetual lacking," and a desire for God to finally "do something" to relieve their miserable conditions. Where is the fruit of joy that God said accompanies those who possess His Spirit and have their eyes fixed truly upon the spiritual purposes of God?

An easy defense of the status quo is to claim that until God "fixes something," I cannot possibly be expected to be joyful. Yet what did Jesus Christ say?

And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, But he shall receive *an hundredfold now in this time*, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, *with persecutions*; and in the world to come eternal life (Mark 10:29–30) [emphasis mine throughout].

The promises of God are not only for joy in the Kingdom to come, although that certainly is the only goal that really matters in the end. Christ said that His children would indeed experience good things *even now*. The promise was not that we would be "persecution free." No, He said that we would be blessed *an hundredfold now, with persecutions!* How is that possible? Mainly, it is all a matter of our frame of mind. We are talking about a joy that bubbles up in us no matter what our physical burdens may be, because we truly take comfort in our blessed roles in God's glorious Plan. When we come to understand that we are the most blessed peoples upon this earth because of this calling, there is a wellspring of joy tapped that can vanquish any of the bad feelings that result from living in this evil world and suffering persecutions both within and without of ourselves.

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).

Where is our good cheer? If it is absent, beware, because we are in great danger.

Never Accept the Status Quo

It is not just enough to say that we know we "need to do better." Very often, we persist in our state of depression and despondency, never really *casting off* the "mental funk" that we find ourselves in. The problem is, if we fail to overcome this downtrodden frame of mind, sooner or later it will wear us down and result in our falling away from the Truth.

Because thou servedst not the LORD thy God *with joyfulness, and with gladness of heart, for the abundance of all things*; Therefore shalt thou serve thine enemies which the LORD shall send against thee, in hunger, and in thirst, and in nakedness, and in want of all things: and he shall put a yoke of iron upon thy neck, until he have destroyed thee (Deuteronomy 28:47–48).

Why would God "pile on" by giving us even more curses, when we are already struggling so much with depression and a sense of hopelessness? The truth is, that is not what He does at all! We suffer the loss of God's favor and special protections when we sin. But if we are only *gritting our teeth* to "keep the Law," sooner or later, we will get weary in well-doing and abandon our faithfulness. He will not curse us for experiencing transitory doubts and temporary sadness. The curse comes when we allow those forces to overwhelm us and to separate us from God. Once we separate ourselves, we become a self-fulfilling prophecy of misery and emptiness. If we do not truly come to *love* His Way, we will give it up, sooner or later. That is why it is so critical that we learn to become truly converted in heart and mind. It is the only means to avoid falling into a trap of despair that will lead to our spiritual demise.

A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh (Luke 6:45).

An Anchor to the Soul

How then do we avoid becoming like the world? How do we live lives of real contentment, even while bearing many burdens of heartache, persecution, and the frustrations of our own weaknesses? How do we keep the forces of evil around us from robbing us of real joy? The answer is found in true spiritual conversion. We are talking about a miraculous transition that comes from the power of the Holy Spirit actually helping us to change what we love, and what gives us pleasure. As long as our real pleasures come from the things of the world, we will ever find frustration in trying to hold fast to God's Truth. But

the more we become converted—truly *changed* in how we think and what gives us pleasure—the more the temporal things of this physical life will cease to have such a hold upon us.

Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshly tables of the heart. And such trust have we through Christ to God-ward: Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God (2 Corinthians 3:3–5).

Jesus Christ gave us the perfect example by maintaining His sense of peace and hope, in spite of the torment He experienced in the flesh at the hands of human beings and spiritual forces around Him. It is easy to be happy when everything goes our way. Real conversion is proven when we learn to manifest contentment, hope, and an abiding joy in the midst of trouble.

Wherein God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have *a strong consolation*, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: Which hope we have as *an anchor of the soul*, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil (Hebrews 6:17–19).

Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, *let us lay aside every weight*, and *the sin which doth so easily beset us*, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God (Hebrews 12:1–2).

The convocations that are part of this upcoming Holy Day season are God's way of reminding us where our true contentment should lie. If we truly appreciate what we are part of, we are the happiest people on the face of the earth.

Your servant and brother in the Faith,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Jon W. Brisby". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned centrally below the typed name.

Jon W. Brisby