

An Incurable Disease

John W. Ritenbaugh

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Within the past couple of months or so, I read a startling statement. It was startling to me then; it is not so startling to me now. But it was startling because of the way the author began the article. It was on Alzheimer's disease. The author was a doctor, so there was at least some measure of medical authority in his statement. He said this: "Everybody knows somebody who has survived cancer, but nobody knows anybody who has survived Alzheimer's."

Until I read that article, I assumed that Alzheimer's was simply one of those mysterious diseases with a rather strange Germanic name. But I was taken aback that it is presently considered as incurable. If this doctor is correct, it means that if someone has it presently it is considered a pronouncement that the certainty of death from it will follow.

A researcher recently announced through the AMA that he has discovered why no treatment has been discovered. It is partly because it has been treated as though it is one disease when in reality it is *seven* loosely-related diseases. The one-way approach will only work for one of those disease, and there are six others for which a cure needs to be found.

My mother died of Alzheimer's at the age of 93. However, long before her death she knew nobody. She was in her own little world, devised by her mind. Long before her death her memories were very erratic, and her behavior was abnormal to say the least. Living with her in my brother's home was very difficult.

She was in a care facility near my brother's home when she finally died. He was retired and went to see her briefly virtually every day. The last time I saw her while she was still living was about two years before her death. She didn't know me. It was very sad and I wondered how my brother "took it."

Before my brother was able to put her in the care facility, I do know that my sister-in-law (my brother's wife) considered having my mother with Alzheimer's disease and living with them in their home as a trial of the highest order. This is because a person with Alzheimer's behavior is at best unpredictably erratic. My sister-in-law commented to me on several occasions that if, after she (my sister-in-law) dies she ends up going to hell, I need to understand that it was my mother who was responsible for putting her there. Living with my mother with Alzheimer's was difficult.

Last week, Richard made mention that we will pass the twenty-sixth anniversary of the Church of the Great God being established during this past week. I was thinking on that fact later during the week and came to realize that this day, today, is also an anniversary, the first, of an incident, an accident it seemed at the time, much closer to home for the Ritenbaugh family.

Most of you are aware that Evelyn has a health problem. She is afflicted, to the best of our knowledge, with dementia, not Alzheimer's. It was one year ago (actually tomorrow, the 14th) that Evelyn was involved in an accident when she was struck on the head by a descending garage door, which resulted in her suffering a subdural hematoma.

A subdural hematoma occurs when a person is bleeding within the skull more rapidly than the skull is designed by God to disperse the blood to other parts of the body. The pressure builds inside the cranium because of the blood being pumped into the skull, and the pressure begins to shut down the brain's functions, one after the other. Part of the solution is for a surgeon to drill into the side of the person's skull, thus opening a way to relieve the blood pressure on the brain until the body can heal the injury that resulted in the bleeding.

Within a few days after the accident, Evelyn had lost virtually every voluntary function a person normally has, like walking. You do that because you want to and you decide to do. She couldn't walk within a few days because of that pressure there. That is when I took her to the emergency part of the hospital in Pineville to be evaluated. They found out exactly what it was very quickly. The operator diagnosed it perfectly. She was right on. So

we took her and put her in the hospital. The operation only took about an hour to perform, but it took the surgical team about two or three days to make a decision regarding where they were going to drill into her cranium so the pressure could be relieved. Well, they drilled right into her head, right here at the side, and immediately the blood spurted out as soon as an opening was there, and they collected it. I guess they wanted to evaluate it as well.

Evelyn recovered the ability to walk within just a few days. Those voluntary things began to come back very quickly. But things that require a mental process are what she cannot do. Sometimes she remembers something just that quickly. For some reason, she can remember people's names. At the Feast of Tabernacles, I purposefully listened to her, and she knew almost everybody's name that came up to greet her there. But anything that requires a calculation by her brain she cannot do.

Just before services, she and Levi met one another between the seats out here, and she knew immediately that Levi had gotten his hair cut. Why she remembered that, I don't know! But she said, "You got a hair cut," and he said yes, he did.

What Evelyn is suffering from is that she cannot draw a string of words from her memory banks to form a sentence even though the words are still there. This gives me hope. The words are still there. You might wonder how I know the words are still there. You did not hear it, but I heard her. She sang the songs because she was reading them from the book and she remembers and can follow the tune.

I have her read to me every day. She reads 2-3 chapters out of the Bible, and she can read beautifully. She knows the words that are printed on the page, but she cannot think of them and use them to calculate anything that has to do with a response to another person that has asked her a question. She cannot answer the phone any further than to say, "Hello." When we brought her home from the hospital, she could not remember the day of her birth. Everybody knows their birth date, don't they? She couldn't remember it, and neither could she respond. Every question that came from the people early on from the hospital—she had to identify herself by telling them when her birth

date was. They do that in order to ensure that she is the person they are speaking to. After a while, I worked it out with the hospital that they would take my response on the telephone. We got that worked out.

Words no longer just come to her in a cohesive, intelligent way. But God has given her and me a great gift in that her disposition, despite her inability to communicate, is just about as sunny, pleasant, and calm as one could wish for in such a situation. That is far different from my mother's mind, for she was erratic, vindictive, hard to live with, and of course, only set on what her mind told her to do.

As I was thinking on this topic earlier in the week, it came to me how much a parallel exists between Alzheimer's and our carnal nature. Our carnal nature is a sentence of death. Alzheimer's dominates the mind so that it regresses and is frozen in place, thinking about nothing of value that advances anyone's quality of life. That is why it is a killer. The person becomes useless.

Our carnal nature holds us in slavery to itself, seeking self-satisfaction in multitudes of earthy pursuits apart from God's purpose for creating us so that real maturity is never truly advanced. Thus, like Alzheimer's, it too is a certain death sentence. There is no breaking the bondage to certain death apart from God's redemption through His calling and the infusion of His Holy Spirit in order to stop our decline into the lake of fire.

So please, don't fear saying anything to Evelyn. She won't chew you out; she doesn't know the words, or how to chew you out anymore. She actually really enjoys being talked to and she struggles hard to find words that she may be able to say back to you, and maybe she needs that exercise at this time. At any rate, please don't avoid her because you are not going to hurt her or do anything that she won't permit.