

# Church of God, The Eternal

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## Learning to Evaluate Our Thoughts

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Greetings to You All, Brethren:

The fall feasts are already behind us. On His Holy Days, God has again enriched us in spiritual material so that we can continue, with the help of His Holy Spirit, to strive for perfection. Winter approaches: a season when days are shorter, evenings longer—a very convenient time for longer meditation, by which we can become more cognizant of personal weaknesses that still need to be overcome and fissures we must fill-in to develop the kind of serenity and confidence which God expects of us when agitation manifests itself all around us. For in all honesty, brethren, who can shout "victory"?

Who can, under any circumstance, perfectly master all the thoughts which pass through one's mind? Thinking is a faculty which can help us to grow and be pleasing to God, if we are able to control it. But the power of thinking may also turn us from the Truth and destroy us, if we do not make the effort to weigh all the thoughts of our minds and hearts on the scale of the absolute standard which God gave to us. Is there anything easier than the proclivity to be swayed and led by thoughts which can hurt others as well as oneself? In Proverbs 15:26, we read the following: "The thoughts of the wicked ['evil thoughts'—French Bible] are an abomination to the Lord . . ." Such thoughts lead us into the way of perdition. Jesus Christ tells us that ". . . out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies" (Matt. 15:19). Evil thoughts are the beginning of a hardened heart—a heart unresponsive to God's way.

We all know the story of Ananias and his wife Sapphira. They sold a possession, the full price of which they had promised to lay at the apostles' feet. However, they kept back part of the price and then conspired to lie to the apostles. How did they come to such a decision? Notice Peter's question: "Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost [Spirit], and to keep back part of the price of the land?" (Acts 5:3). Let us not forget Christ's words: ". . . out of the heart proceed evil thought . . ." Satan exerts a direct influence on the human heart.

How does he do it?

All that Satan offers is attractively wrapped. And all the natural thoughts of a man seem right in his own eyes—so right that he always believes the outcome will be successful, regardless of the decision which he makes.

The example of Ananias and Sapphira teaches us a significant lesson. For, as a result of allowing their hearts to conceive such a thought, they rendered a decision which was fatal to both of them.

Through His servant Isaiah, God said: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways . . ." (Isa. 55:8). Evil thoughts—those which, conceived by the natural mind, are right in man's eyes—are the cause of many problems and difficulties in our lives. As we learn from the example recorded in Acts 5, we cannot (indeed must not) trust the thoughts which our minds naturally conceive—even though the resultant reasonings seem right, logical and acceptable.

To be positive and sound, our thoughts must be *tried by* God's absolute, revealed *standard*. They must be controlled and guided by God's Holy Spirit. Let us not forget God's statement: ". . . my thoughts are not your thoughts . . . . For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isa. 55:8–9).

One thing is certain: If we want to use wisely and be edified by all the knowledge we were given on God's Holy Days—if, during this coming winter, we do not want to waste the well of knowledge God gave to us, or let it go dry—we must first learn to control the natural, debasing thoughts which proceed out of our tortuous hearts. Our thinking must be in agreement with God's way of doing things.

How can we rectify our natural thoughts?

The Apostle Paul tells us: "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh" (2 Cor. 10:3). So, our war is spiritual. Every day, at every moment, we must watch what is being conceived in our hearts or is passing through our minds. Paul continues: "Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God" (verse 5). Remember that Jesus Christ tells us, ". . . out of the heart proceed evil thoughts . . ." In the heart is the conception—the embryo—of each thought. Next comes the reasoning, which is nourished by the mind. Finally, it is brought to light by the tongue or by the act. Therefore we read, in Proverbs 30:32: ". . . if thou hast thought evil, lay thine hand upon thy mouth." Among the physical members, the tongue is one of the most difficult

to tame. As a called and chosen servant of God Almighty, Paul says: "Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ."

The called of God must be overcomers. They must not let their hearts give birth to thoughts which are contrary to the purpose for which God called them. But how often, during the past year, have we been enslaved by negative, evil thoughts—which, because we were not able to stop them immediately, led to all kinds of reasonings detrimental to our spiritual health? We should honestly and carefully weigh this matter. For, each year we see people who, though they received the pearl of great price were later pulled out of the church because they failed to manifest enough effort to control their thoughts and reasonings—and consequently rendered decisions which led them into great difficulties. Brethren, let us remember that our fight is spiritual. We must consistently cast down the reasonings which exalt themselves against the knowledge of God. God has made the necessary power available to us. We must *use* it to fight and overcome. God wants us to become men and women able to exercise the mastery necessary to keep every thought captive to obedience in Christ. With divine help we must be able to overcome and quench all the negative thoughts which develop within us.

How?

In Philippians 2:5 we read: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." Christ is our perfect example. Though living in the flesh, He had pure thoughts. He knew how to control His heart and mind so that He did not fulfill His own will or display His own thoughts. He did His Father's will. God the Father gave Him the necessary strength and power to exercise such mastery under any circumstance. Likewise, God has given us His Holy Spirit so that we can have in us the mind of His Son Jesus Christ.

How are we going to begin this fight—quenching the evil thoughts which develop in us?

First, we must *recognize* evil thoughts so that we do not become enslaved by them. In Romans 6:16 we read the following: "Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey . . . ?" Thoughts are our masters. Therefore, it is important to know whether good or bad thoughts pass through our minds. We shall be the servants of either good or evil. If evil dwells in us, it will take deeper root and be harder to eradicate.

Galatians 5:19–23 lists the fruits whereby we may differentiate between good and evil thoughts. Every thought brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ bears the good

fruits listed in verses 22–23. Whereas, evil thoughts produce all the fruits listed in verses 19–21. Under the terms of the New Covenant, it is not just the product or act which is sin. For, sin *begins* with the evil thought. Christ makes this plain in Matthew 5:28. To foster or keep alive evil thoughts is to break the Law.

Second, then, we must manifest the willpower to *fight* evil thoughts. James 1:13–15 speaks of the development of that which the human heart conceives. The longer we tarry, the more difficult and painful the fight becomes. And since an evil thought is already a sin, two things are required to achieve victory: 1) Repent of having allowed such a thought to develop within one's mind. 2) Make the necessary effort to eradicate the thought from one's mind. In Psalm 119:60 David says: "I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments." Many realize they occasionally foster evil thoughts, and they regret such behavior. But to regret is not to repent, unless it is accompanied by the will to *act*—to bring about a permanent and definitive change.

Finally, let us *be vigilant*. Let us stay spiritually alert and watchful, remembering that the heart with which we were born is deceitful above all things. We must carefully evaluate all which passes through our minds, so that we can know the nature and scope of our thoughts—whether we shall be edified or destroyed by them.

Brethren, God promises to be with us and help us. He makes the necessary power available to us and commands us to overcome. Being overcomers requires effort on our part.

To bear evil thoughts in one's mind is to play with sin, deceiving oneself with wrong reasonings and thus becoming guilty in God's sight. Evil thoughts pollute our minds, harden our hearts, and keep us from reasoning and reflecting soundly. They cause us to waste the precious time which God grants for our growth in His Truth. They prevent us from being true brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ, walking together in this magnificent way which God revealed to His people. And they can keep us from entering into God's Kingdom. Therefore, let us bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ. Let us show unto God our full appreciation for the strength which He makes available to us, and how happy we are to use that power to fulfill the purpose for which He called us.

Let us ". . . abide in him [Christ]; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming" (1 John 2:28). Verse 24 tells us how to maintain such a relationship with Christ. It is through obedience to the pure and infallible Truth of God. Such obedience is not adapted to that which we think is right under given circumstances. Rather, it holds captive every thought in the Truth—the Word of God, which does not change and cannot be broken.

Brethren, let us not be weary in working toward our salvation. Let us not be weary in praying for one another. Let our requests (needs) be made known unto God. For, if we do the will of our Father who is in heaven, we shall not be as orphans. "And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds ['thoughts'—French Bible] through Christ Jesus" (Ph'p. 4:7).

With all my affection,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'J. Aviolat', written in black ink.

Jean Aviolat