

Church of God, The Eternal

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Spiritual Endurance

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Dear Brethren:

Greetings from Mindanao, Philippines. Once again I thank God for this privilege given to me to reach you through this *Monthly Letter*. I wish and pray to God that all of us will remain faithful to Him in spite of all the trials and adversities we are facing as we yield to and obey Him. I hope all of us will endure to the end.

When we commit our lives to Jesus Christ and go into that watery grave of baptism, we have to be willing to endure unto the end. Jesus was very concerned that anyone contemplating this lifesaving covenant count the cost before entering into this awesome obligation. He said in Luke 14:28–30, "For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish."

The first time God opened our minds to His precious Truth we were filled with excitement with what we had discovered. If you were like I, you could not wait to share these truths with family and friends. We could not understand why they could not "see" what we had. Often this got us into trouble. Seldom do we realize that we first attempt to move like a sprinter—with blinding speed. Sprinters run as fast and hard as they can for short distances. But the Christian race cannot be run as a sprinter. "Our race" is a marathon. It takes a different kind of runner to compete in a marathon. Speed is secondary. Endurance is the key. Many came into God's Church scorching the trail as a Derby champion. They could not maintain that breakneck pace. They broke down and fell by the way side, while the steady, plodding, converted members stayed the course, enduring to the end of the race.

We have to endure to the end. While we tend to think this means until His feet stand on the Mount of Olives, we cannot afford to wait that long to evaluate. Many of our fellow firstfruits have already met their end. Many of them had no idea of the very day of their end. Very recently, here in the Philippines, our church office manager died as a result of a stroke. We do not know when that end will come. That's why enduring to the end must be a daily, on-going process—our top priority. The Bible has several examples of heroes who have endured to the end.

Abraham patiently endured, "For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself, Saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee. And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise" (Hebrews 6:13–15).

Moses endured, fearing not Pharaoh:

By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible (Hebrews 11:24–27).

There are many others, but to top them all is our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Willingly He endured, on our behalf, the agonizing death of the cross (stake or tree).

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. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds (Hebrews 12:1–3).

We must not forget that our eternal reward is only possible upon our enduring to the end. "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him" (James 1:12).

In Mark, chapter four, we have the parable of the sower of the seed, which teaches a powerful lesson in enduring to the end. In verses 3–8, Jesus speaks of seed falling by the way side and being devoured by birds; seed falling on stony ground where they could not take root; seed that fell among thorns and was choked out as they grew, and seed that fell on good ground and bare much fruit. Jesus then explained the parable to His disciples since they did not understand (verses 14–20).

The seed is the gospel. The seed by the way side is heard and understood, but Satan swoops in like a bird of prey and devours it. The evil one will use any person, any device, whether subtle or obvious, to devour, distort, and twist the precious Word of God and His Church. Satan uses people to sow discord and discourage little ones in the faith, and he is often successful in devouring seeds, causing the newly called not to endure to the end.

The seed on stony ground is like those we talked about earlier. They begin with the speed of a sprinter but lack the endurance of a plodder. In God's Church I have encountered many who were baptized before but endured only a short while. Many were mainly impressed by a talented speaker who said something with which they agreed. Others were simply interested only in being someone within the organization. Their foundation was on something other than the Rock, which is Christ, and His Word, the Holy Bible. So when they meet certain trials and adversities they stop enduring.

Some seed grew up and did well for a while but then was choked out by thorns. Jesus said, they are deceived by the world's riches and turn their backs against Christ. These are those observing God's commandments but their hearts are focused on the world's riches. When Christ tests them and their possessions are at stake, they will likewise stop enduring.

And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet? Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me. But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions (Matthew 19:16–22).

Then there's the seed that fell on good ground. Seed firmly rooted in the Truth of God, nurtured by the living water of the word, growing and bearing much good fruit. That's where we all want to be, rooted solidly, safe from the birds of prey, free of thorns, building righteous character, growing in grace and knowledge. Constant and enduring in prayer and study.

Let us always remember the sobering words of Jesus in Matthew 20:16, "for many be called, but few chosen." Those that are chosen are they that endure unto the end.

Your brother in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mario Y. Roque', with a stylized, cursive script.

Mario Y. Roque