

Church of God, The Eternal

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A Question of Priorities

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Dear Brethren:

Once again I am greeting you all on behalf of the brethren here in Mindanao, Philippines. Our prayer is that you are always in good health and prospering by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The burden of this letter, brethren, is about priorities. I cannot forget a discussion about this subject which took place several years ago, during our high school days. The question runs this way: You are on a boat sailing with your wife and your mother. Suddenly, trouble happens and the boat is about to sink. Everybody must jump into the water. Who is your priority to save from drowning? Your mother or your wife, and why? There were several reasons why some would save their mother first, and several reasons why some would save their wife first. The discussion was very lively when our teacher called the attention of one of our classmates sitting in the back row named Pedro, and asked him the question. Pedro answered promptly and said: Neither of the two but I will save my own life first. The discussion ended with laughter.

It is true, brethren, in this life our main priority is self-preservation. But what did the Lord Jesus Christ say in Mark 8:35? "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it."

Let us see some examples of God's people in the Bible concerning their priorities.

God came first in Abraham's life. If you had a child whom you loved with all your being—if he was your only child, and you had eagerly waited and prayed for him for years—would you be willing to give him up?

Abraham was put to such a test. Humanly speaking, it did not make much sense. Why did God give Abraham such a seemingly cruel order, saying, "Take now thy son, thine only son

Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering" (Genesis 22:2)?

Abraham must have spent a sleepless night struggling with his thoughts wondering why God demanded of him such a sacrifice. He loved God for sure, but he also loved his son, Isaac, very much. He had to choose between his love toward God and his love toward his son. The choice is all the more difficult since he did not understand its purpose. Nevertheless, whatever his thoughts and concerns, he set his priorities right. "And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him (Genesis 22:3).

Would we have done this? Would we have obeyed God to the point of being willing to sacrifice our only son whom we loved? Abraham passed the test.

What about us? Does God come first in our lives, before anyone else, even members of our family? If we cannot put God first in our lives today, how can we put Him first tomorrow, when things will get tougher?

What about David's priorities?

King David and Saul had totally different attitudes. David's attitude made him a man after God's own heart, whereas Saul's caused him to be rejected. Have we ever considered that one of David's most important qualities for outweighing his mistakes was his sense of priorities?

Saul was jealous of David and had gathered 3,000 men out of all Israel to seek David and kill him. Strangely enough, the circumstances changed, offering David a unique chance to capture and kill Saul when the latter was resting in a cave. What an exceptional opportunity! After all, the two men were at war with each other—Saul had proven himself to be merciless.

"And the men of David said unto him, Behold the day of which the LORD said unto thee, Behold, I will deliver thine enemy into thine hand, that thou mayest do to him as it shall seem good unto thee" (1 Samuel 24:4). It would have been only natural, humanly, for David to kill Saul and justify himself by saying that God had promised to make his enemies fall into his hands. But David did not reason that way. He arose and stealthily cut off the skirt of Saul's robe. And afterward David's heart smote him, because he had cut off Saul's skirt (verses 4–5).

Why? Why should David's heart smite him? He did not commit any crime! No, but on his list of priorities, obedience to God came first. He said to his men, "The LORD forbid that I should do this thing unto my master, the LORD'S anointed, to stretch forth mine hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the LORD" (verse 6).

There you are! Even though Saul wanted to kill him, David refused to do any injury to the king. Respecting God's anointed came before fighting for his own life. David's tremendous attitude is an example to all of us today. Is there any wonder why he will be a king in the soon-coming Kingdom of God? As for Saul, he carnally sought his own selfish interest, seeking after power and exaltation. That is why God rejected him.

Do we remember the circumstances of our calling? How did we first react? Did we hesitate to turn away from the world, finding it hard to choose between those of our household and Christ? What was our attitude then—and what is it now? Unfortunately, some are still looking back and trying to pursue their personal ambitions before deciding to follow Christ. Time is running short. We must rearrange our priorities before it is too late. If we put first things first, God will always take care of our need. This does not mean we should neglect our part and stop taking care of our household. It simply means that we are to put first things first—be filled with God and His work. We must endeavor to please Him with our attitude and growth as Christ said, "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matthew 6:33).

Our baptism was symbolic of our decision to put God first in our lives, no matter the circumstances. Do we still feel the same way today? We accepted the condition to love God more than anyone or anything else, with all our hearts. And with all our souls and with all our minds (Matthew 22:37). This is the greatest commandment of all. Does it have first priority in our lives? And after that, does the second great commandment—loving your neighbor as yourself—have all priority in our lives (verses 38–39)?

As we can see, even love has priorities! First we must love God, and then love our neighbor. This does not mean we should neglect loving our neighbor because we love God first. It is just a matter of priority. Actually, if we really love God—if we obey His commandment and do His will—we automatically love our neighbor, because we cannot love God without loving our neighbor. "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" (1 John 4:20). We must remember not to neglect anything on our list of priorities.

Obey God rather than man.

The disciples of Christ, before receiving the Holy Spirit, did not have the necessary power and faith to fight the enemy. They forsook their master and fled when the Roman soldier arrested Him. The promise they had made to Christ a few hours earlier, to never forsake Him, was not engraved on their list of priorities.

But after their conversion, after receiving the Holy Spirit during the day of Pentecost as pictured by the recent Holy Day we observed, the disciples learned their priorities. Faithful to their mission, they preached the Gospel, despite threats and persecution.

On one occasion when the disciples were brought before the council, the high priest condemned them, saying, "Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name?" But they answered, "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:27–29).

A question of priorities! The disciples lives were at stake, but they were willing to follow Christ's instruction even if it meant death. They had learned that "He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it" (Matthew 10:39).

On our own list of priorities, do we put God, His church and His Gospel before our own lives? Or do we perhaps desperately cling to our own lives for fear of losing them? Remember Christ's words! Unless we get our priorities straight, we may end up losing our lives!

Your brother in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mario Y. Roque', written in a cursive style.

Mario Y. Roque