

Church of God, The Eternal

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Learning to Evaluate Our Thoughts

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Dear Brothers and Sisters:

Very affectionate greetings to you all. A whole year has already gone by since my last letter: time flies!

As in every past year, there were times when we rejoiced with those who were rejoicing and we were sorrowful with those who were grieving. Indeed, as the Bible says, when someone in the Body is suffering, all the members suffer with him. Such experiences must bring us into a closer relationship than ever with our Father who is constantly at work and infinitely merciful. The examples which we can read in God's Word show very clearly that anything which has value—spiritually speaking—is not easily acquired. The building of a character which is filled with the righteousness of God is not easily done. However, the results are well worth all the determination and all the efforts possible. That is why God, in His wisdom, is allowing great tests. He wants to know whether we have enough resolve to remain faithful and submissive to Him, whatever the intensity or the length of the trial.

Therefore, what is important in our daily living is doing what is right in God's sight; it is asking Him to purify us because we do not want our hearts and minds to entertain concepts, thoughts or practices which are not in conformity with what God expects of us. ". . . bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (1 Corinthians 10:5). So we are not only judged according to our actions, but also according to our thoughts. And the more we allow in our minds anything which is contrary to the instructions of God, the more injurious to us it becomes—the more we fail spiritually and the weaker our faith gets. There are many passages in God's Word

which show that we must honor God not by following our own ways and our own thoughts but by fulfilling His will.

Then the question which everyone must ask himself is the following one: do I live according to the will of God? My thoughts, my words, my behavior, my work, my leisure activities and so on, are all these things in conformity with the will of God? Out of habit we think that what we say or do is right in God's sight, but is it really? Do we not follow—sometimes out of weakness or discouragement—our own thoughts, our own ways, what seems right in our own eyes, though we know that God says to us, ". . . my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways . . ." (Isaiah 55:8). So if we are not impregnated with the thoughts and the ways of God through His Holy Spirit, we can be full of good intentions but easily choose solutions which seem right to us because they please our natures or because they do not try our faith.

The story of a called one of God was recorded for us in the Bible: a man who had to go through many turbulent circumstances before he resolved to do what God required of him. It is the life of Jonah, who sought to evade his responsibilities. It is an example which shows how dangerous it is not to obey what God commands, because sooner or later we will fall into God's hands. Many of the circumstances which Jonah experienced because of his attitude and behavior can illustrate what many of the called experience in their lives. Jonah was called to be a servant of God; likewise every called human being who fulfills his responsibilities according to God's instructions is a servant of God.

Therefore let us draw a few teachings from that example.

Jonah did not want to do what God expected of him. He thought that he could get by if he fled from the presence of the Lord: he embarked on a ship. But lo and behold God unleashed a mighty tempest.

Likewise, how many times do we experience mental tempests and adverse circumstances merely because we want to do our own will and act according to our own ideas—thus fleeing from the obedience which we owe to God? In the book of Jonah, chapter one, verse five, we see a very interesting point. While the tempest is raging, the mariners—who do not know the true God—immediately appeal to their gods. But what does the servant of God do? Instead of feeling culpable and praying to God, he is sleeping down in the ship. It is what many of the called do. Instead of asking themselves pertinent questions when they are caught in the tempest of

difficulties, they rationalize and justify themselves because they do not want to recognize their guilt toward God; so they fall asleep spiritually.

It is easy for us to be like Jonah and go down into the ship which we create in our own minds so that we are not too tossed by our circumstances; it is easy for us to justify our situations through our own reasonings instead of humbling ourselves before God, entreating Him for forgiveness and being able to live as God requires of His elect. We see that even the shipmaster—who was a heathen—became indignant at the behavior of Jonah—a called one of God! Thus the crew of the ship was quicker to call upon their gods in order to know why such conditions were prevailing. Jonah was not concerned at all, yet he knew that he was evading the duties which God had given to him. Through his reasonings he was able to justify himself and set his conscience at rest.

Do we sometimes behave in the same way? Jonah reveals who he is; he says, ". . . I am an Hebrew; and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land" (Jonah 1:9). He thought that he feared God or he said so to justify his behavior. Had he really shown reverence for God, he would have done what God was asking, he would not have fled. Whereas the mariners were terribly frightened when they heard of the God of the Hebrews; they said to Jonah, "Why hast thou done this?"

It is a question which could be addressed to many of the called in our time, as we see how many foolish decisions are made to avoid doing the will of God.

Then when the mariners saw that their ship was about to be wrecked, they began to cry to the true God, because they realized that their gods had not changed the conditions in any way. Can we grasp the spiritual significance of this?

We make decisions which we consider good because they are based on human conceptions which please our natures. But there is no improvement; on the contrary, things get worse and worse until we come to recognize our mistakes, confess them before God, repent of them and be determined to fulfill the responsibilities which God gave to us.

Because of Jonah's decision, God unleashed a mighty tempest. Jonah was cast into the sea, swallowed up by a fish and eventually vomited out upon the dry land. At this point God reminds him of what he must do. Now Jonah is finally willing to take action as God expects of him. But what a lot of circumstances he had to go

through just to come to the starting point, for his mission is not accomplished yet. The only progress which he has made so far is the realization that he had better obey God.

So many of the called have to experience trying circumstances before they realize that the best course is to do with faith what God requires of them. And when we come to recognize that in our lives, we too are at the starting point; we still have to live God's way by faith as He expects of us: that is our mission. "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10). How often God reminds us of what we must do and how. But how many tempests must we go through until we accept to do God's will—and to do it with continuity? Everyone must examine his own life and see whether he willingly does what God requires of him.

In chapter three of Jonah, we see how the people of Nineveh reacted to the warning of God's servant. The people of Nineveh believed God and their repentance was sincere. God saw that they were turning from their evil ways. The prophet Nahum tells us that they were people whose lives were filled with lying and violence; they were incessantly practicing robbery. Yet those people believed the one whom God sent. What a contrast to the people of God in our time who were warned over many years: most of them did not believe the commissioned servant who spared no strength and set the example of steadfastness in the faith until the end of his life. How many will there be who will have to experience a terrible tempest someday in order to get back to the starting point and finally be willing to live up to God's requirements—to prove their faithfulness to His Truth so that they can inherit salvation? God is, ". . . not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). So the contrast is that the people of Nineveh repented sincerely, they immediately trusted the warning of Jonah and God did not have to destroy them. Whereas Jonah—who was a called one of God—showed a lack of trust and was unfaithful; he wanted to evade the instructions and the duties which God had given to him. He was even angry because the people whom he had to warn repented and wanted to live God's way. Thus the people of Nineveh did not need to undergo the experiences to which Jonah had to be subjected in order to finally submit his will to God's. That did not teach him a lesson for long however, since shortly afterward he did not agree with God. He disapproved of God's showing His mercy to the people of Nineveh who had sincerely repented. But God said to him, "Doest thou well to be angry?"

The story of Jonah is a marvelous example showing God's patience, mercy and goodness toward His called ones. Is He not longsuffering toward His people in our time? He is constantly speaking to us and exhorting us, saying that we are much better off submitting our wills to His and fulfilling His will as He requires of us. For by dint of being obstinate and resisting God, one ends up being of all men most miserable emotionally. This is what the example of Jonah as well as the history of ancient Israel teaches us.

Since God accepted the repentance of the inhabitants of Nineveh—who were heathen—there is no doubt that He will accept the sincere repentance of His people. But this example shows us that sometimes the called of God find it more difficult to see their sins, repent of them and turn from their evil ways than the heathen. God sees everything and it is impossible for a called one to escape His presence. Therefore let us apply ourselves to carrying out our responsibilities according to the instructions of God. "But if ye will not do so, behold, ye have sinned against the Lord: and be sure your sin will find you out" (Numbers 32:23).

God is fair! And Jonah's behavior and state of mind picture the continual disobedience of the people of God to His commands and their vain efforts to justify themselves and escape the presence of God. If God is afflicting us because we have not come to fulfill His purpose as He expects of us, then let us learn to recognize it and let us manifest a right frame of mind as described to us by the prophet Micah: "I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him, until he plead my cause, and execute judgment for me: he will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold his righteousness" (Micah 7:9).

When we persist in our own ways, in a manner of thinking which is contrary to the thoughts of Christ, and we hold to a mental orientation which drives us to circumvent God's instructions, be unfaithful to His way of life and shun the responsibilities which He gave to us, we are under an influence which comes from our enemy, Satan, and makes us frustrated and unhappy human beings. But if we are humble enough to recognize our wrongs, our weaknesses, our shortcomings, our occasional lack of faith and we turn from the evil way on which we have embarked—proving to God by our self-discipline that we want to do His will with His help, and in faith live up to the requirements which are indispensable to the inheritance of salvation—then God continues to heed those who fear Him and do not flee from His authority. As we read, "And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him" (Malachi 3:17).

It is certainly not easy to perform our tasks in the world in which we live, but it must be accomplished—with the help of God's Spirit—and our work will ultimately be made perfect. It is then that our struggle against the works of the flesh will be over and we will enjoy a great and marvelous rest. God will grant it to us after we have borne all the trials of this life. Therefore let us make the firm resolve to endure, in order to receive the promised reward: sharing eternity together without having to fear separation anymore and being eternally in the service of God our Father and His Son Jesus Christ. What glory! And how beneficial to all humanity!

My regards and my affection to the entire Church.

Your worker in Christ,

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

Jean Aviolat