

Church of God, The Eternal

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True Repentance and the Purpose of Suffering

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

January 2000

The affection which we show to one another by praying one for another is a great help and a great comfort to us all as it will be soon to all human beings on this earth. Therefore, as the Apostle Paul said, "Praying always . . . watching thereunto with all perseverance" (Ephesians 6:18).

The farther we walk on the road of life, the more we realize that suffering is part of man's life. There is suffering which results from sin, and for us who have been called there is suffering which is to bring us to the perfect stature of Jesus Christ.

As soon as the first couple who lived on this earth separated from God to enter into an atrocious marriage with the forces of evil, they both had to encounter most trying and distressing consequences. Their first son became an enemy of God and killed his brother who was a lover of God's way.

What picture our present society gives us! I read in the paper that there are 11.2 million orphans as a result of the AIDS epidemic. Then how many are there because of wars and all kinds of catastrophes? Besides there are those who suffer from all kinds of incurable diseases—incurable by the hand of man—or from having had limbs amputated because of the foolishness of man who is full of genius for spoiling his own life and the lives of others. All that mass of human beings who go through a life which is so filled with suffering, all those orphans, are they more responsible, more evil than the others? Jesus Christ answers, "I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3).

By nature we are all rebellious against God's way. We must therefore repent of what happens naturally in our hearts and in our minds—reasonings which seem right to us, thoughts which run through our minds and drive us into speaking words which God does not like to hear or into behaving in a way which does not please God. Jesus Christ who can read hearts and minds says to us: "except ye repent, ye shall ALL likewise perish" (emphasis ours).

To repent is not merely asking God for forgiveness when we are aware of the mistake which we made or the bad attitude which we manifested. To repent is to change our way of thinking, living and behaving. It is to allow Christ's thoughts to take their place in our hearts and our minds. It is to accept in our lives His motivation, His attitude, His obedience toward God's way as the Apostle Peter explains to us: "Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin; That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God" (1 Peter 4:1–2). This is the result of true repentance. And if that repentance is not manifest in our lives, Jesus Christ says that we shall all likewise perish. "For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps" (1 Peter 2:20–21).

Those who wrongly seek a way out of this suffering which they called experience as we follow Christ's steps do not come to repentance as is expected. They want to save their lives. As Jesus Christ says, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it" (Luke 9:23–24).

What does He mean by denying oneself? The Apostle Peter gives us an example:

Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous: Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing. For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile: Let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it. For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil. And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good? But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye (1 Peter 3:8–14).

As long as we are not able to fully live these requirements, we must repent. It is not in justifying the self, creating divisions, or manifesting an attitude of independence that we will truly be repentant and able then to inherit eternal life.

All around us we see a young generation who suffers terribly from the consequences of sin. God is allowing humankind to have more than their fill of their own ways, of the consequences of their own actions. But the day will come when a glorious King will deliver them from such agony. Will we take part in that deliverance? Providing we can accept godly sorrow which produces a repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret, says the Apostle Paul. But the sorrow of the world—of the ways of this world—produces death.

Let us not be of those who, professing themselves to be wise become fools, simply because, after having been enlightened and having tasted the good Word of God, they revel again in their own thoughts and in their own ways and eventually find pleasure in behavior which displeases God. The Apostle Peter tells us that God "hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust" (2 Peter 1:3–4). How does one called of God come to the stage of forgetting such a duty? By trusting his own reasonings he fails to recognize that for which he needs to repent. In his mind his own way becomes God's way. He thinks he is living the Truth of God. But, the fruits borne in the process of time prove that he deceives himself.

The Apostle Peter continues: "And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (vv. 5–8). Do we put forth daily the effort which is required of us for those things to be lived abundantly in our lives? If we judge our lives by the light of the life of Christ, it is not difficult for us to understand that repentance is a daily duty. To know our Lord Jesus Christ is to see the beauty of that life which He lived in His own flesh body despite the terrible sufferings which He endured for us while we were all sinners. To repent is to want His own life to be lived in us, accepting the need to bear the marks of His sufferings. "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:10–11). That repentance which is expected of us by Jesus Christ requires a severe self-examination and an intense spiritual activity so that the wonderful fruits of the life of Christ may be in us and abound.

The Apostle Peter adds, "But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins" (2 Peter 1:9). What attitude then does he manifest toward those who suffer for the righteousness of God and show sincere repentance? The prophet Isaiah speaks of it:

Hear the word of the Lord, you who tremble at his word: "Your brethren who hate you and cast you out for my name's sake have said, 'Let the Lord be glorified, that we may see your joy'; but it is they who shall be put to shame (Isaiah 66:5, *Revised Standard Version*).

They shall be put to shame! It is only a matter of time as determined by God.

Remember Job's friends who were claiming that Job would not have had to suffer as he did if he had not greatly sinned. They were convinced that their orientation was in accordance with God's thinking. And yet at the end of Job's trial God said to them: ". . . my servant Job shall pray for you: for him will I accept: lest I deal with you after your folly, in that ye have not spoken of me the thing which is right, like my servant Job" (Job 42:8). Though they were convinced that they had spoken the right thing, in God's sight their words were only folly. ". . . the Lord accepted Job's prayer" (Job 42:9, *Revised Standard Version*). Job held fast his integrity and he forgave his friends their folly.

Nothing is easier than picking up our Bibles and saying that we agree with the Word of God. It is what many people in this world do. If that were sufficient in God's sight, the world would not be in the condition it is. Neither would the people of God be scattered as they are today. God wants His Word to be lived in our lives; God wants us to live it, trusting Him. Job's friends had to do what God commanded them to do so that they would not perish from their folly. Jesus Christ says to us: "except you repent [except you change so that the fruits of the life of Christ abound in you], you shall all likewise perish."

Every human being needs to be corrected by this Word which we were given to understand and by the trials which we go through. That is why we must carefully evaluate our thoughts, our lives, the circumstances which we experience, the reactions which we manifest, the decisions which we make, so that we can manifest that repentance which God expects of us for the inheritance of salvation. "He that keepeth the commandment keepeth his own soul; but he that despiseth his ways shall die" (Proverbs 19:16) or "He who does not watch over his way will die" (*French Bible*). Let us accept the need to be attentive to what God tells us and to the circumstances which He allows us to go through in order to be purified and found qualified—by the tests to which we are subjected. Let us have that orientation which David manifested when he said, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psalms 139:23–24). It is in asking God to reveal to us certain things which are not honorable in our lives that we will be able to be truly repentant. "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy" (Proverbs 28:13). How do we cover our sins? By justifying ourselves, by lessening the importance of the mistakes we make, by being deliberately blind to certain weaknesses in our own lives, or by refusing to face reality—to recognize it and to repent. There is not a human being who does not have sins or weaknesses to overcome. The difference is that some cover them or justify them by pointing a finger at the mistakes of somebody else, whereas others confess them before God, repent, and make the necessary changes in their lives in order to obtain mercy and the forgiveness of God.

Let us remember the response of Paul on the way to Damascus. He thought he was doing what was right in God's sight by persecuting the Church of God. But when Christ showed him that his orientation was not God's, he said, "Lord, what do you want me to do?" He did not take the risk of fighting against God—opposing the will of God.

"Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth" (Romans 14:22). How can one condemn oneself? By what one allows in his own life. All the called will claim they adhere to God's Word. But do the things which they allow in their lives—their attitude, their frame of mind and the way in which they obey certain laws of God—do these please God or do those people condemn themselves by what they allow? Let us not forget that living in accordance with the Truth creates the unity of the people of God. The Apostle Paul is saying here, happy is the man who lives according to the will of God—who repents. And how does he live that way? With faith! "The faith that you have, keep between yourself and God" (Romans 14:22, *Revised Standard Version*). He does not need to concern himself with whether others do it or not, for the day will come when everyone will give account of himself. By that day some will have repented while others will have condemned themselves by that which they have allowed. Because in that which they allow, faith is lacking, the fruits of the life of Christ in their lives are insufficient or have not come to maturity.

So let us be upright, honest with the Word of God. Let us follow the example of Job, who under trial said, "I have treasured in my bosom the words of his mouth" (*Revised Standard Version*) or "I have made my will *bend* to the words of his mouth" (*French Bible*, Job 23:12). Job refused to let the circumstances which he needed to encounter in his life cause dross of unbelief, slackening, bitterness, or rebellion. On the contrary, the trial made him a repentant man who will inherit the Kingdom of God. To what advantage is it for one called of God to glory in his claim to righteousness if the Spirit is trying to convict him for that which he allows, because that which he allows is not in conformity with the Truth of God? "But he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord. For not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth" (2 Corinthians 10:17–18).

Repent, our Lord Jesus Christ says to us. Let us work on our salvation, let us be true disciples of Christ. It is then that we can wait for His reign on this earth with the joy of being among His servants whom He will find watching when He comes.

It is with my most affectionate and respectful feelings that I address these few lines to you.

Sincerely,

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

Jean Aviolat