

Church of God, The Eternal

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Soon another year will be behind us. In less than three months we will be on the threshold of a new year. Time goes by with its days of joy, happiness, and sometimes deep sadness.

In Psalm 90:9 and 12 we read, ". . . we spend our years as a tale that is told. . . . So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom." Applying our hearts unto wisdom requires of each of us a thorough examination of one's own life. It can be the obligation to bear in silence an affront which came out of an evil heart. It can be keeping our minds under control and our mouths always calm when hatred arms itself against us. It can be disarming someone with a smile who insults us. It can be bearing without cursing friends who become raging lions. It can be waiting for victory in silence—facing an adversary and remaining silent. It is being fully aware that we are living every moment of our lives under the eye of God who searches hearts and minds. "Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding. For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies: and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her" (Proverbs 3:13–15). Yes, indeed, happy are those who apply their hearts unto wisdom and set themselves against insult that strength which grows with each triumph obtained.

Thus responded Jesus Christ when facing the one who had come to kiss Him for the purpose of betraying Him. He said to him, "My friend, go ahead and do what you have come for" (Matthew 26:50, *The Living Bible*). Such an attitude did not mean that Jesus Christ was approving of the behavior of this disciple. But, since Judas had been made partaker of the same call and of the same knowledge of the truth as the other disciples, Christ called him, "My friend!" No bitterness, no hatred arose in the heart and mind of Jesus Christ, though by his behavior that disciple had become an enemy of the truth, therefore, an enemy of Christ. So it was with deep sadness that Christ said to Judas, "My friend." For He also said, ". . . but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! it had been good for that man if he had not been born" (Matthew 26:24).

In a parable Christ spoke of a man who had been called to the knowledge of the truth. Being cunning he thought he could deceive God all the way into the Kingdom of God. The King said to him, ". . . Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless" (Matthew 22:12). That man realized that it was useless justifying his own concepts of the truth—what he had allowed himself to do while justifying himself throughout his life. He did not apply his heart unto wisdom in order to fulfill the purpose of his call. The King called him "Friend," not because He was approving of his behavior, but because that man had been called and chosen to be a child of God. But he was bound and cast into the outer darkness instead.

We see that to Jesus Christ the called are His friends. And, they remain His friends until the day they are eliminated if they have not been able, or have not wanted to maintain the bond of that friendship by living the Truth of God, or if by their behavior they have become enemies of Christ. "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you" (John 15:14). Jesus Christ calls friends all those whom He clothed with His magnificent robe, which is the truth. In accepting His call we become His friends, and we remain His friends, and will be His friends forever, if in turn we are the faithful friends of the Truth of God. That requires us to fulfill many duties in this life with respect to the mind and the heart, and in our relationship with one another. The work is so great that we must number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.

Which friends do we choose? In Proverbs 3:32 we read, "For the froward is abomination to the LORD: but his secret is with the righteous." *The Living Bible* translates the last clause of this verse as ". . . He gives His friendship to the godly." David said, "I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them *that* keep thy precepts" (Psalm 119:63). True friendship is a mark of affection and kindness—respect and faithfulness which is not founded on blood ties or on material possessions, but on our faithfulness to the One who gave His life for His friends. "This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:12–13). Jesus Christ says to His friends, "This is my commandment." And, He shows us that He himself is the absolute example, "That ye love one another, as I have loved you." Not the smallest grain of bitterness or hypocrisy is allowed. It is a genuine friendship which Jesus Christ manifests to His called until the day of judgement. In order to live that commandment as Jesus Christ lived it, one must resort to wisdom; one must apply one's heart unto wisdom. To take the statements of God lightly, to fail to make them an integral part of our lives is to find ourselves someday before Jesus Christ who will say to us, "My friend, how are you here before Me without having a wedding garment?" That is, without being clothed with the righteousness of God. It is with much sadness that Jesus Christ looks at someone whom He chooses to be His friend, to whom He gave time, the necessary help, assistance in trial, and even His own life, and sees him fail at the end of the race because he has not been able to do with pleasure what Christ commanded him and because He has not been able to trust him.

In James 2:23 we read, ". . . Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God." Another example, "And the LORD spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend . . ." (Exodus 33:11). Jesus Christ being the same yesterday, today, and forever, as we are told by the Apostle Paul, there is no doubt that a very close bond of friendship imbued with benevolence and respect is offered to the called of God. But to accept that friendship is in turn to live it towards others. And that friendship must be founded on the immutable spiritual standards and not on personal advantages as it is most of the time in this world where "The poor is hated even of his own neighbour: but the rich hath many friends" (Proverbs 14:20). Job, himself, experienced it when he was in possession of all his riches; his friends held him in esteem. They respected him. But when he was in adversity, stripped of his goods, they began to persecute him, to tarnish his reputation, to accuse him falsely. ". . . ye dig a pit for your friend" (Job 6:27). So they were not true and good friends. Sometimes the trial, the hardship which strikes allows us to recognize the true friends from those who give the appearance of being friends. "A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity" (Proverbs 17:17). It was certainly not the case with the friends of Job. Their friendship vanished with Job's possessions. But what saved Job was that he himself remained a faithful and trusting friend of God through all his trial. He showed no feelings of hatred against his friends who were speaking evil of him and were accusing him of acts which he had not committed. "And it was so, that after the LORD had spoken these words unto Job, the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite, My wrath is kindled against thee, and against thy two friends: for ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right, as my servant Job hath" (Job 42:7). Those men were far from thinking they had spoken evil of God. This shows us how sinful we can become when we speak evil of a friend of Christ. "And the LORD turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends: also the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before" (Job 42:10).

Jesus Christ does not forsake His friends. Of course He tries them sometimes severely for a purpose to be achieved in their lives. But if in turn we want to show our friendship by our loyalty, our faithfulness, our courage, our resolution to be true friends—who love the Truth of God at all times—then, brethren, our reward will be much greater than the one which Job received during his lifetime.

While we live in this time of the end, we, too, can be tried through certain friends. Jesus Christ says to us, "And ye shall be betrayed both by parents, and brethren, and kinsfolks, and friends . . ." (Luke 21:16).

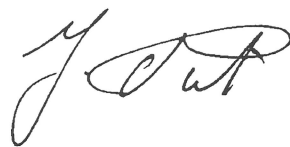
There are others who are not going to appreciate anymore the true worth of that friendship which Jesus Christ offers to them. James says to us, ". . . whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God" (James 4:4). The world does not have anything to offer to us for our future except deep disappointment. Others called lose their right orientation because of the difficult times. "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous . . ." (2 Timothy 3:1–2). *RSV*—lovers of money; *French Bible*—friends of money. It is

unquestionable that in the system in which we live we need money in order to meet all our obligations. But it is wrong to make a friend of money, for it is a friend which will destroy us spiritually. James says to us, "Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days" (James 5:3). For which purpose? "Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter. Ye have condemned and killed the just; and he doth not resist you" (James 5:5–6). As we see, money must be at our service, it must be used with wisdom, but it must never become our friend. By the mouth of the prophet Malachi, God tells us that in the last days there are some called who are robbing Him in tithes and offerings. People who were called to be the friends of Jesus Christ, why are they robbing God? Do they let themselves be influenced by the behavior of people of this world, a large number of them being friends of money? Yes, indeed, for those who do not know God, money is their god or their friend.

So, whatever circumstances we may see happening around us or what we ourselves may go through, we have everything to gain by being and remaining true friends of Jesus Christ. He chose us to be His friends. But will we be able to remain so even at the cost of our lives? Will we be the friends of Abraham, Moses, Job, and many others who are now resting and waiting for the day of awakening? Jesus Christ says of them as He said of Lazarus, ". . . Our friend . . . sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep" (John 11:11). It is God who grants us this breath of life and it is Jesus Christ who will awake forever His true friends who are sleeping. "And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. . . . Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him" (Luke 12:4–5).

We were called to know God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ. Can we see and appreciate that true value in our lives? "He that loveth pureness of heart, for the grace of his lips the king shall be his friend" (Proverbs 22:11). The King whom we are waiting for is Jesus Christ. Will He be our Friend forever or will He pass judgement on us that will doom us to destruction? As for Him, He gave His life for His friends. Can we give Him ours and prove our friendship to Him by our obedience, our faithfulness, the love and respect which we show for one another? With such friendship it will be much easier for us to wait patiently for His return. It is then that we will have surmounted forever the darkness of this world and the painful obstacles of this life to enter eternal light and friendship.

I greet you respectfully and send with this letter my most sincere affection for you.

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

Jean Aviolat