

January 2013

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

Very warm greetings to you all. I trust that your morale and your spiritual orientation are sound, whatever circumstances you encounter in your personal lives. Let us not allow our spiritual growth to dwindle with the passing of time. Remember the day of your call: when you entered into a covenant with God through baptism, the only thing which gave meaning to your lives was the Truth of God. You understood how significant and important it was to submit your lives to the law of God. You knew that you would undergo trials in order to acquire God's character, without which one cannot obtain salvation. You realized that man can be born into immortality only after going through a lifelong process of building righteous and holy character. That calling filled you with enthusiasm, courage and conviction, because you knew that the outcome would be salvation—a free gift.

Such was the knowledge of all those who were called and baptized. The "yes" which they pronounced before their immersion confirmed their repentance and their commitment. They were promising to do the will of God by practicing with the help of His Spirit the way of life which had been delivered. And yet, as time goes by, how many are venturing off in all directions! Such behavior indicates some degree of weariness which permeates their lives. We can forget that as long as we live in the flesh, we are confronted with a choice. Either we persevere in God's way and fight the battles which create spiritual maturity and sturdy character, or we do as we please—obeying God as it suits us and thereby evading the need to fight and grow in determination and character. Shunning that training is at the same time rejecting God's Truth and retracting the oath taken before God at baptism. But all of us were taught and admonished. From the very beginning of our call we were told by Jesus Christ, ". . . If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Matthew 16:24).

Whose countenance does not mirror sorrows, difficulties, struggles experienced along the journey of life? Much of our suffering is the result of the sins which we commit. Some of it is the weight of the trials which we bear. The story of one's life is told through indelible scars. There are many wounds which affect hearts and minds and leave scars: an unhappy childhood; the loss or the absence of a parent; being neglected or mistreated by one's parents; a disappointment in a romantic involvement or another human relationship; conflicts in marriage; having trouble with one's child or children; the loss of a loved one; poverty; financial struggle and so on. Terrible suffering has left its mark in the childhood and the lives of many people. Indeed, everyone can read the story of his life in his own heart and mind. Of course, many wounds heal, but they leave scars. They are thoughts, feelings, experiences which cannot be expunged and have a strong influence on our disposition, our opinions, our relationships with others and how we see others as well as ourselves.

But our call put us on a path which leads to a complete healing of our pasts. The Apostle John wrote:

Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God. . . . Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is (1 John 3:1–2).

So he who does not let up in his spiritual growth lives with ". . . this hope in him [and] purifieth himself, even as he is pure" (verse 3). With enthusiasm he keeps doing what God expects of him so that divine character may be developed in him. And we know that achieving spiritual maturity is a lifelong task. But a glorious future awaits us, because "we shall be like him [like Christ]."

We are told by the Apostle Paul, "And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together" (Romans 8:17). Since Jesus Christ suffered much in the flesh, we in turn bear in our bodies and in various ways the marks of the sufferings of Christ. But when we are changed from the physical state into the spiritual, we shall be like Him and we shall see Him as He is. As we go through this life's joyful or painful experiences, we use the help which God gives us by His Spirit and we strive to reach a level of perfection which is acceptable in His sight. However, we will have put on absolute perfection only after having been changed from flesh into spirit beings. Before that transformation, the degree of our obedience and submission to God's immutable laws will show Him the level of perfection which we will have attained. "Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless" (2 Peter 3:14). In the appointed day we will taste perfection. "And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure."

Thus we are molded through a refinement process which sometimes wounds and leaves scars. But for all that, we do not become discouraged because we are exhorted by Jesus Christ, ". . . if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments" (Matthew 19:17). Knowing that keeping God's commandments is absolutely valuable for building holy and righteous character, we continue to make progress; we continue to grow in the character traits of our Heavenly Father through self-mastery. Adversity confronts us in various ways: it can be an illness, a disability, or denigration heaped upon us because our life circumstances reflect the fact that we will not compromise God's principles. Through these experiences we shore up our faith, "looking unto Jesus the author and finisher [perfecter] of our faith . . ." (Hebrews 12:2).

The fire of trial will show everyone the areas in which his spiritual construction is still composed of straw or stubble. And whatever does not withstand the heat of trial must be replaced. Conversely, when we come through, we see our progress, the victory gained in our struggles, the success of our work on the self.

My dear brethren, whatever your wounds and your scars may be, you are assured that you will be healed sooner or later. God did not lie when He said to His people to whom He had given His way of life, ". . . for I am the Lord that healeth thee" (Exodus 15:26). There obviously are requirements:

. . . If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the Lord thy God, and wilt do that which is right in his sight, and wilt give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes . . . (Exodus 15:26).

Jesus Christ defines one of the conditions by which all wounds and scars will be completely erased from our hearts and minds:

. . . if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses (Matthew 6:14–15).

We must come to forgive. Whether they are our parents or brothers and sisters, or a husband, or a wife, or our children, or whoever else, God wants us to forgive. For each one of us has a huge debt which was remitted by the sacrifice of His own Son. Furthermore, ". . . we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). Jesus Christ understands not only the causes of our wounds but also how much they hurt. "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" (verse 16).

Any trespass which we cannot forgive is a wound which does not heal. And Jesus Christ knows how painful that is, for He says, "So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses" (Matthew 18:35). Scars are things which we forgive; we rid our hearts of hatred and bitterness, but there are indelible marks which remain in our minds. We do need help. God is our Healer, and He alone will obliterate all those things which are past and which were so harmful to our hearts and minds. And to be forgiven is to be healed. Then we will be perfect and we will see our Savior as He is. We will also see and know one another in a domain which will be quite different from the one which we experience in the flesh, with all its wounds, its scars and its weaknesses.

Therefore, let us not grow weary of loving the Truth of God; let us not grow tired of forgiving, for it is on this condition that our Heavenly Father will also forgive us. To be forgiven is to be healed of any handicaps which we may have borne in this life and which cause so much misery to human beings. So, my dear brethren, without counting the many trials which are behind us, let us look forward to the beautiful days which lie ahead and let us love one another, believing in eternity. "And above all these things put on charity [love], which is the bond of perfectness" (Colossians 3:14).

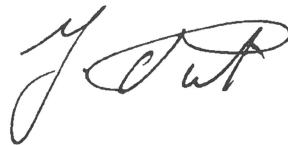
Perfection is complete healing, and complete healing is salvation. No one can buy it. In His goodness and His mercy, God takes pleasure in giving it freely to all those who will have borne their crosses and forgiven others during this physical life. Let us not harbor resentment over the wounds of the past; let us forgive and allow God to erase our scars. The prophet Isaiah recorded the following prophecy:

He will swallow up death for ever, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth; for the Lord has spoken (Isaiah 25:8, *Revised Standard Version*).

That is a promise of God; it will be carried out.

Thank you for your prayers. We also remember you all in ours.

Yours affectionately,
your brother in Christ,

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

Jean Aviolat

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Jon W. Brisby', written in a cursive style.

Jon W. Brisby