

Church of God, The Eternal

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The Image We Convey to Others: Is It Honest and Sincere?

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Dear Brothers And Sisters:

Jesus Christ made this statement in Mark 10:29–30:

. . . Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life.

Yes, indeed, as years go by, we become more united into a family whose members show affection and respect to one another, and where everyone sees to it that he gives the other the happiness which he needs.

Another year has gone by—a space of time during which many circumstances have prevailed in many areas. The important thing is that we do not—through all these conditions—lose sight of God's purpose in our lives and that we continue to have implicit trust in our Creator. For the reality is not always the one which men attempt to make us accept. They talk about improvement, creation of jobs, when in reality distress, hatred, and misery get worse and worse.

Man is extremely clever at putting different faces on things. It all depends on whom or what he has to deal with; it all depends on the situation in which he finds himself. The prophet Jeremiah wrote, "Thus saith the Lord; Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord" (Jer. 17:5). Solomon wrote, "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding" (Prov. 3:5). These texts show that unless God gives us insight through the power of His Holy Spirit, it is very difficult and even impossible for us to know the sincerity of a human being, unless we can see the fruits thereof. Jesus Christ gives us the key to the mystery, "Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a

corrupt tree bring forth good fruit" (Matt. 7:16–18). And He emphasizes in verse 20, "Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them."

But usually man likes to deceive his peers into thinking that he is good; he does his level best to make them believe that he is only well-disposed towards them. One of the images which he likes to portray is a mask of nobility and virtue which he strives to put on in society. It is, so to speak, his public image—the good impression which he tries to create and his reputation which he endeavors to protect. What counts to him is what people think of him and what they say about him.

You know well the story written for our instruction in 1 Kings, chapter 13, where we are told of an old prophet who dwelt in Bethel and deceived the true servant of God by his public image. In verses 14–17 we read:

. . . he said unto him, Art thou the man of God that camest from Judah? And he said, I am. Then he said unto him, Come home with me, and eat bread. And he said, I may not return with thee, nor go in with thee: neither will I eat bread nor drink water with thee in this place: For it was said to me by the word of the Lord, Thou shalt eat no bread nor drink water there, nor turn again to go by the way that thou camest.

We see that the servant of God knew 100 percent the orders which he was given by God. At first sight it seems that nothing could dissuade him from doing the will of God. Let us read verse 18: "He said unto him, I am a prophet also as thou art . . ." Yes, indeed, verse 11 tells us that he was an old prophet and, without doubt, nothing on the surface indicated that he was a liar and false. So he said to him, ". . . I am a prophet also as thou art; and an angel spake unto me by the word of the Lord, saying, Bring him back with thee into thine house, that he may eat bread and drink water. But he lied unto him." Unfortunately, the man of God gave in. He let himself be deceived by the image of the prophet, and it cost him his life. The prophet was not any prophet of God at this time; he was old, seemed kind and compassionate, but in reality he was a hypocrite, a liar, unfaithful to God's Way.

Brethren, this is a grave warning to us all. First, let us never take the risk of putting such a facade on our lives; let us not try to make others believe something which we are not. Let us be sincere and honest. Secondly, we too know what God expects of us; therefore, let us not allow ourselves to be deceived by people who strive to create a good impression and seem to offer generously wonderful things, while in reality they seek our destruction. In both the above cases, the price to pay for failure is one's life.

The second common image of man is the one which our families and immediate circle of friends know only too well. It is an image which is quite different from the first one—smiles

become scarce, they are replaced with irritation. In this environment man shows carelessness; his life is bedlam; there is confusion and disorder. "I can't help it," he says, "it's just the way I'm made." He knows what he should do, but does not do it.

Genesis 4 relates the example of a man who, though aware of God's will, gave himself over to irritation. Let us read verses 5–7:

And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell. And the Lord said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him [but you must master it (*RSV*)].

As we see, it is conditional. "*If* thou doest well . . ." or ". . . *if* thou doest not well . . ." Cain knew very well what he had to do, but he did not attach importance to the teachings of God. He did not want to master the emotions of his own nature. He too said to himself, "It's just the way I'm made." He did not want to change his attitude and recognize that he had done wrong. He gave himself over to his nature to such an extent that he finally slew his brother.

Brethren, let us remember that wherever we are, God sees us, He watches our behavior and state of mind. "Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do" (Heb. 4:13).

Now, how does our face appear and how do we react when we look at ourselves in the mirror of God's Law? Looking at ourselves objectively, we have no reason to be proud. On the contrary, how often are we secretly ashamed of an action, a word, or a thought? But as a man does not let his eye linger on an ugly picture, so he hastens to put himself together by making a great number of "good" excuses. "Granted! It's not right, but I didn't intend to do wrong. And I'm not worse than anyone else." Yes, indeed, nothing is easier than justifying oneself by comparing oneself with the weaknesses of others, but it is showing a rather wretched image, because it is seeking to appear beautiful outwardly, while within it is full of uncleanness and iniquity. It is putting on a "hard mask" which refuses instruction. The prophet Jeremiah had to write, "And though they say, The Lord liveth; surely they swear falsely. O Lord, are not thine eyes upon the truth? thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved; thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction: they have made their faces harder than a rock; they have refused to return" (Jer. 5:2–3).

Brethren, God does not want to see such a face on us, and if we still have masks of these various images, God tenders His grace to us once again. Grace is unmerited pardon. God wants us to begin the year without masks, He invites us to be once again cleansed from all disguise. God reminds us of this invitation by means of the Passover. At what price is that made possible for us? Speaking of Christ, Isaiah wrote, "As many were astonished at thee; his visage was so marred more

than any man, and his form more than the sons of men" (Isa. 52:14). From verses 2–5 of chapter 53, we read:

. . . he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for *our* transgressions, he was bruised for *our* iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed [emphasis mine].

This is what the Son of God suffered to put an end to our black life with its multiple images—full of mistakes, regret, and envy. Christ gave His life for us; and now we once again have the privilege of partaking of the bread and the wine—symbolizing the very life of Jesus Christ in us, a clean life without any mask. The Feast of Unleavened Bread is to teach us to strive towards perfection, without growing slack and putting on masks. "But we all, with open face [with unveiled face (*RSV*)] beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Cor. 3:18).

If we can accept such an invitation with joy and present ourselves before Him with unveiled faces, burying all our false portraits in His blood, then we have taken a good step at the beginning of this new year. We shall have a successful year providing we do not despise anybody; we create peace and silently do that which is good. Regardless of what happens in this world, nobody will be able to rob us of this glorious image which Christ is shaping within us, making it similar to His. In the final analysis, it is the only one which counts—whatever the people who look at us think of it—since we shall ultimately face not the judgment of men, but the judgment of God. Our faces may be sometimes serene, sometimes worn-out by sorrow, or also wrinkled by the weight of years. God fashions us like precious diamonds to make us become like His Son. And the Bible teaches us that His face is like the sun shining in full strength.

My dear brothers and sisters, we of all people are the most richly blessed human beings. Time will never destroy our affection and love for you. Our friendship is sure and solid, because it is founded on the immutable Truth which God gave to us.

Respectfully,

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

Jean Aviolat