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THE SECOND EPISTLE OF PAUL THE APOSTLE TO THE CORINTHIANS

BY

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AN INTRODUCTION

The subject of this epistle:

This epistle is the most prominent essay on the concept of ministry and the exalted shepherding love. Every phrase is considered as a practical law for the true minister. It is as though God allowed for the attack on the apostleship of St. Paul, to make him reveal what is in his depths of love toward his people, and what is in his mind of true concepts of faith concerning the shepherding.

Despite the multitude of difficulties and problems that confronted the apostle in Corinth, the subject of this epistle came to deal with “**The triumphant canonical ministry**”.

“Thanks be to God who always leads us in Triumph in Christ” (2 Corinthians 2: 14).

The key to this epistle:

The intense afflictions that confronted the apostle, did not destroy his soul, because he realized that they are allowed by God to reveal His arm working in the midst of troubles
“Who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (2 Corinthians 3: 6).

The date of its writing:

It was written in the year 57 A.D. and sent from Macedonia, few months after the first epistle.

The goal of sending it:

- * Some Jews came from Jerusalem to create doubt in the apostleship of Paul; and to claim that he is aggressive in his epistles, but weak in his presence. As some of the Corinthians listened to them and started to deny his apostolic authority, Paul found it necessary to prove the authenticity of his apostleship (Chapters 1 to chapter 7); and (chapter 10 to chapter 13); to confirm his love for his people; his readiness to be their servant, so that they would enjoy the liberty of the glory of the children of God (4: 5); and that *“he will very gladly spend and be spent for their souls; though the more abundantly he loves them, the less he is loved”* (12: 15); He has already proclaimed to them that he would be enflamed in the depths of his heart if any of them stumble; and would feel weak if any of them is weak (11: 29).
- * Being informed by Titus that his first epistle to them had a positive response and fruition of true repentance (7: 16), the apostle is writing to confirm his joy for their repentance, and that his heart is wide with love for them. Feeling comfortable to hear, as well, that the affairs of the church have been put in order; and that the faults have been gradually corrected, he is writing to encourage them to keep going along this sound path.

Ambrosiaster believes that he wrote this epistle for the sake of a few of them who stubbornly kept going on their wrong ways. Although the epistle was very mild, yet he had, at its end, to be very firm because of the persistence of a few of them on denying his apostleship, and resisting the ministry.

- * What made him hasten to write this epistle, was because that person whom he previously commanded to be separated because he committed evil with his father's

wife (1Corinthians 5); having truly repented his sin, and genuinely grieved, the apostle fearing that he might fall into despair, hastened to write to them to receive him back with every possible love (2: 7).

- * He wrote to thank them because of their care for the persecuted brethren in Jerusalem; and for their good reception of Titus while visiting them (8: 9).
- * The topics dealt with in the two epistle to the Corinthians, are almost identical; namely, the spiritual gifts, the resurrection from the dead, the Lord's supper, the exhortation to give abundantly (9: 1-15), and love (1 Corinthians 13).
- * He wrote to warn them against heresies and contentions; And to tell them about the divine comforts granted by God to His believers in the midst of sufferings. The apostle had to make a comparison between the Old and the New Covenants, not to belittle the importance of the law, but to respond to the few Christians of a Jewish origin who persisted on accusing him of apostasy and resistance to the law.
- * In his first epistle he promised to visit them (1 Corinthians 16: 5); but as he could not fulfill his promise, on account of being preoccupied by the Spirit with more important tasks, he is writing his second epistle to apologize to them for his delay. According to St. John Chrysostom, he did not promise to visit them, but he rather revealed his wish to do that.

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AN INSPIRATION from 2 CORINTHIANS

GRANT ME A WIDE HEART TO CARRY EVERY SOUL UP TO YOUR HEAVEN

- + You have opened the doors of heaven before me
Open a door for me, to carry every soul up to You by Your Holy Spirit.
By love, You carried me to the bosom of the Father.
Grant me the wide heart for everyone.
To carry many by Your grace to the fellowship of Your glories.

- + Sanctify me, O Holy One!
To carry, together with love, the holy life.
I covet for the earth to become heaven.
That in it there would be no defilement.
When every sinner will be a saint!
Let me reject every defilement;
Yet let me not despise those defiled.
As You are the Grantor of holiness;

Your pleasure, O Mighty One, is
To carry Your cross; like someone very weak.
Let my pleasure, as well, be in weaknesses;
As, while I am weak, I am strong in You.
And as I die together with You, I live by, and with You.
As You are the life and resurrection!

- + Grant me to be faithful in Your ministry,
Let me covet reconciling everyone to You, O heavenly One!
That all would experience the open heaven.
Your Holy Spirit will take away the veil from our face!
To behold the splendor of Your glory;
And realize what You have prepared for us!

- + Our souls become filled with the comfort of the Spirit amid the sufferings.
And become wide by the practical love of giving.
We give our hearts to the needy;
As You have given Yourself dwelling in us.
Prepare me to minister to You by the spirit of sanctity and of mutual love.
The unfailing ministry of strength and glory.

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DIVISION 1

THE MUTUAL LOVE BETWEEN THE SHEPHERD AND HIS FLOCK

CHAPTER 1

AN INTRODUCTION

This chapter reveals the heart of the shepherd who seeks, not what is his, but what is for the sake of the church of God. In the midst of his anguish that he despaired even of life (8), as though he had the sentence of death in himself; he was only preoccupied with the mutual and practical love between him and his flock. He revealed his amazing love for them through the following:

- Whether he is afflicted or consoled, it is for the sake of their salvation (6; 7)
- He is in need of their prayers for his sake (11).

- He is their boast, as they are his, in the day of the Lord Jesus (14)
- He longs to visit them (15-24).
- He determined not to come to them while they are in sorrow, but to partake of their joy (24); because his joy is the joy of them all!
A series of unceasing mutual love (2: 3).

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1- THE APOSTOLIC BLESSING:

“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, to the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in all Achaia” (1)

He did not begin by the name of the addressee as it was the custom at that time, but by the sender. But as an apostle writing to his congregation, he begins with his name, as it was the custom of rulers and judges.

He added Timothy to himself, not that he needed his help, but on account of that *“on the testimony of two persons the word is realized”*. He called him *“our brother”* to honor him in the sight of the people of Corinth, as a brother in the same faith, and as a partner in ministry, albeit not an apostle; as he did not say: *“Paul and Timothy the apostles”*. However, in his epistle to the Philippians, he added Timothy’s name without calling himself an apostle; as there was no need to confirm his apostleship to the Philippians. What an amazing humility, to call such a young man *“his brother”*, as an appreciation of his faith, his preaching and shepherding work!

In his first epistle, he said: "*Paul, called to be an apostle*", but here, in his second epistle, having already confirmed his apostleship, he says: "*Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God*". He is committing them to accept it, as his mission will not depend upon their will, nor that of anyone else, but according to the will of God who called him, and his own consent that made it steadfast. The Lord Jesus has personally called him to preach among the Gentiles, according to the will of the Father which is One with that of the Lord Jesus.

+ Again Paul calls the Corinthians "a church", to gather all together; And he calls them "saints", so that if there is someone defiled among them, he would be exempted from this greeting.

(St. John Chrysostom)

+ The expression "*with all the saints*" is somewhat vague. He either means all the saints who accompanied him, or those in Corinth.

(St. Dedyms the blind)

+ Two make a symphony of joyful mutual love, he mentioned: "*Paul and Sosthenes our brother*" (1 Corinthians 1); and "*Paul and Timothy our brother*" (2 Corinthians 1), sent to the same congregation.

(The scholar Origen)

St. John Chrysostom believes that Paul refers here to the Christians in the entire province of Achaia, and not only to those of Corinth, on account of that all were going through the same problems, and all were in need of the same treatment.

Despite what some members of the church of Corinth had of spiritual, doctrinal, and behavioral problems, yet the apostle's eyes looked at that church as a holy bride to a

Holy Bridegroom; and because its congregation were seeking holiness, he counted them as saints.

The church, following the lead of her Holy Groom, is the light of the world. In his work 'Contra Celsum', the scholar Origen calls on his opponents to compare between the heathen countries and the Christian churches established in them, in particular those in Corinth and Alexandria.

+ Compared to the congregations among which the churches established By Christ, the churches appear as flames of light in the world.

Who among us do not see that the few members of the churches, are mostly better than the multitudes in those civil congregations?!

Comparing the council of God's church with a city council, we shall find that certain members of the church councils are worthy of being honorable members of a divine city, in case such a city is found in the world. Whereas, we shall find that the civil members in a city council, by their questionable ethics, are unworthy of the prominent positions they occupy among their fellow citizens.

In the same way, taking into consideration the virtues of the two categories; if we compare between the head of each church with the heads of these cities, we shall find those occupying even the lowest positions in the churches, to be superior to to all the civil rulers,

(The scholar Origen)

"Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (2)

Talking about his own compassionate fatherhood, and his giving for the sake of all, the apostle Paul seeks from them to look at the fatherhood of God the Father, and to the salvation work of Christ, to realize that the fatherhood of the apostle and his love for

their salvation, are nothing but a shadow and fruit of the fatherhood of God the Father, and the giving of God the Son.

- + The works done by the Father is also done by the Son, and the gifts presented by the Father are also granted by the Son. From this we understand that, although we know God being the Father, we still are counted as ministers of Jesus Christ. We do not call Him “Brother”, but “Lord”; on account of that He is the Only begotten Son, by nature, and not by adoption; and of that He is the Lord of all those He made the children of God.

(St. Dedyumus the blind)

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comforts” (3)

Talking about the sufferings, he and some of the Corinthians are going through, he starts by talking about the comforts coming from God; so that no one would concentrate his thoughts on the sufferings, but on the divine comforts. He presented God the Father here by three titles:

1- Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

2- Father of mercies; who is compassionate to the soul as well as to the body; in this present time, as well as in eternity.

3- God of all comforts.

The Old Covenant used to call God “The *God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob*” (Exodus 3: 15, 16; 4: 5; 7: 15), to confirm that He is the God of the covenant with the fathers and their seed. Here, however, he refers to the Son, to confirm the new covenant between God the Father and the believers through the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ; As, according to the same apostle: “*To Abraham and his Seed were*

the promises made. He does not say, 'And to seeds', as of many, but as of one, 'And to your Seed', who is Christ" (Galatians 3: 16).

He calls Him as well, "*The Father of mercies*", for He finds pleasure and rejoices in presenting mercy; As according to the prophet Micah:

"Who is a God like You, pardoning iniquity, and passing over the transgression of the remnant of all His heritage?" (Micah 7: 18). He also

calls Him, "*God of all comforts*", For from Him proceeds the Holy Spirit (John 15: 26), the Helper, and the Source and the Fountain of all comfort.

The violence of some of the Corinthians has not taken away from the apostle his great compassion toward them; because, together with them, he enjoys the divine compassion and comforts, despite the faults of all. These comfort are supporting us amid the labors and sufferings of this world.

+ He speaks here about "*God of mercies*", to plant in them the spirit of hope, that God anticipates their repentance to grant them His mercies, and to reform their life. The apostle intends to give them some comfort, to spare them being destroyed by rebuke and firmness. By using the plural tense, he confirms to them that however great their iniquities are, yet God's mercies and comforts are greater and stronger.

God, being alone, "Holy and Good", sanctifies the others and makes them good. Being alone, "the Blessed", He grants the blessing, and does not take it from another; And, in the same way, being "the Father of mercies" by nature, He is the Source of all mercies, and does not seek it from another.

(St. Dedyms the blind)

- + Paul, starting, not by the suffering, but by the comfort, he presents thanksgiving for it even before it happens; and clarifies that comfort dwells through suffering.

(Theodor, Bishop of Messisa)

- + Believing in the “Comforter”, we know that this title equally applies to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, on the same level, according to the testimony of the inspired Holy Book, in which God the Son gave this title to Himself, and equally to the Holy Spirit, and to God the Father.

David says to the Father: *“You, O Lord, helped me and comforted me”*; And the great apostle, in the same way, applies it to God the Father, saying: *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comforts”* (3).

John the apostle, as well, in one of his catholic epistles, uses the same title “the Comforter” for the Son; Then the Lord Himself says that He will send another Comforter, meaning the Holy Spirit.

(St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa)

2- ENDURING ALL THE SUFFERINGS IN CHRIST FOR THEIR SAKE:

*“Who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble,
with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God”*

(4)

The apostle’s heart flows with a perpetual thanksgiving to God, the Grantor of comforts amid the tribulations. In this epistle, referring to the

exalted comforts of God in all situations, the apostle talks about God's comfort to those who unjustly suffer for the sake of their belief in the Lord Christ; And His comfort to the sinners who return to God by repentance, to let them enjoy the fellowship with Him.

The apostle probably refers to the comforts, to let them feel, even amid their sufferings, that they, themselves, could be of benefit to others. They should not stop at enjoying comforts, but should flow them over their brethren who suffer like them. He probably wrote this to raise them up from the state of discouragement that dwelt upon them because of not visiting them.

- + The Corinthians were very disappointed because the apostle did not come to them despite his promise to do so; Because he spent all the time in Macedonia, they assumed that he prefers the Macedonians to them. That is why Paul prepares their souls, and deals with their feelings against him, by proclaiming the reason for his delay, albeit not in a direct way.
- + He, who is loving, and is perpetually attached to God, would not be harmed by the violent waves, however abundant they may be, But, on the contrary, he would emerge out of them with a new strength. Whereas he, who is weak and failing, would often fall, even if there are nothing to bother him.

(St. John Chrysostom)

He also reminded them of God's comforts, to make them long to share them with others, to give the chance to them who fall then repent, to Experience them, and not to fall into despair.

- + Paul wrote about this beforehand, as he intended to talk about the person who was condemned because of his grave sin; that he should be given the chance to be reconciled to the comforting power of God.

(Severian, Bishop of Gebalah)

St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa, believes that these comforts are a deposit of the pleasures of the eternal life, which we experience in our depths here, to enjoy it to perfection in eternity.

- + What is meant by saying that the kingdom of God is inside us? But that the pleasure coming from High up to the souls by the Spirit, would be like an image, deposit, or a model of the eternal grace, to be enjoyed by the saints in the life to come. God calls us, by the work of the Spirit for salvation, through our sufferings, to a fellowship with the goodness and graces of the Spirit.

(St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa)

“For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ” (5)

It is as though the apostle proclaims that he who recognizes faith, only through studying books and listening to sermons, is miserable; as he does not gain the abundance of God’s comforts through the practical fellowship with the suffering Christ.

The apostle Paul presents to us his own experience, that the abundance of his sufferings is giving him more strength, on account of that they open before him the door of the divine comforts. Instead of complaining of the abundance of his sufferings, he exhorts all to experience the blessings of the road of sufferings, in order to gain heavenly glories.

- + Paul, not intending to grieve his disciples by presenting a full account of his sufferings, he, instead proclaims the greatness of the comforts he has got, reminding them of Christ.

+ Christ exalts our souls, counting those sufferings as His. What a joy dwells on us to become fellows of Christ, and to suffer for His sake.

+ How glorious are the sufferings by which we liken His death!

The way the goldsmith does when he casts a piece of gold into the furnace to go through fire for a certain time to be purified; So does God when he allows for humanity to be tested by the furnace of afflictions to be purified and to gain great benefit ... I wish therefore that we would not be disturbed nor despair when temptations dwell upon us; because as the goldsmith knows for sure the exact time he should leave the piece of gold in the furnace, and takes it out at the right time, before it gets corrupted and burnt; How much more would God know that. Once He sees us purified, he will release us from the temptations, before we fall down and collapse because of the multitude of our evils.

When something unexpected dwells upon us, we should not murmur, and get disturbed, but endure the ordinances of God who elaborately knows how to purify our hearts by the fire of temptations, the way it pleases Him. He does all these things with one goal, namely, the benefit of those tempted. Hence the wise advice is to submit to God in everything, because He knows for sure when to take us out of the furnace of evil (Wisdom of Joshua 1: 1, 2).

We should perpetually submit to Him, thank Him, and endure everything with perseverance; whether He grants us blessings, or chastisements, which are, as well, a kind of blessing.

The physician does not only allows for us to go to cheerful parks, and to enjoy good things, but he sometimes, as well, has to use on us the scalpel and the surgical knife; In both cases he is the physician. And the father sometimes treats his son with compassion, and some other times he punishes and chastises him; and in either case he is a father. ... Knowing for sure that God is more compassionate than

physicians and fathers, we should not question His treatment, nor seek an account from Him thereof; But whatever He finds good in His sight, let Him do, whether He relieves us from temptations, or chastises us; Because in either case He intends to bring us back to the good path, and to give us fellowship with Him. He is aware of our needs, of what suit everyone of us, and of the way we are to be saved.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + If the more the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ; Let us then welcome the encouraging sufferings of Christ, and let them abound in us. The abounding consolation by which all the sorrowful enjoy, are not the same for everyone of us, because if they are the same, it would not be written that "*the more the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ*"; ... and that those who partake of the sufferings, will also partake of the consolation according to their fellowship in the passion of Christ.

(The scholar Origen)

The apostle draws our attention to enjoy seeing the suffering and the crucified Christ instead of being preoccupied with our own sufferings.

The word "*consolation*" here came to refer to the enjoyment of the soul of seeing Christ present at the time of affliction.

- + It is obvious that Christ Himself for whose sake we suffer, is present with us, consoling us, and saving us from labor through His divine intervention.

(Amrosiaster)

- + By consolation, he means 'Theoria', interpreted as the "vision of the soul"; as the vision gives birth to consolation.

(Mar Isaac the Syrian)

“Now if we are afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effective, for enduring the same sufferings which we also suffer. Or if we are comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation” (6)

Commenting on the two verses 6 and 7, St. John Chrysostom confirms the role of both the preacher and the listeners; all of them are committed to endure the sufferings for the sake of salvation. On another aspect, he interprets the expression “*which is effective*” as (which energizes itself); as it does not mean just “effective”, but (effective in themselves), to reveal that grace is effective in them, and contributes the more to the wish of their mind. By that, the apostle confirms the role of the believer and his acceptance of the sufferings by his own free will, that the grace of God will dwell upon him more and more; As grace responds the more to him who wishes for the salvation of his own soul.

+ What he says is this: [Your salvation is not only through our own doing, but through yours as well. Preaching the word to you, we endure sorrows; And receiving it, you would endure the same things.

We endure to bring you forth what you should receive; and you endure to receive what you are granted, and not to lose it.

Your salvation will be realized , not only through mere faith, but through sufferings and enduring the same thing together with us.

Your salvation likens a boxer in an arena, full of the energy and of being “effective in himself”. This energy is revealed, increases, and exalts, the more you feel the need to suffer and to endure everything with dignity.

(St. John Chrysostom)

Dedicating his life to the account of the kingdom of God, and coveting the salvation of everyone, the minister becomes a holy tool in the hand of God, who would work through him, both in his afflictions, as well as in his comforts; would work by his words, as well as by his actions, the inner purity of his heart, and his apparent behavior; Namely God would work by his whole being.

If the sufferings of the apostle bring forth in him the consolation of beholding the crucified and partaking of His crucifixion; He, in the midst of both his suffering and his consolation, would abide to his fatherhood of his congregation. If he moans, it would be for the sake of their salvation; And if he is consoled, it is to have them partake of his consolation, that he gets from the Lord.

- + What could be compared to such a humility, when Paul obviously lifts those who fall down, up to his own level, as equal to him? Our salvation is to be more prominently realized when we endure everything with dignity. The work of salvation does not include faith alone, but to endure the evils that would come upon us, as well.
- + Paul endured that cross, not only for his own sake, but to let everyone else learn to follow his lead; So he says: "*Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern*" (Philippians 3: 17).; And: "*The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do*" (Philippians 4: 9); And also: "*For to you, it had been granted, on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him , but also to suffer for His sake*" (Philippians 1: 29).

Human honors appear in a better way, when they gather in one person; but in spiritual things it is different: honors would have more splendor when shared by many, and would not be confined to one person.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + If the apostles had to suffer, how much more should the others suffer like them?

(Severian, Bishop of Gebalah)

“And our hope for you is steadfast, because we know that as you are partakers of the sufferings, so also you would partake of the consolation” (7)

The apostle never had any doubt that his suffering people would enjoy the divine consolation.

By love, it is not possible to separate the apostle from his people; As, whether in his anguish or in his consolation, he aims to their salvation.

It is therefore befitting of them not to separate themselves from him, but to partake of his sufferings and consolations, as though they are their own. This is the clear line in the whole epistle.

- + His hope in them is not shaken by their behavior. Paul also tells them that when he is consoled, so they will be; If the Corinthians count Paul's sufferings as their own, his consolations would also become their consolations. By so saying, the apostle hopes to encourage them, and to make them accept his delay in visiting them more easily.

(St. John Chrysostom)

(To be continued in Part 2)

(Chapter 1 – Part 2)

“For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia; that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life” (8)

It is befitting of the churches to realize what the true ministers endure of troubles to the account of the kingdom of God. Here, the apostle does not refer to specific troubles, whether it was that provoked by Demetrius the silversmith (Acts 19); the plot of the Jews to kill him (Acts 20: 3); the confrontation of the beasts at Ephesus, as it came in the his first epistle to the Corinthians (15: 32); or others of the many near deaths met by him.

It is obvious that the troubles with which the apostle was burdened, were beyond the limits of human endurance, so that he, and those who were with him, despaired even of life. It is also obvious that the apostle confronted a very great anguish just before writing this epistle, not mentioned in his history; and came to the knowledge of the Corinthians.

And despite the life of perseverance of which the apostle Paul was known, he was moaning amid the great anguish he confronted; and we even see him admitting that he despaired even of life. Yet, hastening to raise his eyes up to God, his Savior, he was filled with joyful hope..

+ I think that Paul refers here to the riot provoked by Demetrius the silversmith in Ephesus.

(Theodoret, Bishop of Cyrus)

- + By parading his troubles, Paul intended to let the Corinthians realize that what they, themselves, endure, are nothing compared with what he does. When the disciple grieves for what he endures of troubles, he will find comfort when he realizes that his master suffers more than he does.

- + It would be very consoling for men to know about what the others are going through. If the news are bad, that would be of benefit to them to know how to keep themselves from falling like the others; And if the news are good, all will rejoice together. Here, as we can see, the news were very bad indeed.

(St. John Chrysostom)

“Yes we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead” (9)

God allows for His people to get into afflictions to make them realize their helplessness to save themselves on their own; then they would lean on Him as a Savior who is capable to raise them from the dead, and restore them to life. They would have the practical experience of their father Abraham, who believed in Him who gives life to the dead (Romans 4: 17).

- + Although Paul expected to die, yet that did not happen. According to the nature of events that he went through, he should have died; but God did not allow it yet, to teach him not to lean upon himself, but upon God.

- + Those who have the honor of being affiliated to the army, wear a decorated uniform, and may have golden chains around their necks. But Paul was shackled with iron chains around his feet instead of golden ones around his neck; he bore the cross, was chased, scourged, and suffered hunger.

Therefore, beloved brother, do not feel sad for Paul, for his adornments by God were better and more honorable. Bearing the cross is not in vain. It is amazing that Paul in his chains, scourges, and wounds, had more splendor than if he wore a royal robe and a crown. His attire made him more exalted!

If we apply this to someone gravely ill, we shall find that jewelry and fantastic attire would not take away his fever; But when Paul's handkerchiefs or aprons were put on the sick, the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out of them (Acts 19: 12); which is only befitting of the bearer of the cross. The way thieves will flee away if they see the sign of the king; how much more will ailments and demons do when they see the cross?!

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + The perfect piety is realized by not clinging to this life; by putting in mind the response to death; and by not leaning upon ourselves, the beginning would be realized through being liberated from all external things: worldly possessions, vain glory and evil desires, as did the two disciples of the Lord: James and his brother John, who forsook their father and their boat on which they depended in their whole life; and as did Mathew who forsook his position as a tax-collector and followed the Lord, not only forsaking the profits of his prominent job, but not caring about the risks that would certainly dwell upon him and his family on the hands of the rulers for his desertion and negligence of his official duties. As for Paul, the world was crucified to him, and he to the world.

(St. Basil the Great)

He first talked about the affliction, being the royal way to enjoy the divine consolations; and being the way of mutual love between the believer and his crucified Christ; as well as between him and his brethren. Then he crossed over to talk about the experience of death, as he

despaired even of life; Yet for a limited time, then, in the midst of his anguish, he came to realize that he is indebted for his whole new life, raised from death, to his Christ raised from the dead. This practical experience, he lived in the past, saying, *“delivered us from so great a death”*; and is, as well, a present live experience, *“and does deliver us”*; and will extend by the spirit of hope in the future, *“He will still deliver us”* (10).

“Who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us” (10)

Their hope in God who delivers from death is not set on a bare view, but on practical experience. Having already delivered them, and is delivering them, there would be no doubt that He will still deliver them in the future till the end. He is the Keeper of His Kingdom which He has set, and sets in our depths.

Recalling God’s dealings with us in the past would bring forth in us the spirit of thanksgiving, increase our faith in God’s work, and fill our souls with surety and joy in salvation.

- + Although the resurrection is something that concerns the future, yet Paul reveals that it is happening every day, when man is delivered from the gates of death, which is a kind of resurrection. The same thing could be said about being saved from a serious illness or from unbearable temptations.

(St. John Chrysostom)

3- THEIR PRAYERS FOR HIM WHILE HE WAS SUFFERING:

“You also helping together in prayer for us , that thanks may be given by many persons, on our behalf for the gift granted to us through many” (11)

Imitating Paul, St. John Chrysostom sought from his congregation to pray for him, saying to them: [The bishop is in need of such prayers more than you do ... The higher the rank of man, the more would also be his shortcomings. One virtue in a bishop is enough to lift him up to heaven, and a single transgression could cast him down into hell].

- + Paul so said to exhort them to pray for one another; and to get used to thank God for what happen to them and to others. So doing for the sake of others, they would much more do it for their own sake. If someone of such a high rank cries out, saying that he was saved by their prayers, how much more it would be befitting of them to be meek and humble on their part?!

(St. John Chrysostom)

The apostle’s perfect trust in the work of God would not lead him to seclusion, but rather to resort to the whole congregation to pray for his sake, to support him in his ministry. Every member is committed to pray for his own sake, as well as for that of his brethren, and to seek their prayers for him.

What an amazing feeling in the heart of the apostle Paul; being indebted to God for His work in him and in his brethren; and at the same time, being indebted to his congregation who pray for his sake, and for his ministry. By such feeling, pride would never crawl into the heart of the apostle, so amazing in both his success and in his humility.

4- HE IS THEIR BOAST, AND THEY ARE HIS:

“For our boasting is this: the testimony of our conscience that we conducted ourselves in the world in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, and more abundantly toward you” (12)

What the apostle cherish the most is the testimony of his inner conscience, and not the commendation or the condemnation of men. This inner conscience, lightened by the Holy Spirit, testifies to his simplicity and faithfulness in his behavior, by the grace of God, whether in his relationship with the world, or with the church in Corinth.

He conducted himself in simplicity, namely, with an obvious goal, without diversion, in blameless sincerity, by the grace of God that knows nothing but uprightness; and not according to the human wisdom, that often resorts to deception and craftiness, under the pretence of ‘wisdom’. He works by the heavenly grace of God, seeking nothing but what is heavenly; and not by human wisdom, that cares for what is temporal and earthly.

In his first epistle, the apostle Paul criticized the teachings that are set upon earthly human wisdom (1 Corinthians 1: 17; 2: 16); And here he refers again to this issue; counting those who teach them as preaching according to the world wisdom, for gaining material benefit, or temporal honor. That is what made the apostle reject any material benefit for his ministry.

By the world here he means both the Jews and the Gentiles; as he covets the salvation of the whole humanity, their edification, and their glory.

- + Those who live uprightly, will see the power of God work in their life, and will be consoled.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + It is befitting of virtue not to seek glory, honor, or authority; although a good person would ultimately gain all that in a good way; as these things would certainly follow virtue.. There is no true virtue, but that which seeks to reach the ultimate goal of true goodness.
- + The best virtue is that which seeks no human verdict, other than that of the inner conscience of man himself.

(St. Augustine)

“For we are not writing any other thing to you than what you read or understand. Now I trust you will understand, even to the end” (13)

Here he refers to his first epistle to them. As he wrote before, he is writing now about the divine Truth, from which he hopes they will never divert, but will abide till the end.

Having been attacked by some, the apostle Paul presents his life, thoughts, and all his works, harmonizing with his preaching, and testifying to the truth of his ministry.

- + The apostle Paul says that he preaches nothing other than what he has learned by the grace of God, with no addition on his part.

- + Despite all the accusations against him, the apostle Paul says that he does not preach something, and thinks of something different; And all the facts themselves speak and confirm what is true.

(Theodoret, Bishop of Cyrus)

- + What Paul says is supported by what he does. As through the works we may learn what a certain man truly thinks.

(St. Ambrose)

- + Paul is not boasting; as all what he does is to write facts, that the Corinthians themselves know to be true.

(St. John Chrysostom)

As also you have understood us in part) that we are your boast as you also are ours, in the day of the Lord Jesus” (14)

Despite their close attachment to the apostle Paul, and getting to know him, yet their understanding of him remains in part; they still know nothing about his inner life, as they should. Some believe that, by saying “*in part*”, he does not mean their knowledge of him is not complete, but that not all the Corinthians know him, only some of them; having not benefited from his ministry, his preaching, his epistles, or his counsel.

“*In the day of the Lord*”, that great day in which the depths of every man, his intentions, and his inner glories, will be proclaimed; when the believers would receive the fellowship of glory with Christ; when the Corinthians would boast of their apostle, and he would boast of them;

and when they rejoice in his glory, and he exults in theirs in the Lord.

Despite their in-part understanding of the apostle Paul, and of his inner life, yet it is enough to be a live testimony to the authenticity of his apostleship, to make them boast of him, and to respond to the word of God that he preaches, which makes him in turn boast of them. They cherish his practical gospel harmonizing with his preaching; and he, on his part, cherishes the work of God in them through him; and both parties enjoy the eternal glories.

- + Paul confirms that his boasting in his children is obvious, which will be for their benefit in the day of the Lord.

(St. Ambrose)

- + You know us, not through hearsay, but through practical experience. The word “in part”, he says as a kind of humility.
- + By his talk, Paul severs the roots of envy in the Corinthians; by making them his fellows in the glories of his good works.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + Paul says that the Corinthians understood him only in part; having not still rejected the vain accusations against him.

(Theodoret, Bishop of Cyrus)

5- HIS LONGING TO VISIT THEM:

“And in this confidence I intended to come to you before, that you might have a second benefit” (15)

In this confidence in that he is their boast, and they are his, as well, in the day of the Lord, he intended to visit them, that they might have more blessings; as he previously promised them in his first epistle (1 Corinthians 16: 5).

Writing to them, as well as his future visit would increase their enjoyment of the blessed life, and the experience of the heavenly grace.

They trust in his wisdom, whether he writes or visits, or postponed his visit. According to St. John Chrysostom, by the word “grace” he means (joy).

+ *“that you might have a second joy”*. The joy will be doubled by writing to them, then by visiting them.

(St. John Chrysostom)

“to pass by way of you to Macedonia, to come again from Macedonia to you, and be helped by you on my way to Judea” (16)

That was his original plan which was not allowed by God.

+ Some believe that he promised the Corinthians in his first epistle that he would visit them after visiting the Macedonians first; but having been not ready to wait, he had to explain to them what was on his mind.

(Theodoret, Bishop of Cyrus)

“Therefore, when I was planning this, did I do it lightly? Or the things I plan, do I plan according to the flesh,

that with me there should be Yes, Yes, and No, No?” (17)

When he wrote to them, planning to visit them, he did not do it lightly, namely, without serious thinking, and taking every thing into consideration, nor has so decided according to the flesh, but his goal was spiritual, that touches their spiritual growth. He was not seeking a temporal benefit, but to present to them a double grace.

+ By that, Paul intended to respond to the accusation that he is not trustworthy, by proclaiming that he did not lightly change his mind, but
new strong circumstances have compelled him to alter his original plan.

When a spiritual person does not do what he intended to do, there has to be something else of more importance that concern the
salvation of someone in particular.

(Ambrosiaster)

+ He means to say that he did not change his plan to visit them, lightly or carelessly; but because he submits and is obedient to the Holy
Spirit.

+ As far as the carnal man is concerned, who is attracted to the present world, and is completely under its spell; he, being outside the spiritual influence, is free to go wherever he intends to go, and to do whatever he wishes to do; The spiritual man, on the other hand, is not free to do what he wishes to do, but is completely under the authority of the Holy
Spirit. So was Paul; he could not go to visit Corinth, because it was not according to the will of the Spirit.

(St. John Chrysostom)

*“But as God is faithful, our word to you was not Yes or
No” (18)*

According to St. John Chrysostom, by saying “*our word*” he means his preaching, work, and movements; all of which are not personally his own; but referring them to God, he says: “*As God is faithful*”. Yes, he did reveal to them his intention to visit them; yet his movements are not up to him, but up to the will of God.

Putting the faithful God before his eyes, he presented to them nothing but the truth that knows no twisting by saying Yes sometimes, and No some other times. Namely, what he previously said and could not realize, was not a fault on his part, but because of either some circumstances concerning them that made him postpone the visit, or because of some other circumstances that concern the salvation of others, and compelled him not to forsake them.

The apostle said that for fear that they might probably connect between the postponement of the visit, and his preaching or his gospel, and might wrongly assume that he easily changes his mind, and is not steadfast as far as the truth is concerned.

+ The apostle Paul had to explain the reason why he could not realize his promise to come to visit them, so that the Corinthians would not lose confidence in his preaching. His preaching was indeed trustworthy; but his promise was a personal intention, that was not allowed by God.

(St. John Chrysostom)

“For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us – by me, Silvanus, and Timothy – was not ‘Yes’, and ‘No’, but in Him it is always ‘Yes’” (19)

What the apostle Paul, or any other apostle or minister preach, is the Person of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, the untwisted Truth, in whom is the 'Yes', and not the 'No'.

When, as humans, we confess that we lie, we are saying the truth, knowing that we lie; But the Word, namely, God, who is greater than us, would never do that. He is the divine Truth who speaks about the Father in a unique way; The power of the Word is great; He could not lie; In Him there is no 'Yes' and 'No', but 'Yes' 'Yes' and 'No' 'No'.

According to Ambrosiaster: [It is befitting of the qualified preachers to be clear in what they say; and not to utter anything that is not of benefit; as our human will often tends to lean to contradictory directions. Paul insists that he does not do according to his will, but according to what he knows to be of benefit. As far as Christ is concerned, this problem does not exist, Always intending what is of benefit; Hence His will is unchangeable, and unswayable].

+ I say nothing but what I said before. My talk now is not different from what I have already said; Otherwise it would not be faith, but only
distracted mind!

(St. John Chrysostom)

"For in Him every one of God's promises is a 'yes', and in Him 'Amen', to the glory of God through us" (20)

According to St. John Chrysostom, promises are set in God, are realized in Him, and not from man.

Preaching the divine promises is a call to receive the Person of Christ, in whom we enjoy those true and faithful promises; In Him we find the Truth and the mercy, and God is glorified in us. He is the 'New Covenant', by which we enjoy the reconciliation with

God, and the eternal enjoyment of His love. And as said by the apostle: *“Jesus has become a surety of a better covenant”* (Hebrew 7: 22).

By saying *“through us”*, the apostle confirms that what the Corinthians have enjoyed of exalted divine promises, have been realized in Jesus Christ, through the preaching of the apostle Paul and other apostles; And that what ended up to the glory of God the Father, is but through the Only begotten Son, preached through the apostle. In other words, through the apostles, the preaching of Christ was realized, in whom humanity has gained the divine promises, and in Him the Father was glorified. How could he then behave lightly, or with an unbecoming goal?!

+ Paul’s preaching presents many promises: He says that we shall be raised up to life anew, and will ascend to heaven, He talks

about non-corruption, and the great rewards waiting for us. These promises are unchangeable, not like Paul’s promise to visit them.

They are always true.

(St. John Chrysostom)

“Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God” (21)

While defending himself, saying that he did not act lightly, the apostle Paul draws the attention of his readers to the work of the Holy Trinity: The Father who presented the exalted divine promises; the Only begotten Son in whom those promises are realized; and the Holy Spirit who establishes the people together with the apostles in Christ, where they gain the anointment of sanctification, and the divine holy seal for their protection.

God anoints His believers with the anointment of His Holy Spirit, to be established in what they gain in Jesus Christ, of the realization of the divine promises.

Here the apostle joins himself with the people, to enjoy together with them the anointment of the Holy Spirit, granted by God to His believers to be established in Christ, the Only begotten Son, to enjoy His divine power, and to gain the spirit of triumph over the enemy, the devil.

+ Paul says that Christ will establish the Gentiles in the faith promised to the Jews; having made us all one.

(Ambrosiaster)

+ If the source and the fountain have been established in a fitting way, how could we not enjoy the fruition coming from them? Each of them would lead to the other.

(St. John Chrysostom)

+ After such words; having denied Satan, and there is no more mutual thing in you for him; and having established a covenant with Christ; and become completely His, he commands you to be sealed (anointed) with Christ, and to have the sign of the cross put on your forehead.

Yet, that vicious beast would not shy away; hearing these words, he would become more vicious; and as expected, he would intend to charge against you in a spectacle; Hence God anoints your features, and seals them with the sign of the cross; by which the evil enemy would be reigned; and would no more dare to behold that scene; But once he sees the rays of the sun on your face, his eyes would be blinded and would jump away.

Through the Mayroon (the anointment), the cross would seal you ... You should know that it is God Himself, and not the priest, who anoints you; Just listen to the

apostle Paul say: *“He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God”* (21).

(St. John Chrysostom)

The baptism: A seal of ‘Sphragis’:

“Who has also sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a deposit” (22)

In the Old Covenant, The circumcision was like a seal inscribed on the body, without which man would lose his reference to the people of God, would be counted as a betrayer of the divine covenant, and would fall under the verdict of perdition; It is the *“seal of the righteousness of faith”* (Colossians 2: 11, 12). In the New Covenant, on the other hand, baptism is called a seal ‘Sphragis’, by which man bears the sign of the inner membership of the church, the union with the Lord Christ, and the acceptance of the kingdom of God. This term ‘seal’ probably refers to the apostle Paul, saying: *“He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, who has also sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a deposit”* (2 Corinthians 1: 21, 22); and, *“..., in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise”* (Ephesians 1: 13).

+ Baptism is a blessed seal.

(St. Clement of Alexandria)

+ During baptism, in the presence of bishops, priests, or deacons, ... approaching the minister of baptism, do not look at the seen face, but remember the Holy Spirit, about whom we are speaking now, as He is present to seal your soul. He will grant

you the seal that will terrify the evil spirits; a holy heavenly seal, as it is written: *“in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise”*.

- + How amazing is baptism, considered as a ransom for the captives ... and a holy seal, never to be cut loose.

(St. Cyril of Jerusalem)

- + Baptism is a fellowship in the Logos, and destruction of sin; It bears us to God; It is a key to the kingdom of heaven, a garment of incorruption, and a seal of the new birth.

(St. Gregory the Neziarian)

Many fathers spoke about baptism as a seal for the soul, like St. Clement the Roman, Hermes, the scholar Tertullian, and St. John Chrysostom.

- + Approach, and receive the sacramental seal, to be recognized by your Master, to be counted among the saints, and as one of the known flock of Christ, to be placed on His right hand.

(St. Cyril of Jerusalem)

- + The sign by which you will be sealed now, is a sign that you have become among the flock of Christ.

(Father Theodor, Bishop of Messisa)

- + The seal is a guarantee of keeping, and of possession.

- + In case you have the seal on you; when your souls and bodies are anointed with the holy oil and the Spirit, What could ever happen to you?! The flock sealed with the sign, could never be easily robbed; Whereas the flock that carry no seal is an easy prey to thieves.... You may, as well die in peace,... Do not fear being denied the help of God, granted to you for the sake of your salvation.

(St. Gegory the Nezianzen)

- + The soul that is not protected, nor beautified by the new birth; I wonder how could the angels receive her, once she leaves the body! ... when she does not bear the seal (Asphragiston), nor any sign to designate her possessor! ... She would indeed be carried on air, and would wander uncomfortably; no one would pay attention to her, being without a known possessor! ... She would seek comfort, yet will not find it; would cry out in vain, and would unprofitably regret.

(St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa)

- + Now, your name will be inscribed, and you will be invited to enter the camp (the spiritual camp).

- + Each one of you will come and present himself before God in the presence of the uncountable hosts of angels; the Holy Spirit will put a sign on your souls, to be recorded among the army of the great King.

(St. Cyril of Jerusalem)

- + The sign printed now is a sign that you have become among the flock of the Lord Christ, a soldier of the King of heaven ... He is elected after his soul and body are tested, he will then receive the seal on his hand that designates the name of the King whom he serves.

Now, taken to the kingdom of heaven, you could be recognized when inspected, as a soldier of the King of heaven.

(Father Theodor, Bishop of Messisa)

- + Baptism is the seal of God. And as the first man was created in the image of God and according to His likeness, So is he who follows the Holy Spirit, he will be sealed by Him, and will take the image of the Creator.

(St. Eronimus)

- + Those enlightened will receive the features of Christ ... On everyone of them the form, image, and features of the Word will be printed; Christ will be counted as born in everyone of them through the work of the Holy Spirit ... Those who are baptized would become other Christs.

(Father Methodeus)

“Moreover I call God as witness against my soul, that to spare you I came no more to Corinth” (23)

The apostle calls God as witness to his words; as there were among them those who still raise doubt in his person, words, and possibilities.

- + Here, the apostle speaks with those who obviously wish for reform, yet have not exerted any effort in this concern. To spare them, he went to somewhere else at that time, hoping that they might manage to control themselves. Paul did not want them to assume that that he despise them as unworthy of his visit; As, once they realize that hope and have their ways reformed, he will certainly come to them.

(Ambrosiaster)

- + Keeping himself away from Corinth for sometime, if it was done as a kind of chastisement, it was neither intended by him nor by them.

(St. John Chrysostom)

“Not that we have dominion over your faith, but are fellow workers for your joy; for by faith you stand” (24)

Here the apostle reveals that he is not a master who commands and has dominion over the faith of others; But is a loving father who longs to support them to fill their life with joy and gladness. He does not intend to use the authority and chastisement, but, by the spirit of encouragement, to give them joy and gladness. That is why he delayed his visit. As, by the faith preached to them by the apostle Paul or by any other apostle, they stand; It would be befitting of them, not to depend on anyone, whatever his rank or role in the church, but only on God, the Subject of their faith.

- + Paul so says because faith should never be compulsory, but the product of free will.

(Ambrosiaster)

- + Paul adds this, as his authority was obvious, something feared by the Corinthians.

(Father Theodoret, Bishop of Cyrus)

- + *“Not that we have dominion over your faith”*, nor we give commands concerning these things as masters and lords; We are appointed as teachers of the word, not to have authority over anyone.

- + Receiving treatment depends upon the will of the patient and not of the physician. That is what is realized by such an amazing man (Paul), when he said to the Corinthians: “*Not that we have dominion over your faith, but are fellow workers for your joy*” (24). As only Christians are not allowed to treat sinners against their will. The world judges, on the other hand, when they arrest and try the workers of iniquity, they use the law with great authority, to keep them from doing their evil, even against their own will. In our case, however, the sinner should be reformed, not by compulsion, but by humility.

(St. John Chrysostom)

AN INSPIRATION FROM 2 CORINTHIANS 1

YOUR LOVE ENFLAMES MY HEART WITH THE LOVE FOR HUMANITY

- + Your love is amazing, O the exalted and everlasting Love!
When I see You find pleasure in suffering for my sake,
My heart, in turn, becomes wide by love, to find pleasure in suffering.
I am not worthy of suffering for Your sake.
And for the sake of Your beloved children.
- + In You, we all unite together.
I enjoy their prayers for my sake.
And, in my turn, I never cease to pray for theirs.
- + I boast of them, having become a wonder!
And they, in turn, cherish me.

As we all share Your grace

- + Your apostle Paul longed to visit the church in Corinth.
By his fiery heart, he longed to visit every man.
In case one falls, he counted the whole city as lost.
And in case he repented, the whole church, together with the heavenlies exult.

- + His longings are the fruition of the work of Your amazing Spirit.
Indeed, how sweet is the love that comes from You!



DIVISION 2

THE CONCEPT OF MINISTRY

(Chapters 2 to 5)

In these chapters the apostle Paul presents to us the following evangelic concept and nature of ministry:

(1) **He seeks the repentance of the sinners, and not their grief** (Chapter 2). The apostle postponed his visit to them so as not to see

them grieved, the same way he showed compassion toward the one he previously condemned (2: 5-11). In his first epistle to the church he was firm concerning the one who intended to marry his father's wife. Now, that the man concerned has presented a true repentance after being separated from the church, the apostle sought his return with great love, lest he would be swallowed up with too much sorrow (2: 7). The apostle was known for his firmness against sin, and his exalted love to the repentant, whatever great their sins are; by which he revealed the sweet fragrance of Christ in him to all (2: 12 – 17).

(2) **He presents the ministry of the New Covenant** (Chapter 3): His ministry is not formalities given by a teacher to his disciples, but a

ministry of love; bearing his disciples in his heart, to become his readable message by all people. Reading the heart of Paul, all would find the souls ministered by Christ inscribed by the Holy Spirit in his depths! For no favor on the apostle's part, but it is a reflection of the glory of God, who pours His righteousness in glory upon those His ministers. The ministry of the New Covenant is an entrance to the eternal glory. There is no comparison between the splendor of the glory of the righteousness of Christ, and the glory of the mortal face of Moses.

- **A ministry of the Spirit, and not of the letter** (3: 1-3). We are no longer under the shadow of the law; nor anticipating the symbols and the prophets (3: 18).
- **A glorified ministry** (3: 4-11)
- **A ministry without veil** (3: 12-17).

(3) **A ministry of hope by the spirit of power without losing heart** (Chapter 4); “As we have received mercy, we do not lose heart” (4: 1).

He presents his personal experience of having the mercies of God with him. Having been before blind in mind, then was enlightened by the gospel of the glory of Christ, he does not present himself, “*but the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ*” (4: 6).

It is the **ministry of affliction even to death, yet without despair**: “*always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body*” (4: 10).

To the dead he presents **the continuous ministry of resurrection which he has experienced and still tasting day by day**: “*Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day*” (4: 16).

(4) **A heavenly ministry** (5: 1-10): “*We have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens*” (5: 1).

(5) **A ministry of renewal through mortality** : “*If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new*” (5: 17).

(6) **A ministry of reconciliation**: “*Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ; as though God was pleading through us; we implore you on*

Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God" (5: 20).

CHAPTER 2

SHEPHERDING AND REFORM

In this chapter the apostle opens his heart up to the Corinthians to let them know how much he loves them (1-4). He presents to them here one of the reasons for delaying his visit, namely, that he felt their grief because of the person who fell into adultery. In his love, he did not intend to visit them in this sad atmosphere. But now, as the man concerned has repented, all would rejoice in him, and the apostle would come to partake of their rejoicing in his repentance.

The apostle seeks from the church to show the repentant every love, in order to let him realize that their grief was not out of revenge nor hatred, but of love for his own salvation (5-11).

Now the apostle is coming as well, to give them the good news of the amazing works of God with him; having opened before him a wide door of preaching; and that through him, and his co-workers, the sweet fragrance of Christ for the salvation of many will be diffused (12-17).

- | | |
|--|---------|
| 1- <i>"My joy is the joy of you all"</i> | 1 - 4 |
| 2- His intercession for the repentant fallen man | 5 - 11 |
| 3- A door was opened to me by the Lord | 12 - 17 |

1- ***"My joy is the joy of you all"*** (3)

The apostle preferred not to come to visit them during their grief, as their grief is his as well, and their joy is his joy, What dwell upon him of joy or of grief would also dwell upon them all. He caused them grief when he rebuked them for their slothfulness toward the leader fallen in adultery; But having responded well to his demand, now he intends to come to them to partake of their joy in the man's repentance, and of the work of God in him; as the church has become an icon of heaven, exulting for the return of the sinner.

In his fatherhood, he proclaims that he is unable to come to them; saying:

“But I determined this within myself, that I would not come again to you in sorrow” (1)

The apostle reveals here his feelings of love; as, in his first epistle to them, he was so firm, that he might have caused some of them to grieve, and some to be even offended. Now he reveals his fatherly compassion, and that he could not endure to see them in sorrow.

+ Paul feared that by rebuking a few, he probably caused grief to many; as all the members of the body suffer with the suffering of a single member.

(Ambrosiaster)

“For if I make you sorrowful, then who is he who makes me glad, but the one who is made sorrowful by me?” (2)

He chose not to visit them before the repentance of the fallen man, lest he would then have to use his apostolic authority to chastise, which could cause a collective grief; while he wish for the spirit of consolation and joy to prevail over the church.

+ Forsake your prayer and go to rebuke him (a sinner); You would reform him, and you, as well would have benefit. In such a way we help
all to be saved and to reach the kingdom of heaven, by the grace and love of our Lord Jesus Christ.

+ A wrong care for pleasing others, is a betrayal against the salvation of the shepherd, as well as of theirs.

+ I would rather be in your eyes an arrogant man, difficult to get along with, than to let you do what would displease the Lord.

+ I am committed to instruct you; and in particular to rebuke you. The way fire would dissolve wax; the fear of punishment would soften the
hearts of sinners.

(St. John Chrysostom)

+ It is so shameful to see how the physically ill would readily put great trust in their physicians, even if it comes to cut, burn, or cause severe pain, or to be given bitter medications; and how they consider these things as good deeds on his part; While, we do not adopt the same tendency toward our spiritual physicians when they work on our salvation through firm chastisement. In this concern, the apostle says: "*For if I make you sorrowful, then who is he who makes me glad but the one who is made sorrowful by me?*" (2).... Therefore, it is befitting of us to take into consideration the ultimate result, and count him who causes us pain according to the Lord, as a good doer.

(St. Basil the Great)

The apostle previously proclaimed in his first epistle that the church should grieve for the sinners; and persist on grieving, together with her

Head, our Lord Jesus, until the sinners return and submit to the Father. Commenting on the words of the Lord: *“I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father’s kingdom”* (Matthew 26: 29), the scholar Origen says:

[Because wine in the Holy Book symbolizes the spiritual joy, and God promised His people to bless their wine, namely, He will grant them an abundance of spiritual joy; that is why the priests are forbidden to drink wine before entering the temple; intending for them to be sad, when they offer the sacrifices for the sake of sinners. Then once the sinners are reconciled with the Father, their joy would become consummated.

Origen believes that, as Christ Himself, together with His saints anticipate the repentance of the sinners; their joy is therefore not yet Complete].

- + It is befitting of us not to assume that while Paul grieves for the sake of the sinners, and weeps on their transgressions, Christ would cease to weep when he approaches the Father, stands at the altar to offer the sacrifice of atonement for our sake. Not drinking the wine of joy “when he ascends to the altar”, is because he still carries the bitterness of our sins; That is why he does not wish to drink the wine alone in the kingdom of His Father, but awaits us, saying: *“to drink it together with you”* We are therefore, delaying his joy by being slothful in our life.

(The scholar Origen)

“And I wrote this very thing to you, lest, when I come, I should have sorrow over those from whom I ought to have joy, having confidence in you all that my joy is the joy of you all” (3)

It is as though he says: [I know for sure that you seek my pleasure, which would be realized by your sanctity; When my soul exults in you, you would be exulted as well, as

my joy is the joy of you all. I can not keep silent before sin and disobedience; and, at the same time, I am committed to come with the spirit of meekness, and be compassionate toward all the repentant]. He wishes, as much as he possibly could, to be a fountain of joy for all.

- + Saying that he would be pleased by their sorrow, may sound a kind of arrogance and hardness of heart; So, to appease the shock probably caused by his words, he adds that he knows that *“his joy is the joy of them all”*, and when he is sorrowful, they will all be sorrowful as well ... He means to say: I did not come to you, not because I hate you, but rather because I feel great love toward you.
- + Paul reveals here that he is not less sorrowful than those who did wrong, but rather more. He almost cannot endure the pain that the Corinthians have caused him.

(St. John Chrysostom)

*“For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you, with many tears, not that you should be grieved,
but you might know the love which I have so abundantly for you” (2)*

These words reveal how far the opponents of the apostle Paul have completely distorted his image, claiming that he is a tyrant and a violent person, who, wounding others, and bringing them bitterness, would make his heart glad. To justify himself of such accusation, the apostle confirms the high price he paid while writing that firm first epistle; namely the abundant tears, the intense grief, and the anguish of the heart! But his role as an apostle committed him to write it, although with inner sighs of his heart, and bitterness of his soul.

- + Who writes down in the hearts? It is God who writes with His finger on all consciences, the natural law He gave to mankind; in which we start to receive the

seeds of truth, to get them into the depth. These seeds, if we care to plant, will bring forth in us good fruition by Jesus Christ.

(The scholar Origen)

- + Let us then become sorrowful in our minds, not for the sake of those pleasurable things for which the kings grieve; but for the sake of those godly things of benefit for us; as "*For godly sorrow produces repentance to salvation, not to be regretted*" (2 Corinthians 7: 10).

Let us become sorrowful for such things; let us for their sake have our hearts pierced with grief. So Paul grieved for the sake of sinners, and so he wept "*Out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you*" (2)

When he finds no reason to feel sorrow for himself, he does it to the account of others; or rather he counts their things as concerning him, at least until the sorrow comes to an end.

When others stumbled, he got burnt; ... When others became weak, he became weak as well. ... Such kind of sorrow is good, and surpasses any worldly joy.

I prefer him who feels such sorrow over all mankind; And God Himself proclaims that those who mourn are blessed (Matthew 5: 4); those who commiserate with others.

I am so amazed! Amid the dangers confronting the blessed apostle on a daily basis, he still had the soul full of compassion, of love, sought by Christ Himself, a fatherly and a brotherly love. It is befitting of us to have such a kind of sorrow, to mourn, and to shed tears; as such a kind of love embodies a great rejoice; it is the foundation of joy.

(St. John Chrysostom)

2- HIS INTERCESSION FOR THE REPENTANT FALLEN MAN:

The apostle dealt with the issue of that repentant fallen man in a live evangelic way. He started by saying that, although he felt great sorrow for him because of his fall, the whole congregation, as well, felt sorrowful for him. His sorrow is just a part of that of the whole church; As one of them he partakes of their sorrow for a fallen member. ... As far as he is concerned he does not want to be more severe, after they have so moved as a congregation in sorrow over him. It is now high time for them to rejoice in his repentance, and to live no more in bitterness.

“But if anyone has caused grief, he has not grieved me but all of you to some extent – not to put it too severely” (5)

Ambrosiaster believes that by saying “all”, he means the saints among the Corinthians, who feel sorrowful for anyone who commits a sin; The church, shepherds and congregation, would not feel comfortable when even a single member sins.

+ Having the whole world put in his hands, he did not only care for the Gentiles as a whole, but for every single individual. He wrote a letter to the account of Encimus; and another for the sake of the adulterer Corinthian ... looking at both of them as human beings appreciated in the eyes of God, for whom the Father did not spare His Only Begotten Son.

Do not ever say: this man is an escapee slave; that is a thief or a murderer; that is someone heavily burdened with sins, or that is a lowly beggar ...; but

contemplating in how Christ died for his sake, will be enough to give him some of your interest.

- + Notice that Paul no longer refers to the crime committed by that man; as the time has come for forgiveness.

(St. John Chrysostom)

“The punishment which was inflicted by the majority is sufficient for such a man” (6)

The congregation responded to Paul’s command, and chastised the fallen man, who is already humiliated and presented a repentance. This is enough for him and for them. In his compassionate fatherhood, the apostle presented an intercession and a supplication for the sake of that repentant fallen man before the church of Corinth.

- + Paul refers to the zeal of the Corinthians, having so faithfully responded to his demand, and all turned against that man.

(Theodoret, Bishop of Cyrus)

- + The collective life presents more blessings, than to be completely and easily proclaimed. It is of more benefit than the life of solitude, for keeping the good things granted to us by God, and for the sake of the reward for confronting the outside attacks of the enemy.

Concerning a sinner, his withdrawal from sin would be much easier if he fears the disgrace of being rebuked by the multitude among whom he lives; according to the words: *“The punishment which was afflicted by the majority is sufficient for such a man” (6)*. As for a pious man, he, as well, will find great and perfect satisfaction in the appreciation and the justification of the congregation for his behavior.

(St. Basil the Great)

“So that, on the contrary, you ought rather to forgive and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow” (7)

Commenting on the expression: “(graciously) forgive and comfort him”, St. John Chrysostom says: [What Paul says is not because that man is worthy of being forgiven, nor because he presented sufficient repentance, but because he is weak; to spare him from despair].

Because what he has got is sufficient, because the chastisement has reached its goal, and because the situation has become very serious; If the repentant will not find the compassionate bosom of the church, he will be overcome by despair, and his soul will be destroyed. As they were committed to chastise him by separation from the church, they are equally committed to reaffirm and renew their love to him, to let his soul exult with salvation.

+ Anyway, put in mind that if you happen to become slothful and not caring, sin will eventually take hold of you. That is why you should pay attention, if not for the sake of your brother, let it be for your own sake.

Paul talks about these things, and more; Having commanded the Christians of Corinth to deliver such an adulterer to the devil, he came back to say: [That man has already changed his ways]; he became better; and punishment from the majority is sufficient for him, ... Now, *“Reaffirm your love for him”*.

Although it was Paul who made him a public enemy, caused him to be separated from the congregation, and to be cut off from the body; Look now how he cares to rebind him anew, and to reconnects him to the church! ... He does not just say:

“Love him”, but “*Reaffirm your love for him*”. In other words, Proclaim to him that your friendship is true, abiding, full of zeal, enflamed, and fiery.. .Present your love with the same strength by which you have previously proclaimed your hatred for sin. ... What happened, O blessed Paul? ... Tell me.... Have you not delivered him to the devil?! ... He would answer you: Yes, I so did, but not to stay in his hands, but to get rid soon from his overwhelming authority.

Notice how Paul, fearing that despair would give the devil a stronger weapon against the man, he says: “*Reaffirm your love for him*”; then he adds the reason: “*Lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow*” (7)

- + I believe that that man who fell in such a serious crime in Corinth, is worthy of mercy; As once he was rebuked, and was even expelled from the church, he, instead of hating his accusers, he received their criticism with perseverance, and endured it with abidance. ... I believe that, on account of the fact that that man ended up having a stronger love for Paul and for those who responded to his command, to rebuke and chastise him, Paul retracted his accusation, and asked for receiving him back in the church.

(The scholar Origen)

- + Paul, in that situation, was not commanding but asking, not as a teacher, but as one equal to them, putting the Corinthians on the bench of judgment, and himself taking in the position of a defender, asking them to “*reaffirm their love for him*”.
- + Paul not only asks the Corinthians to stop rebuking that man, but even to give him back his former position; for punishment without treatment means nothing.

Notice also how Paul keeps that man’s soul in humility, lest he would probably become in a worse condition when forgiven; He clearly confirms to him that he has

got the forgiveness, not because of his repentance, as much as it is through a free gift from God.

- + Great discreetness is recommended in such a critical situation, lest what is of benefit would turn to be the cause for greater loss. Whatever faults that man has committed, and for which he deserved to be cut off, As a clever physician who uses his scalpel in treating his patient, he should partake with him of the consequences.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + He who is swallowed up with too much sorrow, would probably get back to commit more sins in despair. On the other hand, the true repentant would get away from sin, and confirm that he regrets what he has done.

(Ambrosiaster)

- + Paul asked them to reunite the member to the body, and the lamb to the flock, and to show him complete love and faithful compassion.

(Theodoret, Bishop of Cyrus)

- + By such a way, the words of Paul chastens the man who defiled his father's marital bed, in case he is not aware of the seriousness of his sin. But once the corrective measures have proved their activity, he started to give him comfort, as though he became blessed by his sorrow; saying: "*lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow*". ... We, as well, should put in mind that, as the human nature is somehow connected to sin, the treatment should be through the sorrow of repentance.

(St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa)

*“Therefore I urge you to reaffirm your love for
him” (8)*

Although the apostle does not doubt their love for the sinner, Yet because the situation was so delicate, that repentant was in need to be shown an abundance of love, and a confirmation to himself, that the church has truly forgiven his fault, and returned him to his former position,

- + Paul himself, who caused him to be expelled from among the congregation, like a pestilence; he, who closed all the doors before his face, and delivered him to the devil; Once he saw how that poor fellow was drowned in sorrow, regretting his sin, and changing his behavior, he gave the Corinthians instructions contradictory to his previous ones.

Now you may see together with me that by having too much sorrow, we work to the account of the devil, whose tricks we well know, that he intends to push us forth to extremism, and to turn the medication which is supposed to cure us into a deadly poison. Extremism would Cast us into the hands of the devil.

- + Like a sinner who grieves over his sins, Paul wept for that man who committed adultery, and asked the congregation to *“reaffirm their love for him” (8)*. Even when he previously condemned him, he did that out of much affliction and with many tears, saying: *“For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you, with many tears, not that you should be grieved, but that you might know the love which I have so abundantly for you” (4).*; And also: *“To the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; to those who are without law as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law; to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I*

have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some” (1 Corinthians 9: 20-22). And somewhere else he says: “that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus”.

(St. John Chrysostom)

“For to this end I also wrote, that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things” (9)

Having presented an intercession for the sinner; intending to exhort them to prompt action by love, he counted that command as a kind of test to know by it the extent of their obedience to him. Some believe that it is easier for man (or for the church), to chastise, than to bring back the sinner to his former position inside the heart and within the church.

- + Paul needs to know whether the Corinthians are equally obedient to restore the sinner, as they were to punish him. As punishment may bear some kind of envy and hatred; while by working on restoring him with love, they show their obedience to be pure. That is the test of the true disciples, whether their obedience is when they are commanded to do something, but also to consummate it on their own.

(St. John Chrysostom)

“Anyone whom you forgive, I also forgive. What I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sakes in the presence of Christ” (10)

What he bears of forgiving love, by which to forget what that repentant has done, is only realized through the love of the apostle for the church as a whole; whom he intends to see as a pure bride. The forgetfulness he practices, is for the sake of Christ in whose presence he

is. It is as though that repentant is very dear to the church and to Christ her Groom, and not just to Paul alone. What the apostle does, and the feelings he bears, are not against the church in Corinth, nor against the thought of Christ, but are all in harmony with the thought of the church, that bears the thought of Christ.

- + Paul practiced what he preaches. He had the right to command, yet he could not refrain from doing what he himself demands from others to do. In his first epistle he condemned the crime committed by that man, with the hope that everyone would be as disgusted by such a crime (1 Corinthians 5: 1-13). But now, he seeks from them to retract their position, and to stop showing anger toward him. There is no doubt that the Corinthians did not have the wisdom of the apostle, to realize that this is what they should promptly do.

(Ambrosiaster)

- + By giving the leadership to the Corinthians, and by telling them that he is going to follow up their reaction, he did his best to appease the rebellious souls of those who love controversy. Lest they would be slothful and refrain to forgive the man, he applied the pressure of telling them that he himself has already forgiven him.
- + The devil can destroy under the pretence of piety; He, not only destroys by leading someone to adultery, but even, on the contrary, to let him have too much sorrow, that despair would follow repentance.... To catch us by sin is his normal task; But to catch us in our repentance, using our own weapon to fight us, is a disgrace for us.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + The problem is not only to recognize Satan's devices, but to play with them. Paul was aware of their dynamics, not to be preoccupied with them, but to keep himself from falling in their traps.

(St. Dedymus, the blind)

"Lest Satan should take advantage of us, for we are not ignorant of his devices" (11)

Here the apostle Paul presents another cause beside the harmony of his thought with that of the church and of Christ; which is not to give Satan the chance to destroy the man with the spirit of despair. As according to St. Philoxinus, when man falls into despair, all demons enter into him.

- + Do not ever fall into despair. You have been created in the image of God; And He, who created you as such, has himself become man. The blood of the Only begotten Son was shed for your sake.

(St. Augustine)

3- A DOOR WAS OPENED TO ME BY THE LORD:

After dealing with the issue of postponing his visit to them, and his intercession for the fallen repentant, he talked them about God's work through him, having opened a door for preaching and ministry. By that he intended to create an atmosphere of joy for such good news; and to reveal to them his strong friendship with them, to talk to them about his personal affairs that do not directly concern the church in Corinth. And he told them as well, his personal feelings toward his beloved disciple Titus. On the one hand, he does not cease to work in many

countries, and the hand of God was giving him success; And on another hand, his continuous preoccupation with ministry, and his labor, could not take away from him his feelings and emotions toward his beloved.

“Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ’s gospel, and a door was opened to me by the Lord, ...” (12)

After he wrote his first epistle amid his abundant tears, great sorrow, and anguish of heart, God did not intend to forsake him in such a bitterness, but brought joy to his heart by opening to him a new door for ministry and preaching.

“I had no rest in my spirit because I did not find Titus my brother, but taking my leave of them, I departed for Macedonia” (13)

Impatiently anticipating the coming of Titus to tell him their news, he had to leave to Macedonia, hoping to find him there, And there he was, To tell him the joyful news (6-7).

- + In the book of Acts (16: 9), it is said that a man from Macedonia appeared to Paul in a vision and pleaded with him, saying, *“Come over to Macedonia and help us”*. Yet the apostle did not refer to that event in his epistle, as it was obviously not the time to talk about such things about himself.

(St. Dedymus the blind)

- + By referring to Titus here, who was the carrier of his epistle to Corinth, the apostle aimed to exhort the church there to receive him well and to appreciate his worthiness.

(Theodoret, Bishop of Cyrus)

- + It is as though Paul was bare of flesh and blood, no more than a soul without a body, and a heart devoid of any lust. In such peace of angelic spirits he lived on earth a heavenly life; as though in the company of the cherubim, partaking of their secret melodies.

He endured all persecutions, as though his body was not his own; he was not affected by, nor harbored any fear of the prison, the shackles, the exile, the threats, the beating, the stoning, or even the death,

He endured all that, but being separated from his beloved friend and fellow worker was enough to disturb him, and to have no rest in his spirit, to the extent that he could not stay long in a city where he came to preach the gospel, and hastened to depart from it (12-13).

(St. John Chrysostom)

“Now, thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place” (14)

It is as though he says that the coming of Titus has taken away his fears, satisfied his depths, and turned his life into a sacrifice of thanksgiving to God, the source of every goodness, who granted him and them to join the procession of his triumph under his leadership.

It has been the custom of the Romans and the Greeks, a leader victorious in a battle, would enter his capital in an awesome procession, with the whole people participating in giving honor to the triumphant army. The leader used to be clothed with a crimson gold-adorned robe, with a

golden crown over his head, and the rod of authority in his hand; and to ride a magnificent chariot of ebony covered with golden plates, drawn by white horses – sometimes by elephants, as it happened with Pompey when he conquered Africa; or even by lions as it happened with Markus Aurelius; or by leopards, as it happened with Helisgabalus; his sons sitting at his feet, or riding horses around his chariot; And a slave standing behind him to keep reminding him that he is only a human being, so that he would not be puffed up beyond reason.

The procession was usually preceded by a musical marching band, playing tunes of triumph, followed by a group of young men leading animal sacrifices to be offered to gods, with their heads adorned with beautiful crowns and colored ribbons. After them come carts carrying the spoil taken from the enemy, and horsemen, kings, princes and leaders captives, shackled with chains. Then comes the triumphant leader in his chariot, on whom the cheering people throw roses, and cry out slogans of victory; followed by the elites exulted by the victory of their army and king. The procession ends with the priests of the temple leading a white ox to be offered as the greatest sacrifice to the gods.

The people of Corinth knew all that, but two centuries ago, the province of Achaia fell, and Corinth was destroyed on the hands of the Roman Consul Lucius Mummius.

A great difference between the triumphant procession longed for by a Roman leader, and that lived by the apostle Paul, when Satan falls captive; when the apostle, together with his co-workers, and all the people are glorified, and sweet heavenly fragrance diffuses, that of Christ. The true believer, hiding in the cross, would perpetually feel his triumph in Jesus Christ, under His leadership over all the hosts of

darkness; over the evil lusts, sins of the body, and the seductions of the evil world. And as St. Augustine says: [The whole world, is overcome, brethren, not by military might, but by the (foolishness) of the cross; ... His body was raised on the cross, and to Him the spirits submitted].

- + God knows your good will, anticipates your strife, supports your weakness, and will ultimately crown your triumph.

(St. Augustine)

The heavenly Lord Jesus Christ, descended to us to become the leader of our triumph, and to bring us over to heaven; As he is alone able to carry us inside Him, and to open the gates of heaven before us.

- + Do not marvel that the whole world would be saved; because He is not a mere man, but the Only begotten Son of God who died for the sake of the world.

Yes indeed, by the sin of one -- Adam, death reigned over the world; And by the righteousness of One, life will rather reign.

If they were expelled from paradise because of eating from the tree; Would it not be easier for the believers to re-enter into it, because of the tree of Christ?!

If the first man found on earth has brought death over the world; Would it not rather be, that his Creator would bring about the eternal life; being Himself the Life?! If Phinehas with his zeal, has turned back God's wrath by killing the evil doers (Numbers 25: 6-12); How much more would Jesus who killed no one, but "delivered Himself a ransom", would take away God's wrath from man?!

(St. Cyril of Jerusalem)

- + Just meditate in such amazing development! He sends His angels to lead men to the heavenlies! Behold. Heaven is set on earth, for heaven to be committed to receive the earthlies.

(St. John Chrysostom)

“For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing” (15)

- + Why, O woman, do you pour so much perfume on such a body defiled on the inside? Why do you waste so much on dirt; You are as though pouring poison on bricks! There is – if you will – precious oil and perfume by which you can anoint yourself; not imported from Arabia, nor from Ethiopia, nor from Persia, but from heaven itself; not purchased by silver or gold, but by virtuous will, and unfeigned faith. Purchase such an oil, whose fragrance could fill the world; which was smelled by the apostles *“For we are to God the fragrance of Christ ...; To the one we are the aroma of death to death, and to the other the aroma of life to life” (15-16)*. That spiritual oil comes out, not only from the bodies of the apostles, but even from their clothes; Paul’s clothes were so saturated with it to drive out demons.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + As there is a relationship between the very costly oil of “Nardine” (spikenard) of the gospel (John 12: 3) and that of the bride of the song, smelled by the groom. (Songs 4: 10)?

In the gospel it came that the sweet fragrance of the perfume poured on the head of our Lord filled the whole house where the banquet was held; as though the woman who poured it has prophesied the death of the Lord who testified to her deed, saying: *“ She did it for My burial” (Matthew 26: 12)*.

The house filled with that fragrance represents the whole universe and the whole world “*Wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial of her*” (Matthew 26: 13). Like the ‘Nardine’ in the Song of Songs that sends its scent from the bride to the groom (Song 1: 12), the sweet fragrance of Christ that filled the whole house, will become like oil that anoints the body of the church in the whole universe and whole world.

- + When the bride of the song says to the daughters of Jerusalem: “*My nardine (spikenard) sends forth its fragrance*” (Song 1: 12); the (soul) takes from every flower in the garden of virtues; and the life of man would become as fragrant as his good behavior; and thus becomes perfect to a certain extent. Such a man does not have to look steadfastly at the word of God as he would at the sun, but would rather see it inside himself as though in a mirror; for the rays of this chaste and holy virtue reflects on his pure life in abundance. and turns what is not seen, to be clearly seen by us, and what is not realized, to be realized by us, by imaging the sun in the mirror of our souls.

When we understand the text, we shall find no difference between talking about the rays of the sun and the pouring of virtue, or the coming forth of the fragrance of perfumes. Whatever the expression we chose, there is one idea common to all; namely, we gain the knowledge of goodness from the virtue; that goodness that surpasses every understanding; the same way we realize the beauty of any model from his image,

So Paul, with the fragrance of his virtue likened that unapproachable beauty; the fruition of the Spirit: love, peace, etc. and was worthy to become “*the sweet fragrance of Christ*” (2 Corinthians 2: 15). Paul smelled that incomprehensible grace that surpasses every grace, and gave himself to others as a sweet fragrance, to take from it according to their capacity. The apostle Paul became an aroma, either of death or of life, according to the nature of him who smell it.

(St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa)

Living in an uninterrupted series of triumphant processions, God the Father smells in Paul and in the whole church the sweet fragrance of Christ; when He sees in them the realization of His divine will.

“To the one we are the aroma of death to death, and to the other the aroma of life to life. And who is sufficient for those things?” (16)

The triumphant processions included two categories of people: One category feeling the climax of joy and exultation; led by the victorious Leader and his hosts; And a category suffering the climax of misery and bitterness, the captivated kings, their sons, and leaders,

In the continuous triumphant procession, the victorious believers exult, carrying the fragrance of life; while the non-believers who persist on rebellion and the disobedience of non-faith will collapse.

Christ, the Sun of Righteousness grants life and growth to the trees planted in His vineyard, watered by the water of the Spirit; And He dries up those, cut off, cast on the ground, and do not enjoy the fountains of living water.

By saying: *“And who is sufficient for those things?”*; he means: [Who is worthy of doing such a great task with such exalted result: life or death? It is an exalted divine task, impossible for man to realize, and for the false apostles to oppose; which has been realized by the prophet Isaiah, who said: *“I shall be glorious in the eyes of the Lord; and my God shall be my strength”* (Isaiah 49: 5). So the believer will enjoy the glory, not only in the eyes of men and angels, but in the eyes of God Himself; and will bear inside himself, the lord his God, his

strength.

- + For whom then will it be “*an aroma of death to death*”, but for those who do not believe, and do not submit to the Word (Logos) of God? ... And again, who are they who are saved and will get the inheritance, but those who believe in God, and continue loving Him; as did Caleb the son Jephuneh, Joshua the son of Nun (Numbers 14: 30), and the innocent children of Nineveh (Jonah 4: 11), who lacked the feeling of evil. But who are they who are saved now, and will enjoy the eternal life, but those who love God, believe in His promises, and are “*babes in malice*” (1 Corinthians 14: 20)?

(St. Erinaos)

- + Put an altar of incense in the depths of your heart. Be the sweet fragrance of Christ.

(The scholar Origen)

- + The fragrance of the knowledge of God diffuses from and by Christ. Paul says “*aroma*”; on account of that some things are known by their smell, even though they may be unseen. God the Unseen wishes to be realized by Christ. Preaching Christ reaches our hearing, the way the smell reaches our noses, to bring forth God and His Only begotten Son to the depths of His creation. He who utters the truth about Christ will become a mere fragrance diffused from God; will be worthy of commendation by those who believe in him. Whereas he who presents faulty proclamations about Christ, would have a repulsive smell for the both the believers and non-believers.

(Ambrosiaster)

- + *“Who is sufficient for those things?”* Realizing that he has just uttered such great things, Paul got back to refer humbly to that everything is from God, from Christ, and nothing is from him ... So, if no one is sufficient for those things, they have to be according to “Grace”.
- + *“As from God”* (17); meaning that we do not claim to give you something on our own, but from God who gives all. We are not glorified in anything as though we do it on our own, but we refer everything to God.

(St. John Chrysostom)

The apostle Paul calls the knowledge of God “fragrance”, to smell more than to see.

- + Whether man is saved or perish, the gospel remains on its strength. The light even if it blinds someone, is still light; and the honey even if it tastes bitter in the mouth of the sick, is still sweet. So is the gospel, it has its sweet fragrance for all, even though those who do not believe in it would perish.
- + In case someone is lost, he should only blame himself. The bright light may blind the weak sighted. According to the nature of the good things, they not only reform those who attach to them, but also destroy those who oppose them.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + Now the law is called (the ministry of death) to the Jews for whom It was inscribed on stone, in reference to the hardness of their hearts; Yet this does not apply to those who keep it with love; for love consummates the law.
- + Every tribulation is either for punishing the wicked, or for testing the righteous....
So are peace and tranquility at the time of
controversies, could be of benefit for the good, or for the corruption of the wicked.

(St. Augustine)

- + So Paul walked in the virtues of the divine Groom; took the eternal beauty as a model for his life, and gained for himself the fragrance of the 'nardine' from among the group of virtues practiced by the mind: "*love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and self-control*" (Galatians 5: 22), to be able to say that he is the "*fragrance of Christ*" (15). He smells the fragrance of Him who is incomprehensible; takes the exalted grace, and presents himself to others as the fragrance of incense; becoming for some an aroma of life, and for others an aroma of death, according to the seeking of either for salvation.
- + The Holy Spirit is He who fills our life with the fragrance of holiness; and the incense is the diverse virtues smelled by the divine Groom as the fragrance of perfume that surpasses any other.
- + Do not let any carnal or lustful person, from whom emerges the repulsive aroma of the ancient man (2 Corinthians 2: 16), do not let him belittle the importance of the holy thoughts and words, and replace them with other carnal and covetous thoughts; But let everyone rather gets out from the 'ego', separate himself from the material world, to ascend to paradise, having become like God by purity. Then we should say: Let us enter into the Holy of Holies of the thoughts proclaimed in this book (the Song of Songs)

(St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa)

- + Preaching the gospel for non-believers, is the aroma of death; Whenever they hear the word of God, they receive it as though a pestilence through which death knocks on the door. For the others, on the other hand, it is the aroma of life. For the believers, the word of God is a message of the eternal life, that works in them according to their faith.

(Ambrosiaster)

“for we are not, as so many, peddling the word of God ; but as of sincerity, but as from God, we speak in the sight of God in Christ” (17).

As his conscience testifies to his faithfulness and simplicity, the apostle Paul does not mix the concepts and teachings of Christ with his own concepts and teachings. Although he, himself, is not qualified enough for this task, Yet through his faithfulness, God works by him, to consummate the mission of reconciliation in Jesus Christ.

He will never hear that divine saying directed to the false apostles and prophets: *“Your silver has become dross; your wine mixed with water* (Isaiah 1: 22); As the false prophets and the wicked priests used to corrupt the word of God by their own evil thoughts.

The apostle confirms that he is sent by God, and that he utters what He directly says to him as His ambassador; and that he speaks before Him and in His presence. He seeks the realization of the message of Christ: *“Be reconciled to God”* (2 Corinthians 5: 20).

+ Paul talks in Christ, not by his own wisdom, but by the power given to him by God.

(St. John Chrysostom)

AN INSPIRATION FROM 2 CORINTHIANS 2

REJOICE OUR HEARTS TOGETHER IN YOU

- + You have descended to us, O Source of joy and true blessing.
You have partaken of our sufferings; that we become worthy of partaking of Your unique joy.
You moan with our moans; and exult by our joys
Grant us this fellowship together.

- + Let me rejoice when all rejoice in You.
And let the gladness of my salvation be gladness for all those around me.
To sing together with the blessed Paul:
"My joy is the joy of you all"

- + You hauled me up from my fall;
You granted me the resurrection from the dead
How could I then not rejoice for the standing of the fallen?
How could I not have a wide heart for the repentant?
When You do not any more remember my sins;
How could I remember the sins of my brethren?

- + I do not talk about specific persons;
Open for me a door to testify to Your work of salvation before many.
When shall I see all humanity enjoy the joy of your salvation?

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CHAPTER 3

MINISTRY OF THE NEW COVENANT

In the last chapter the apostle talked about the mutual love between the shepherd and the flock, and among the members of the flock; and sought from them to reaffirm the true and practical love to the repentant. Now he reveals that the ministry of the New Covenant is a ministry of the Spirit that grants life; and not a ministry of the deadly letter; presenting a comparison between the gospel of the New Testament and the literality of the law, without offending the law in itself. He revealed as well the glory of this ministry, not comparable to the glory of the Old Covenant; and sought from them to take away the veil from their faces, as it is no longer needed, in order to realize the depths of its glory.

1- Between the gospel and the law	1 - 5
2- A glorious ministry	6 - 11
3- A ministry without veil	12 – 17

1- BETWEEN THE GOSPEL AND THE LAW:

“Do we begin again to commend ourselves? Or do we need as some others, letters of commendation to you or from you?” (1)

The apostle proclaims to them that he is no need for oral or written commendation to them from other churches, nor from them to other churches; As his ministry, being a great and honorable ministry of the New Covenant, he needs no commendation from anyone to give him honor or glory; His ministry is a divine ministry, and his justification is from God Himself who called him to it. He never had any doubt in God’s call, in his

own faithfulness in the ministry, in his triumph by Christ Jesus, or in God's support to him.

St. Dedymus the blind says that the apostle Paul delicately shows his astonishment in how the Corinthians were still not able to realize what is behind his use of the apostolic authority! Here, he talks, not to boast, but to spare them being deceived by anyone.

"You are our letter written in our hearts, known and read by all men" (2)

They are the letter that he does not read by his mouth, nor send to other churches, but he rather read it by his heart, to have his inner depths exult for the sake of God's grace working in them. As nothing would bring forth joy to the minister's heart more than to read the work of God in the life of those he ministers; because in them he can realize the extent of his success by the divine grace.

Being in Paul's heart, where there is a flame of the fire of love, he is no need of anyone to remind him of them. Being the subject of his exalted love, wherever he goes, people could read what he carries for them of love; he perpetually speaks about them, or about God's work in them through him.

+ The salvation of the Corinthians has been in Paul's heart, as well as in those of his co-workers; and he was perpetually thinking about it.

(Ambrosiaster)

Comparing between the mission of the apostle Paul, and that of the great among the angels, the archangel Michael, St. John Chrysostom says:

+ While the mission of the archangel Michael was caring for the Jews (Daniel 12: 1), that of the apostle Paul covered the inhabited and the uninhabited parts of the

earth, and the seas. This does not belittle the mission of the archangel Michael; far from it. But I mean to say that man could enjoy the fellowship of the angels, and could even be in the same rank and have the same honor.

(St. John Chrysostom)

“You are manifestly a letter of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink, but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is of the heart” (3)

It is as though he says: Why should I need letters of commendation, when you yourselves, by your new life, are such a letter, not written by ink on papers, but by the spirit in our hearts; testifying to my work before my conscience, as well as before people. Your life is the best letter, perpetually open and read.

They are the letter of Christ; And Paul, together with other apostles or ministers, are nothing more than ministers to them, tools used by the Lord Christ, the Source of every goodness in them.

In the Old Covenant, God gave them His commandments inscribed on tablets of stone (Exodus 31: 18; Deuteronomy 9: 10). But now, with the advent of the era of grace, God took away from them the nature of stone, and wrote His law by His Holy Spirit on tablets of flesh, namely on their hearts; as He previously promised in the book of Ezekiel: *“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh, and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My spirit within you”* (Ezekiel 36: 26, 27). That is how God sets out of the heart of the believer, what is like the ark of the covenant to contain inside it the two tablets of the law, and the gospel, written with the finger of God, namely His Holy Spirit.

The apostle sees himself as though the ink by which the finger of God, namely, His Holy Spirit, writes His gospel within the hearts of millions.

Speaking about his ministry among them, the apostle proclaims its amazing glory, being:

a- They are his letter (2) written by the apostle Paul by the grace of God in him, together with an abundance of strife and near deaths.

b- They are the letter of Christ, having become a practical gospel read by all.

c- The living Spirit of God writes the gospel of Christ in their hearts

d- Their hearts turned into a new ark of covenant, including the gospel of grace.

e- The apostle became like the ink, by which the spirit writes in their hearts.

f- The gospel of Christ is written in their hearts, where their emotions, feelings, intentions, and thoughts, are completely absorbed to the account of the kingdom of God.

+ The divine law, given through Moses, was written by the finger of God, believed by many to be His Holy Spirit.

(St. Augustine)

“And we have such trust through Christ toward God” (4)

The apostle Paul has complete trust that God has well received his ministry, a sign of which is that by it, the Gentiles have received faith through their enjoyment of the salvation work of Christ.

“Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God” (5)

Such trust that God has well received his ministry, and that it produced fruition in the life of the Gentiles, especially in Corinth, did not make Paul arrogantly proud of himself, or let him refer to himself the ability of enlightening the mind or renewing the heart; He knows for sure that he is just a tool in God's hand; and it is God alone who grants the holy will, the pure thought and emotions, and the blessed feelings, He is the Source of every strength, blessing, and grace.

+ "...to have the right to become children of God" (John 1: 12); That could not be set upon human strength, but upon the power of God, received by men from God, who inspires holy thoughts into our heart, through which we care for "*the faith working through love*" (Galatians 5: 6); because "*We are not sufficient of ourselves, ... but our sufficiency is from God*", who has authority on our hearts and minds.

(St. Augustine)

"who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills but the Spirit gives life" (6)

Crawling into the church of Corinth, the false teachers concentrated on the literal application of the Mosaic law, in an attempt to oppose the apostle Paul, whom they accused of breaking the law.

Paul previously asked: "*who is sufficient for these things?*" (2: 16); Here came the answer that God made him and his co-workers sufficient enough to be ministers of the New Covenant.

God called him to minister the New Covenant, by the spirit and not by the deadly letter. Here Paul compares between the ministry of the old Covenant, characterized by the letter, and the ministry of the New Covenant, that should be practiced by the Spirit. The

former ministry on which the letter prevails is deadly, for it did nothing more than to reveal the extent of corruption that man has reached, without presenting the possibility of reaching the incorruption. It is not the law itself that is deadly, for it is rather a mirror that reveals the death that dwelt upon the sinner because of his disobedience; Whereas the ministry of the New Covenant offers the treatment.

The apostle here, does not speak as though he is against the ministry of the Old Covenant, but he warns against sticking to the letter, even if it is held fast by the ministers of the New Covenant. If the Jews, by rejecting the spiritual understanding of the law, did not enjoy the salvation of Christ, So will be the ministers of the new Covenant if they reject the spiritual understanding of the gospel; they will stumble.

- + We are committed to praise together with the blessed David, saying: "*my strength and song*", are not by my free will itself, but by "*the Lord who has become my salvation*" (Psalm 118: 14). The teacher of the Gentile was not ignorant of that, when he proclaimed that he became sufficient enough to become a minister of the New Covenant, not because of his worthiness and his strife, but by the mercy of God: "*Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God*" (3: 5, 6).

(Father Pavnotius)

- + The letter means what is material; while the Spirit means what is mental, which we call spiritual.
- + We became sufficient by the lord, the Minister of the New Covenant, who leads the proof of the Spirit and the power; so that, when the believers conform with Him, their faith would be, not by the human wisdom, but by the power of God.

(The scholar Origen)

+ The apostle Paul truly says: "*The letter kills but the Spirit gives life*". The letter circumcises a part of the body; whereas the Spirit completely keeps the circumcision of the soul and the body; so that the purity is kept, the self-control is beloved, and the un-necessary parts are taken away (as there is nothing necessary in the iniquity of greed, and in the sins of sexual immorality, that do not belong to nature, but came as a fruition of lust}. The carnal circumcision is a symbol; whereas the spiritual circumcision is the truth; the former cuts off a body part, while the later cuts off sin.

+ The Spirit gives life. But you have to understand that the grant of life, which is the work of the father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, is indivisible; And in order to know the unity of granting life through the spirit, Paul says: "*He who raised Christ from the dead, will also give life to your mortal bodies through the Spirit who dwells in you*" (Romans 8: 11).

(St. Ambrose)

+ Although the law was spiritual, yet it did not give the Spirit; Moses had the letter and not the Spirit; While we were given the gift of the Spirit.

(St. John Chrysostom)

+ How does the Spirit give life? By consummating the letter, that it would not kill.

+ To long for Christ, confess to Christ, believe in Christ. By adding the Spirit to the letter, you would be saved, while if you take the Spirit away from the letter, the letter would kill; and if it does, where would the hope be? But the spirit gives life.

+ You who fear God, praise Him; to worship Him, not as slaves but as free. Learn how to love Him whom you fear; to be able to praise Him whom you love.

Men of the Old Covenant feared God because of the letter that terrifies and kills; and did not have the Spirit who gives life. They used to run to the temple to offer sacrifices of blood, ignorant of the shadow through them; ignorant of the fact that they were a symbol of the blood to come, by which all are to be saved.

- + God commands chastity, and it is He who gives chastity by the command of the law. And He gives the Spirit; as the law without the grace would make sin abound more (Romans 5: 20). The letter without the Spirit kills. He commands to teach us how to ask for the help of the grace when we attempt to obey His commandments; and in our weakness and anxiety, we fall under the law; And also to make us thankful to Him for helping us, if we manage to do any good work.
- + If you take away the Spirit, how would the law be of benefit? Because of this the Book says: "*The letter kills*". The law commands, and you still do not obey it. There are things forbidden and you still practice them. You see how "*the Letter kills*"?
- + Let the Spirit be united to the law; For, when you receive the law, and you do not have the help of the Spirit, you could not consummate what came in the law ... You should have the Spirit to help you consummate what you are commanded to do; Because in the absence of the Spirit, the letter would kill you ... You could not make the ignorance an excuse, as long as you have received the law. Now, having learned what you should do, you could not make ignorance an excuse... But why did the apostle say: "*The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life*"? How could the Spirit give life? Because He makes the letter realized, so that it would not kill. The holy are those who consummate the law of God according to the gift of God. The law commands, but it could not help; The Spirit is then added as a Helper, to consummate the commandments of God joyfully and with gladness. There is no doubt that many keep the law out of fear; But those who keep the law out of love for righteousness, would rejoice, and count it not stranger from them.

- + By the law of works, God says to us: 'Do according to My commands', but by the law of faith, we say to God: 'Give us what you commanded'.

(St. Augustine)

- + Paul does not say 'the ministry of the law', but says: "*the ministry of death*" (7), talking rather about its results, to lessen its appeal.

(Theodor. Bishop of Messisa)

- + Paul reveals the results of both ministries: While in the former, he concentrates on its results, namely, death, and the separation from God; In the later he concentrates on the Spirit Himself.
- + The law ministered to death, though it was not its cause; What caused death is sin; but the law brought forth the punishment, and revealed what sin was about ... The law did not minister to bring forth sin or death; but for the sinner to endure the punishment; becoming by that more destructive by the sin.

(St. John Chrysostom)

"But if the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of the glory of his countenance, which glory was passing away" (7)

By the ministry of death here, he means the law that established the punishment of the disobedient; by which we recognized the sin and desired it. This ministry (the ten commandments), engraved on tablets of stone; was a glorious and exalted ministry; As while delivering the

law, the mountain smoked, lightening appeared and thunder was heard; and the countenance of Moses, the receiver of the law shined with splendor, a sign of the glory of the law which he received.

- + The glory that appeared on the face of Moses was a symbol of the true glory. And the way the Jews could not look at the face of Moses; the Christians get the glory of the light within themselves; while the darkness fades off and fly away, not able to endure the brightness of the light.

(St. Maccar the Great)

- + The things promised, being eternal, are engraved by the Spirit of God; contrary to those temporary things, written by ink, that fade away and lose their strength.

(Ambrosister)

- + It is God who wrote the law; But Paul and his co-workers prepared men to receive the things written; the same way Moses cut the two tablets of stone (Exodus 34: 1-4), Paul conformed their souls.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + Paul shows the preference of the grace of the Spirit over the law; and the exaltation of preaching by the apostles over the ordinance of the prophets.

(Severian. Bishop of Gebalah)

- + God wrote by his finger on tablets of stone delivered to Moses; not by a carnal finger, but by the Spirit, He gave the law.

If the epistle of the apostle was written by the Spirit, What would then stand on the way of our commitment to believe that the law of God was written, not by ink, but by the Spirit of God, that enlightens the secrets of our hearts

(St. Ambrosiaster)

- + As the pen is the tool of writing, when moved by the hand of an experienced person, So is the tongue of a righteous person, when moved by the Holy Spirit, will write the words of the eternal life in the hearts of believers, immersing it, not in ink, but in the “living Spirit of God”. Therefore the Writer is the Holy Spirit, for being a wise and a capable Teacher for all; The Spirit writes quickly, because the movement of His mind are swift; He writes the thoughts in us, “*Not on tablets of stone, but on tablets of flesh*” (3). The Spirit writes according to the size of the heart, more or less; either things obvious for everyone, or more vague; according to the purity of the heart; And because of the swift writing, the whole world is filled with the gospel.

(St. Basil the Great)

- + These are the laws of the mind; words that grant inspiration, written by the finger of God, not on tablets of stone, but engraved on the hearts of men. They only support those whose hearts are not attached to corruption. The tablets of the cruel hearts will break; whereas the faith of the little men will conform in sensitive minds.

Both laws minister to the word as a way to teach humanity; one through Moses, and the other through the apostles.

(St. Clement of Alexandria)

- + The Head of the household would probably be Jesus himself, who brings out of His treasure, new spiritual things, perpetually renewed by Him in the inner man of the

righteous, those who are renewed day by day (4: 16); And He brings out as well, old things, engraved on the stony hearts of the ancient man; So that by comparing the letter with the Spirit, the writer would enrich him who becomes a disciple to the kingdom of God, and makes him in his likeness, that the disciple would become like his teacher; conforming to the likeness of him who conforms to Christ; then conforming to the likeness of Christ Himself; according to the words of Paul: *“Imitate me, just I also imitate Christ”* (1 Corinthians 11: 1).

- + We got to understand two things concerning the law: the ministry of death engraved in letters, that has no relationship to the Spirit; And the ministry of life, understood in the law by the Spirit. Those with a faithful heart could say: *“We know that the law is spiritual”* (Romans 7: 14); as the law is holy, and so is the commandment, holy, just, and good (Romans 7: 12); It is the plantation by the heavenly Father.

(The scholar Origen)

“How will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious?” (8)

“For if the ministry of condemnation had glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory” (9)

By the ministry of condemnation, he means the law that condemns the sin; Whereas by the ministry of righteousness, he means the gospel of the New Covenant that justifies him who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Righteous; That the believer would bear the righteousness of Christ.

How great, glorious, and very awesome is the law; delivered to oppose the sin, and to confront the kingdom of darkness; and how much more so would be the gospel that grants the righteousness, and establishes in us the kingdom of light. What the law intends for, but could not

realize, the gospel presents in abundance. The law presented a shadow of the truth;
While the gospel brought forth the Truth itself.

- + The law condemns the sinners; Whereas the grace receives and justifies them by faith. It leads them to the holy baptism, and grant them the forgiveness of sins.

(Theodoret, Bishop of Cyrus)

- + Moses' commandments are "the **ministry of condemnation**"; Whereas the grace by the Savior, he calls "the **ministry of righteousness**" superior in glory. The law that condemns was given by Moses; while the grace that justifies came through the Only begotten Son. So how would Christ not be incomparably exalted in glory?!

(St. Cyril the Great)

- + To interpret more clearly the meaning of "*The letter kills*", he says: As the law revealed the sin, yet it did not cause it; Therefore, "*the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory*", for those two tablets of the law have truly exposed the sinners and punished them; whereas the ministry of righteousness, not only did not punish the sinners, but made them righteous. That is what we enjoy through baptism.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + Because the glory of the Spirit which shined on Moses' face, that no one could endure looking at it; By that sign, we know how the bodies would be glorified by the resurrection of the righteous. That same glory will count the faithful souls worthy of gaining the glories in the inner man, by meditating in the glory of the Lord with an unveiled face, namely, in that same inner man, he is glorified from glory to glory according to the same image.

(Father Gregory Palamas)

- + Paul says that because there is no greater glory than the salvation from death. Anyway, a judge who justly condemns the guilty, would be worthy of greater honor if he showed mercy; as he would be giving the guilty a chance to correct his ways.

(Ambrosiaster)

- + We first need the glory that will pass away, for the sake of the exalted glory; the way we need the partial knowledge that will pass away, with the dwelling of the perfect knowledge.

(The scholar Origen)

“Indeed, what once had glory has lost its glory because of the greater glory” (10)

The glory of the glorious law disappeared before the exalted greatness of the gospel, that presented the righteousness, holiness, goodness, and mercy; and proclaimed the greatness and riches of the exalted grace of God.

- + The law of Moses was not greater in glory for the sake of the splendor on Moses' face (Exodus 34: 29-35). That splendor benefited no one, and had no reward of glory; but was rather a hindrance, not through fault in him, but through that of the sinners.

(Ambrosiaster)

- + Paul did not belittle the value of the old Covenant, but he rather commended it in an exalted way, as the comparison is between two things basically alike.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + The light of the lamp shines with splendor in the darkness of the night; Whereas during the day, it could almost be indistinguishable.

(Theodoret, Bishop of Cyrus)

“For if what is passing away was glorious, What remains is much more glorious” (11)

Here, he presents to us a comparison between the law and the gospel: The former is temporary, and ends by the dwelling of the later; whereas the later surpasses the time, and brings us forth into eternity. The splendor of Moses' face passed away with his death; whereas the splendor of the glory of Christ is divine, personal, and remains forever.

According to Ambrosiaster: [Paul did not deny the shining in the law, nor the shining on Moses' face (Exodus 29: 34-35). Yet that shining did not last, being a symbol and not the truth. The difference between Moses' face and the glory of Christ, is like the difference between the image and the person whose image it is].

3- A MINISTRY WITHOUT VEIL:

It is befitting of the ministers of the gospel not to put a veil on their faces the way Moses did, but to reveal the evangelic truth in the perfection of its splendor; as the evangelic ordinance is obvious to all with a spirit of simplicity; and not in symbols, nor in shadows, but in the divine light who came to the world to be seen by all.

“Therefore, since we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech” (12)

The blessings of the gospel opened before us the door of hope, and presented to us a confirmation that the divine promises were realized, and we got to have them, as they are for everyone. God remains working, and will perpetually work to the account of all.

Having the confidence and the confirmation in the clarity and the non-vagueness of the gospel, hiding nothing from the believer, it would be befitting of the ministers of the New Covenant to utter the evangelic truth in simplicity and clarity, for all to enjoy.

- + The apostle Paul says that we have hope in the vision of the glory, not the kind on Moses' face, but that which was seen by the three disciples of the Lord Christ on the mountain, when the Lord proclaimed Himself (Matthew 17: 1-2; Mark 9: 2-3). That is why it is befitting of us to respond to the love of God as much as we can, by being warm in our love for Him, who, purifies us from our sins, and grants us this confidence, which we are committed to increase; for what we shall ultimately see, will be proportional to what we believe in now.

(Ambrosiaster)

- + We shall have the hope that the grace of the Spirit will not come to no avail, but will remain even after the resurrection.

(Severian. Bishop of Gebalah)

“Not like Moses who put a veil over his face to keep the people of Israel from gazing at the end of the glory that was passing away” (13)

The people of Israel, being not qualified to look at the splendor of Moses' face, even though it was only a temporary and passing away
Glory, was so allowed by God for them so as to seek what is greater, namely, the eternal glory that would never pass away.

- + Paul says that we do need to cover ourselves as Moses did (Exodus 34: 33); as we are able to behold the glory surrounding us, even though it is of more splendor than the first one.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + Why does he say that? Because he, who abides in the bare literal meaning, and preoccupies himself with keeping the law, his heart would be as though clothed by the Jewish letter like a veil; because of his ignorance that the carnal keeping of the law has come to no avail by the presence of Christ; on account of that the symbols turn into the facts of the future.

He who has the power to look into the depths of the meanings of the law, then crosses over through the vagueness of the letter as though through a veil, in order to reach to the unutterable things, would be like Moses, taking away the veil when he talks to God, returning from the letter to the Spirit.

The veil over Moses' face would conform to the vagueness of the teachings of the law; And the spiritual meditation would conform to the return to the Lord. He would be more like Moses whose face is glorified by the proclamation of God.

Like the things put close to bright colors, would themselves bear a touch of the splendor shining around them, So would be he, who concentrates his sight steadily on the Spirit; he would glorify the Lord, and would be transfigured to a greater exaltation, and his heart would be enlightened as though with light that pours from the truth of the Spirit. That is the transformation to the glory of the Spirit, not in a

fading or a non-obvious degree, but, as we would expect for him who is enlightened by the Spirit.

(St. Basil the Great)

- + The truth is that the Old Covenant of Mount Sinai that produced the children of bondage, now only aims to testify to the New Covenant; Otherwise, the words of the apostle Paul, saying: "*But even to this day, when Moses is read a veil lies on their hearts*" (15), would become untrue. But when man moves from the Old Covenant to Christ, "*the veil is lifted*". What truly happens is that those who cause a change by turning from the Old Covenant to the New One, start looking at the spiritual happiness more than to the earthly one.
- + Beyond doubt, there is a veil in the Old Testament, that is lifted up when man comes to Christ. During the crucifixion, "*the veil of the temple was torn from top to bottom*" (Matthew 27: 51), to mean what the apostle says about the veil of the Old Testament which, in Christ, came to no avail.
- + It is not the Old Covenant that came to no avail in Christ; but the veil that covers what would be understood in Christ; namely, would become exposed and obvious; and without Christ it would be hidden and vague.

The same apostle hastens to add: "*Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away*" (15). He does not say: "the law or the old Testament is cancelled", for it is not the case; But, by the grace of God, what was covered would be taken away because it is of no benefit; the cover that hides the beneficial truth is taken away.

That is what happens to those who seek with longing and piety, and not with pride and evil, the meaning of the Holy Scripture. To them, the system of events, the cause of the words, the actions, and the conformity between the Old and the New

Covenants, will all be obviously shown; and not a single point would remain without full conformity.

Those secret facts have been reached through the symbols; when they are brought to light by interpreting the facts, those who tend to criticize are committed to learn.

(St. Augustine)

- + Paul says that the law fades away, namely, it comes to an end in Christ, to whose coming the law prophesied.

(Theodoret. Bishop of Cyrus)

“But their minds were hardened. Indeed to this very day, when they hear the reading of the Old Covenant, that same veil is still there, since only in Christ it is set aside” (14)

Having held fast to the letter and not to the Spirit, and having shut their eyes so as not to see the light of the gospel presented to them, their hearts were hardened and they became full of foolishness. It is as though the veil that covered the splendor of Moses' face from them is still there, and became for them a veil of darkness and ignorance on their hearts, that keeps them from looking at the glory of the gospel that shines on them.

- + What happened in Moses' case, happens all the time in the case of the law. What is said is not an accusation against the law, and has no reflection on Moses who put on a veil, but it is an accusation against the narrowness of mind of those who care for the literality of the law. The law has its own glory that befits it; yet they

were incapable of beholding it. We should then not marvel why the Jews did not believe in Christ; if they did not even believe in the law?

- + The veil is put over the hearts of the Jews ... because of their heavy carnal mind... Do not you see that the veil was not over Moses' face, but over the Jewish insight? This happened, not to hide Moses' glory, but to keep them from seeing it, having not found a way to see it. The fault is in them, and it did not make anything unknown as far as Moses is concerned.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + When the (bride) turns on the pages of the prophets a page by page, Now, as the veil that used to cover those pages was taken away, she will recognize Christ, and will find Him come forth from those pages she reads, in a definite proclamation.

(The scholar Origen)

- + "*Until this day*" does not mean just to the day of the apostle Paul, but even to our present day, and to the end of the world.

(St. Cyril of Jerusalem)

"But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart" (15)

The Jews used to cover their heads completely by a veil (Taliyt) from the Hebrew word (Taalal, meaning to cover), when the law is read. But that veil is no more valid, and is taken away; for by the fellowship with Christ the darkness is no more, and the Truth transfigures by a true spiritual thought.

- + The presence of a veil is not because of Moses, but of their intensely carnal minds.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + The veil of the temple is torn, for what was hidden in Judah became exposed to all the Gentiles. The veil is torn and the secrets of the law are proclaimed to believers; But to non-believers, they remain hidden to this very day. When Moses – the Old Testament – is read in a loud voice by the Jews every Sabbath according to the testimony of the apostles, “*the veil covers their hearts*”. They read the law in which there is enough truth, yet they do not understand it, for their eyes stay on their darkness. They are actually like those about whom the Holy Book says: “*Eyes they have, but they do not see; they have ears but they do not hear*” (Psalm 115: 5, 6).

(St. Jerome)

- + On account that the shadows bring forth the truth, even though not the complete truth; Moses, the divinely inspired, put a veil over his face to talk to the children of Israel. Yet by doing that he cries out saying that it is befitting of man to look at the beauty of the uttered words, not through the symbolic outer appearance, but through the hidden meditations in us (15-16). Let us then lift up the veil from over the law, and make Moses’ face free of all covers, to behold the truth bare.

(St. Cyril of Alexandria)

- + As long as man does not listen to the spiritual meaning, a veil is over his heart, and because of this veil, which is the hardened understanding, it is said that the book itself is covered by a veil. This is the interpretation of the veil said to cover Moses’ face when he talked to the children of Israel, namely when the law was publicly read. But once we return to the Lord, where the word of God is, and where the Holy Spirit proclaims the spiritual knowledge, the veil is taken away, and we can behold the glory of the Lord in the Holy Books with an unveiled face.

- + The shining of the coming of Christ by lightening the law of Moses with the splendor of the truth, lifts up the veil that covers the letter of the law, and shuts it in; for all who believe in him, and hide these good things within himself.

(The scholar Origen)

The scholar Origen believes that this veil that kept the Jews from recognizing our lord Jesus Christ, led them to kill Him and to oppose His church.

- + Up till now, the Jews do not stand against the Gentiles who worship the idols, and who blaspheme against God; They do not hate them, nor have any grudge against them. They only have grudge against the Christians, and inflamed with limitless hatred against those who have forsaken the worship of idols, and turned to worship the true God.
- + Having no more altar, nor temple, or a priest, and have no more offering of sacrifices, they feel that their sin abides in them, and that they have no chance for forgiveness. If he who killed the Lord Jesus was a Jew, he still carries the responsibility of that crime up to this very day; a fruit of his lack of understanding of what lie in the law and the prophets.

(The scholar Origen)

The scholar Origen seeks from them to take the veil away, that they could turn their sight from the literal concept of the temple and the sacrifices to the heavenly concept.

- + O Jews, When you come to Jerusalem and find it devastated, and turned into dust and ashes, do not cry like babes; do not grieve, but you should rather seek for

yourselves a city in heaven instead of the one you are looking for here on earth. Lift your sight to find up there, the free Jerusalem, the mother of us all (Galatians 4: 26).

Do not grieve for the absence of the temple here, nor despair for your lack of a priest; as in heaven you will find an altar and priests of the goodness to come, according to the order of Melchizedek in their procession before God (Hebrew 5: 10). The love and mercy of God intended to take away from you the earthly inheritance, to give you the chance to seek the heavenly one.

(The scholar Origen)

If the people of God in the old Covenant were called "Israel"; a word, according to the scholar Origen, meaning (the mind that beholds God).

a veil was put over their mind, they could not behold God, and lost that title, to be received by the church of the New Covenant "the New Israel" who turned to the lord, and enjoyed an exalted divine vision.

This veil that deprived the Jews of the heavenly vision, and from the recognition of the secret of the cross, made the Jews stay at 'Marah' to keep on drinking the bitter water of the law; from which the Christian drink to find it sweet through the cross.

- + The Jews still dwell at Marah, at the bitter waters, because God did not let them see the tree by which the water becomes sweet. But once the tree (the cross) of Jesus comes, and in me the teaching of my Savior dwells, the law of Moses will become sweet to him who reads and understands it.

(The scholar Origen)

“Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away” (16)

Here he talks about what happened with the prophet Moses (Exodus 34: 34); Yet he probably also refers to when the Jews will return to faith in Christ as a Lord and a Leader, who will take away from them the veil of ignorance, the blindness of the mind, and the hardness of the heart; when on them, the true light will shine, and they will clearly see the Truth.

The apostle believes that the Jews as a congregation will receive faith in Christ, and, together with the Gentiles, will come to be one flock to the one Shepherd and the Bishop of the souls of all.

- + We should supplicate to the lord Himself, to the Holy Spirit Himself, to lift up every cloud, and every darkness that makes the vision of our hearts vague by the stains of sins; to be able to have the amazing spiritual knowledge.

(The scholar Origen)

- + The goal of the veil was not to hide Moses' face, but to keep the Jews from seeing him; But once we turn to the lord, that veil will naturally be taken away. When Moses talked to the Jews his face was covered, but when he talked to God he removed the veil from over his face. So shall we, when we turn to the Lord, we shall be able to see the glory of the law and the receiver of the law, both uncovered. It is not only that, but we ourselves shall be in the likeness of Moses.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + Let us then beware, not only when we read Moses, but when we even read Paul, that we would have a veil over our hearts; in case we slothfully listen; or when we are not zealous to learn and to understand, not only Moses and the prophets, but

even the apostles and gospels. I fear that through slothfulness, and the hardness of heart, the divine books would not only be veiled for us, but would even be sealed; ... I fear that when a book is put in the hand of someone, and is asked to read, he would say: "I can not read"; and if put in the hand of someone who can read, he would say "It is sealed".

That is why we are committed, not only to have the zeal to learn the holy literature, but to pray to the Lord, and supplicate to him day and night, that the Lamb of the tribe of Judah would come, and Himself would hold the sealed book and open it; As He is the one who opens the books, and inflames the hearts of His disciples, to say: "*Did not our hearts burn within us while he opened the Scriptures to us?!*" (Luke 24: 32). I wish He finds us now worthy to open for us what he has inspired to His apostle to say: "*The Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty*" (17).

(The scholar Origen)

- + Paul reveals that the Spirit and God are equal. Moses turned his eyes toward God (Exodus 34: 34); And we turn our eyes toward the Holy Spirit. It was difficult for Paul to say that what the Spirit proclaims is greater than what Moses saw, if the Spirit is just a creature and not God Himself.

(Theodoret, Bishop of Cyrus)

- + He who is blessed by the Spirit of the Lord will be liberated from the condemnation of the law; As the spiritual gifts give their power by the spirit. Moreover, the gift is given free to those who are ready to receive it.

(Severian. Bishop of gebalah)

- + The Jews are like kids under the supervision of a teacher. The law is our teacher who brings us forth to the Lord; namely to Christ ... The teacher we fear; while the Lord shows us the way of salvation. Fear brings us forth to liberty, liberty to faith, faith to love, love brings forth sonhood, and the sonhood brings forth inheritance. That is why, where there is faith, there is liberty; because the slave works by fear, while the free works by faith. The former by the letter, while the latter is under grace. The former in bondage, and the latter in the Spirit. And where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.

(St. Ambrose)

- + There is a benefit of taking away the veil off the bride's face; As her eyes would become free, and would be able to look closely at her beloved. Taking away the veil also refers to the work of the Holy Spirit, according to the words of the apostle: *"Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty"* (16, 17).
- + It is not within the ability of man to acquire this gift on his own; yet the divine intention hides behind the body of the Holy Book, as though behind a veil. Because some statutes and historical events cover the facts meditated by the mind, the apostle tells us that those who look at the body of the Holy Book with a veil over their hearts, are not able to see the spiritual glory of the law, being hidden behind the veil put over the face of the giver of the law; That is why he says: *"The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life"*

(St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa)

- + *"A veil lies on their heart"* (15); that they are unable to realize that, *"Old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new"* (5: 17).
Why are they old things? Because they were known for a long time.
And why are they now new? Because they concern the kingdom of heaven.

The apostle tells us now, the way the veil is taken away: "*When one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away*" 16). Therefore, the Jew who does not turn to the Lord, the eyes of his mind would not be able to look to the end. And as they were in the Old, even now at this age, the children of Israel still do not carry an insight to see to the end; namely to the face of Moses. As his shining face carries a symbol of the truth, and the veil obstructs the vision, the children of Israel, up to the present time are unable to recognize the glory of his features.

Now the symbol is no more. Why? Because once the Original (the King) comes, the image is to no avail.

+ The Old Covenant of the Mountain of Sinai brings forth bondage, and is of no benefit, unless it carries a testimony for the New Covenant;

as long as Moses is read, and the veil is still on their hearts; But once one turn to the lord Christ, the veil becomes of no avail.

+ The same apostle says that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in the Holy Book. They are not hidden to be rejected, but to increase the longing for them, because they are hidden. That is the benefit of secret things, which should be honored even if they are not understood; The more you honor them, the more the number of the veils hiding them. The more man is exalted, the more veils (or curtains) he hangs in his house; those veils give more honor to the things they hide as secret; And those who honor them will have the veils taken away; whereas those who scoff the veils, will lose, and will be forbidden from approaching them. That is why, "*when one turns to the lord, the veil is taken away*".

(St. Augustine)

+ "*The kingdom of God is within you*" (Luke 17: 21) ... Because of the repentance from the letter to the living Spirit; "*When one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away*".

(The scholar Origen)

“Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty” (17)

Here, he presents to us the blessing of the enjoyment of the Spirit, confirming that the believers in the New Covenant are happy because of three reasons:

- 1- The enjoyment of the light instead of the darkness.
- 2- The enjoyment of the inner liberty.
- 3- The renewal of our nature, to come to be the icon of Christ.

Here he talks about the liberty; When the Holy Spirit works through the ordinance of salvation presented by the Lord Christ, the believer enjoys the liberty from the literality of the law, and the bondage of corruption; to find himself attached to God, and his will harmonized with that of God. The heart would be liberated from the bondage of selfishness; become wide with love toward all humanity; and would run along the road of the wide divine commandment. Some believe that the apostle here, means by the Spirit, the gospel that we enjoy by the Spirit, and not by the letter. When we enjoy the gospel of the lord, we gain the divine grace that liberates us, not only from the deadly Jewish letter, but from the sin, its authority, corruption, and death.

- + It is befitting of us to know that taking away the veil is a kind of grace; As it is befitting of the eye to become free of any obstacle, to be able to behold the beauty of the Beloved.

(St. Gregory, the Bishop of Nyssa)

- + He who seeks to reach the perfection of the evangelic teaching; he who lives under the grace, would not fall under the authority of sin. Because to stay under the grace means to work according to the things commanded by the grace; Whereas he who does not submit himself to the perfect requirements concerning the perfection of the gospel, should not be ignorant, that, although he is baptized, and even if he becomes a monk, yet he is not under the grace, but is still chained by the shackles of the law, and burdened by sin. Because he who grants the grace of adoption, and receives those who receive Him, intends to add to the building, and not to demolish it; He intends to consummate the law, and not to destroy it.

Those who do not understand this thing, who disregard the magnificent counsels and sermons of the lord Christ, make the liberty a chance to slothfulness and irresponsible behavior; that they are unable to keep the commands of Christ, as though they are too difficult; and they, as well, despise the commandments of the Mosaic law, on account of that they are ancient things; although the law presented them to the beginners and the kids. By that they call for the dangerous liberty cursed by the apostle, saying: "*What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law, but under grace? Certainly not*" (Romans 6: 15).... Those are neither under grace, having never climbed the heights of the teachings of the Lord; nor under the law, having rejected even those simple commandments of the law. Those, fallen under the double authority of sin, assume that they have received the grace of Christ ... and fall into what the apostle Peter warns us against, saying: "*as free, yet not using your liberty as a cloak for vice*" (1 Peter 2: 16); And about which the blessed apostle Paul says: "*For you brethren, have been called to liberty, only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh*" (Galatians 5: 13). Namely, you have been called to be free from the authority of sin; Yet putting the commands of the law aside, are not a permission to sin. The apostle Paul teaches us that this liberty

would be only where the lord is; saying: *“Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty”* (17).

(Father Theonas)

“But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord” (18).

Enjoying the divine light, and the true liberty, our nature is renewed and grows every day, to be conformed, and to become an icon of the Lord Christ, our Creator; and to raise from glory to glory. The believer thus tastes a daily experience and a practical knowledge through the power of the Word, perpetually renewing him.

As the Jews were unable to look steadily at the face of Moses, the intercessor of the Old Covenant, he had to put a veil over his face. As far as we are concerned, we came to have the uncovered face to behold, as though in a mirror, how our nature conforms every day according to the glorious promises of the gospel of Christ, through the work of the Holy Spirit *“The Lord is the Spirit”*.

- + It is not possible for the soul to unite with God, the uncorrupted by any way, unless it becomes almost pure through non-corruption, and set herself as a mirror reflecting the purity of God, that the beauty of the soul is conformed through a fellowship with the original beauty, and the enjoyment of its reflection on her.
- + As long as we can change, it is preferable then to change to the better: *“from glory to glory”*. This makes us perpetually progress toward perfection by daily growth, without setting for ourselves certain limits toward perfection; namely, without being satisfied with what is better.

- + Now we see the bride led by the Word to the highest levels of virtue; to that of perfection.

At the beginning, the Word sends to her some rays of light through the windows of the prophets and the commandments; then He encourages her to come closer to the light, to become beautiful through being transformed to the image of a pigeon in the light. At that stage, the bride takes from goodness as much as she can afford; then the Word raises her up to share a higher beauty which she has never tasted before. And while she progresses, her desire grows with every step because there is no limit for the goodness before her; and, with the dwelling of the Groom with her, she continuously feels that she has just begun her ascent. That is why the Word says to the bride whom he waked up: "*Get up*"; then when she starts to head toward Him, he says: "*Come*"; on account that He, who called her to get up. Is capable of leading her up to go to higher and higher levels.

Because he who runs toward God, will have a long way ahead of him; we have to persist on getting up, and not to cease getting closer to God; As with saying: "*Get up*", and "*Come*", the Groom gives the strength for ascension to what is better. That is why we are committed to understand what follows in the text; As when the Groom exhorts the bride to get more beautiful, He reminds us of the words of the apostle, demanding from us to walk virtuously in order to go from glory to glory (18). By the word "*glory*", he means what we understood and the blessing we got at one time. It is not important how much glory, blessing, and height, we have; as he believes that we have got less than what we hope to get. Although she became as beautiful as the pigeon, yet the groom commands the bride to transform to a better level; And in that case, the text will show us something better than a "Pigeon".

(St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa)

- + That does not refer to the things that will eventually come to an end, but to the things that will never end. The Spirit is God; and we are ascending to the level of the apostles; for we all shall see Him with unveiled faces. Being baptized, the soul glitters more than the sun. And being purified by the Spirit, we shall, not only behold the glory of God, but we shall receive from Him a kind of shine.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + Being transformed from the knowledge of the law to the grace of the Spirit, We should remember that we are moving from the glory of the Spirit working in us, to the glory of our inheritance as children. That is the work of the Spirit; as it is befitting of us to understand the word “the Lord” meaning “the Spirit, not the ‘Son of God’.

(Severian, Bishop of Gebalah)

- + Although saying “as in a mirror” refers to that it is not essential; yet it is obvious that we, any way, seek to liken Him.

(St. (Mar) Isaac, the Syrian)

- + It will be like this: The Old Testament openly proclaimed the Father, and the Son in a more vague way. The New Testament, on the other hand, proclaimed the Son, and inspired the Deity of the Holy Spirit. Now, the Spirit Himself dwells among us, and provides us with more clear proofs about Himself. It was not safe that, while the deity of the father was not yet known, to proclaim the Son in an obvious way. Nor, when we have not receive the deity of the Son, to endure the deity of the Holy Spirit ... That is why, as I believe, the Spirit came gradually to dwell in his apostles, and to fill them according to their possibility of receiving Him: He started by the gospel; then the passion, then the ascension, then made their strength perfect by

dwelling on them as fiery tongues. That was the way Jesus proclaimed Him gradually, as you may learn if you read the Scripture more attentively.

(St. Gregory, the Nezianzen)

- + The Jews in their days could not look at Moses' face, although he was their relative and fellow servant; Whereas you see the face of Christ in His glory, according to the words of the apostle, crying out: "*We all behold the glory of the Lord with unveiled faces*". ... The Jews, after Egypt came to the wilderness; Whereas you will eventually come to heaven. Moses was an excellent leader and commander; Whereas we, have another Moses, the Lord, who leads and commands us.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + I do not believe that it would be something to fear or to make one sad in having a changeable nature. Yet, let us change for the better; let us have a kind of wings to fly up to better things; from glory to glory, to be greater through the daily growth, and the continuous seeking of perfection. The true perfection is not to stop at growing to what is better, and not to set limits for perfection.

(St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa)

- + He does not just refer the Spirit to the Lord, but he added: "*Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty*" (17). So are we all, with an unveiled face, by the reflection of the glory of the lord, are conformed anew into that same image, from glory to glory, like the Lord, the Spirit; Meaning, we, who turn to the Lord, as though with a spiritual understanding, to behold the glory of the Lord, as in the mirror of the Holy Books; Now we change from that glory that turns us to the Lord, to the heavenly glory.

(St. Ambrose)

- + The expression said by the apostle: “face to face”, does not commit us to believe that we shall see God with a carnal face; but we shall see him, unceasingly, in the Spirit. If the apostle did not refer to the face in the inner man, he would not say: *“But we all with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord”* (18). By faith we approach God; and faith is the work of the Spirit, and not of the body.

(St. Augustine)

In this chapter we notice moved from defending his apostleship and the success of his ministry in Corinth and in other places, to show the greatness and the glory of the ministry of the New Covenant, for all the believers to enjoy:

- (1) The ministry of the Old Covenant is glorious, as it happened when Moses received the law on Mount Sinai; But as the people feared death, they demanded that God would not speak to them (Exodus 20: 19; Deuteronomy 18: 16); By that they received the spirit of bondage again to fear (Romans 8: 15); We, on the other hand received the spirit of power and of love (2 Timothy 1: 7), the spirit of adoption to God the Father (2 Corinthians 12: 18-24).
- (2) Moses, whose face shined, was a minister of a law engraved on tablets of stone; While the apostles are ministers of the New Covenant, namely, the gospel of Christ, inscribed by the Holy Spirit on the hearts of flesh of the believers.
- (3) Moses presented the letter that kills; While the apostles presented the gospel by the Spirit who gives life.

- (4) Moses gained glory, and his face shined, yet for some time; Whereas the glory that we get from Christ is perpetually growing, by which we rise from glory to glory, until we reach the eternal glories.
- (5) The law was proclaimed through symbols and vague shadows; Whereas our gospel came clear and simple.
- (6) The Jews saw the passing away glory of Moses outside themselves; Whereas the Christians see the Person of Christ dwelling in them. Those saw it in the face of Moses; Whereas we see it inside us, as in a mirror that reflects the splendor of heavenly glory.

AN INSPIRATION FROM 2 CORINTHIANS 3

I READ YOUR WORK IN THE HEARTS OF YOUR PEOPLE

- + I saw You, O My Savior in the hearts of Your people.
I touched Your rich grace in their depths.
As a Planter who cast the seeds of Your Word on their hearings.
And You, the Grantor of life, present growth to them.

- + Your gospel is very rejoicing.
It inflames my heart with the fire of love for You and all humanity.
You granted me to read Your work in the hearts of Your people.
I read, not letters written with ink;
Nor engraved on stone;
But it is the language of Your fiery Holy Spirit;
Who sets from the stones children for Abraham.

You record a living gospel that sanctifies both the soul and the body.

+ My heart exults, for You brought me forth into the era of grace.

Your grace grants me an exalted sanctification.

Your grace supports me not to break the letter.

Fear no more kills me, for Your Spirit gives me life.

+ When Moses received Your law.

His face shined with an exalted heavenly splendor.

And the Israelites put a veil on Moses' face;

For they could not look at Your shine on his face.

Now, You have granted me Your grace;

Transfiguring in my heart, as though on Mount Tabor;

And filling my depths with exalted lights'

You have brought me into exalted glories

You took away the veil to let me enter into Your sanctuaries.

Where I encounter You, O Grantor of glory.

+ I will always turn to You

The veil will have no more place in me;

No power could hide the splendor of Your glory from my insight.

No one can hide the divine truth from my depths.

+ Your gospel became open before me.

And the gates of heaven flow Your secrets on me

With an unveiled face as in a mirror, I behold Your glory.

You bring me forth from glory to glory.

Until You bring me forth to the amazing day of Your ultimate coming.

Glory be to You, O Grantor of glory to Your beloved.

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CHAPTER 4

FAITHFULNESS IN MINISTRY

Having talked about the mutual relationships of love between the shepherd and his flock (Chapter 2), and having revealed the glory of the ministry of the New Covenant, entrusted to him (Chapter 3); Now he talks to us about his faithfulness in ministry amid the labors and afflictions.

1- The persistence on ministry	1 - 2
2- The rejection of the light by the wicked	3 - 4
3- The uprightness of ministry	5 - 7
4- The sufferings of ministry and the divine help	8 – 18

1- THE PERSISTENCE ON MINISTRY:

Having proclaimed the glory of ministry, we see him here justify himself of the accusation directed by the false teachers against him and his co-workers, that they are deceitful, by which they got the situation upside-down, by interpreting the sufferings and afflictions the apostle and his co-workers are going through, as a proof of God's displeasure with them, and that the divine grace has forsaken them.

“Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart” (1)

While the false teachers interpret the abundance of the sufferings of the apostle Paul and his co-workers as a sign of a divine wrath, the apostle, on the other hand, sees in them the exalted mercy of God, that granted them the blessing and the honor to receive those sufferings for the sake of the ministry, which would certainly lead to the joyful hope. With the confirmation: *“We do not lose heart”*, It is as though he says: Although

we confront many difficulties; yet, in all of them, experiencing the grace of the joyful gospel, the spirit of despair or bitterness will never crawl into our hearts.

Through the divine mercy and grace, Paul received the apostolic ministry (Romans 1: 5); and through them he was given the strength to persist on it. *“And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has enabled me, because he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry”* (1 Timothy 1: 12). Many heroes and great men suffer the feeling of inner losing of heart, even though millions would glorify them; on account of that they do not get in touch with the mercy and grace of God, and do not recognize the inner power that supports them. The apostle Paul, on the other hand, says: *“By the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain”* (1 Corinthians 15: 10).

+ Paul refers his persistence, not to his worthiness, but to the mercy of God. which, at the beginning purifies man, then makes him
righteous, adopts him as a son of God, and grants him a glory like that of his Father.

(Ambrosiaster)

+ This persistence on ministry is referred to the compassionate love of God, that would not only let us fall under the weight of our temptations, but let us rejoice as well, and speak with daring.

(St. John Chrysostom)

“But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth, commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God” (2)

With the intention to walk blamelessly, the apostle did not allow himself to practice anything of shame or disgrace, done by the wicked even in darkness. Some believe that he talks here about the behavior of some false teachers, particularly those of Jewish origin, who practiced carnal faults in secret; that made some of them take the side of that man who committed sexual immorality with his father's wife.

The apostle did not walk in craftiness (Panourgia), but in perfect simplicity and open heart, he did not cover his behavior with glittering appearances that hide beneath them ugly things.

+ He who takes upon himself a leading role is committed to have more splendor than any bright star; and to have such a blameless life, that would let everyone look up at him and imitate his example.

+ *“Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he falls into reproach and the snare of the devil”* (1 Timothy 3: 7). As even the idol worshipers revere a blameless man, I wish we also live accordingly, to let no enemy or a non-believer talk evil against us; he, whose life is blameless, would truly shut up the mouths of adversaries.

(St. John Chrysostom)

The apostle and his co-workers did not handle the word of God deceitfully, but they clearly uttered the evangelic truth. Some believe that the Apostle, by that, refers to what the deceitful gamblers and bargainers do in the market places, who mix the good things with the bad.

The apostle and his co-workers present the truth from their whole consciences to be enjoyed by the consciences of the listeners. It is the ministry of the heart to the heart; by which the true ministers utter the truth, for no other goal than the love of the truth itself. They do not

care for the verdict of others on them, but only for the testimony of their own hidden consciences, even though they do not reveal them; namely the testimony of their own depths, seen only by God.

- + Paul speaks here about the circumcision, to which the false apostles who recently entered into faith from among the Gentiles, have committed themselves.

(Theodoret, Bishop of Cyrus)

- + Knowing that Christ is the true Light (John 1: 9); we learn that it is necessary for our life to be enlightened by the rays of the true light. But virtues are the rays of the Sun of Righteousness (Malachi 4: 2), that emerge to enlighten us, through which we cast off the works of darkness (Romans 13: 12); walk properly as in the day (Romans 13: 13), and renounce the hidden things of shame (2). Doing everything in the light, we, ourselves will become the light, and give it to all those around us (Matthew 5: 15-16). If we know Christ as “sanctification” (1 Corinthians 1: 30), in whom every work becomes pure and well-established, let us then prove by our life that we, ourselves, are partakers of His name, harmonizing in action and words with the power of His sanctification.
- + We are committed to bare ourselves of all those “garments of skin” covering us (See Genesis 3: 21), namely, the carnal wisdom. We are committed to deny all the shameful things done in secret, and not to be covered by “the fig leaves” of this bitter world. And once we tear off those covers of this mortal life, it would be befitting of us to stand again in the sight of our Creator, to resist all the deceptions of taste and vision, and to let ourselves be led only the commandments of God, instead of the poison spat by the serpent..

(St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa)

- + Look at how his light shines before men, when they see his good works.

(St. Augustine)

2- THE REJECTION OF LIGHT BY THE WICKED:

“But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing” (3)

If the gospel preached by the apostle is (kekalummenon), namely, is veiled like Moses' face, it is as such to those who by their own will became blind. When a veil is put on man's heart, it would be a sign that he became among those who perish under the authority of sin, who deliver themselves to evil. Jesus Christ came to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matthew 10: 6; 18: 11; Luke 9: 10), to seek and to save those who are lost. He is the Good Shepherd who leaves the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and goes after the one which is lost until he finds it (Matthew 18: 21; Luke 15: 4).

The apostle means to clarify here that, even if the gospel is veiled, the fault is not in the gospel itself, nor in the ministers who preach it, but in those who persist on keeping themselves lost and destroyed, and do not respond to the divine call.

- + It is only veiled to non-believers, and not to all; like it was with Moses' face that was veiled to all Israel in the Old Covenant.

(Severian, Bishop of Gebalah)

“Whose minds, the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory

of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them” (4)

Another cause that the gospel stay veiled for some, is their response to the god of this age who blinds the insight of non-believers, darkens their understanding, to remain under his authority of darkness, in ignorance and rebellion, to be deprived of the divine Light.

Whom does he mean by “*the god of this age*” but “*the ruler of this world*” (John 16: 11), under whose authority the kingdoms and glories of this world have fallen? (Matthew 4: 8-9).

However, some believe that by “*the god of this age*” he means God Himself who takes His grace away from the wicked because their persistence on disobedience, that deprives them from the light, as “*To them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says: ‘Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, and seeing you will see and not perceive. For the heart of this people has grown dull; Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, Lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, Lest they should understand with their heart and turn, so that I should heal them’”* (Matthew 13: 14-15; Isaiah 6: 9); As it is written: ‘*God has given them a spirit of stupor, Eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear, to this very day*’” (Romans 11: 8); And as it came in (1Timothy 1: 17) about God that He is “*the King Eternal*”.

- + The “*god of this age*’ does not refer to Satan, nor to any other god as claimed by the followers of Mani, but to the Great God of this world, who blinded the minds of the non-believers of this world. As in the world to come, there will be not be any non-believer, who are only in this world.
- + We confirm that this expression talks, not about Satan, but about the God of all.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + He means the God of heaven; not just the God of this age, but the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; the God of all.

(St. Theophylact)

Saints Erinaos, John Chrysostom, Augustine, the scholar Tertullian, Father Theodoret, and others, believe that this text means: [God has blinded the minds of non-believers of this age.

- + If the Son of God is not alone the true Light, and the creatures share with Him this feature, ... Why then, should the saints cry out loudly to God: "*Send out Your Light and Your truth*" (Psalm 43: 3)? ... If man is not in need of the Word who enlightens, Why then should the saints seek from Him to enlighten them, if He cannot help them?

The Only-begotten Son, therefore, differs from the creatures, in being the Light who enlighten those in the darkness.

If we need light from some other source, we therefore, very clearly, are not the true light; and we do not have the same nature of the Word, who surpasses us with no limit.

- + The light is not responsible for those who are not enlightened; as it is the case with the sun that shines over all, and would not be blamed for not benefiting the blind who is not able to see it. The Word, the true Light, the Only-begotten Son, who enlightens all, in a similar way shed His light; yet the sick creation did not receive the light; And as the apostle Paul says: "*The minds of non-believers are blinded,, lest the light of the knowledge of God should shine on them*" (4).

(St. Cyril the Great)

- + Every non-believer is of this world; No one who has overcome the world, and has become worthy of the world to come, could be blinded in his understanding; as his eyes are enlightened.

(St. Dedymsus the blind)

- + Paul says that unbelief is confined to this world; on account that, in the world to come, the truth will be obvious for everyone.

(Theodoret, Bishop of Cyrus)

- + Beloved children, Our divine Teacher is like God, His Father ... He is without sin, and is Blameless ... manifested in a human form, He realizes the will of His Father; ... He is God the Word, who is in the bosom of the Father, and on His right hand; and in His same nature; He is the exact image of God (4). It is befitting of us to liken Him in Spirit, as much as we can; ... but we should strive with our whole might and as much as possible, to be without sin, Nothing for us is more important than to uproot from ourselves, any diversion we are used to.

The high perfection would naturally be, not to sin in any way, which would only concern God!

The exaltation that could follow, is that man would not sin on purpose, which befits the wise.

The third level is that sin would only come in rare occasions; a sign of a very learned man.

Finally, as the lowest level, we should postpone the fault to few moments; that would concern those who call to reform what befell them of loss, and their repentance, as a step on the way of salvation.

(St. Clement of Alexandria)

- + He is the image, of His same essence. He is from the Father, And the Father is not from him, The nature of the image, to be the produce of the Origin whose name it carries. But here there is more than that. In the regular language, the Image is a still representative of something moving; But in the present case, it is a living Reproduction of the (One) living Being, and is more similar to the production of Sheth of Adam (Genesis 5: 3); or any son of his father.

(St. Gregory the Great)

- + What is the face of God like? It is definitely like His image! According to the words of the apostle: "*He is the image of the Father in His Son*" (Colossians 1: 15). By His image, He shines on us, namely, His image – His Son -- shines on us, for Him to shine on Us; Because the light of the Father is the light of the Son; Whoever sees the Father, also sees the Son; and Who sees the Son, also sees the Father. As there is no difference between glory and glory, it is the same glory.

(St. Jerome)

- + The Son of God is the Word, the righteousness. But every sinner is under the authority of the ruler of this age (4); as every sinner is a friend of this evil present age; on account of that he does not deliver himself to Him, who gave Himself up for our sins, to save us from this evil present age, according to the will of our God and Father, and according to what came in the epistle to the Galatians (1: 4). As he who sins, by his own free will, is under the tyranny of the ruler of this age, and is ruled by sin, Paul commands us not to submit to sin that intends to have us under its authority, saying: "*Therefore, do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lust*" (Romans 6: 12).

(The scholar Origen)

3- THE UPRIGHTNESS OF MINISTRY:

“For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake” (5)

The sign of the uprightness of his ministry is to present himself as their servant to preach Christ, and not to preach himself. What preoccupies him is to present Christ’s mind, love, work, and divine Person, and not to present Himself. The lust of his heart is to minister to the world to receive the Lord and Savior of the world. The apostle is not ashamed to call himself their servant (doulos), as that is his true deep feeling; and that is according to the divine call he has got. His desire is not to preach by his wisdom, ability, or self righteousness, but to testify to the Messiah, that He is the Lord of authority on heaven and earth, who reconciles humanity to God the Father.

- + It is not us, but Him who establishes our faith, by which He receives and justifies us.

(St. Dedyms the blind)

- + Humbly expressing himself, Paul talks in a certain way to reveal that he was not preaching the gospel to his own account, but for the glory of the Lord Christ, whom he obeys.

(Ambrosiaster)

- + I am a servant, nothing but a servant to those who receive the gospel. I practice everything to the account of Christ; and do everything for His glory. Therefore, when you oppose me, you actually dishonor God.

- + If you so minister, you are not a servant; If you do it out of principle, by a good intention, from the heart, and for the sake of Christ. This is the bondage practiced by the free Paul, and which he strongly proclaims, saying: *“For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake”* (5). Look how he bares your bondage of its meaning; Like if someone robs another, then gave him back more than what he took from him, he would not be considered as a robber, but as a doer of good.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + To realize the fruits of humility, and the punishment of greed, imitate the Lord by loving one another; Do not fear death or any other punishment, for the sake of the good of the other, but into the way that God entered for your sake, enter for the sake of others, working unceasingly with one body, and one soul for the high call, for the sake of the loving God, and for the sake of one another; For the love and fear of God are the first consummation of the law.

(St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa)

The apostle Paul here, proclaiming that he preaches in the name of the Lord, and not in his own name, he feels that he, together with the children of his Lord, are in need of His divine help. And if it was the pleasure of His Lord, to accept to be a servant of men to grant them the sonhood to God; Would he, as an apostle, not share with His Lord His pleasure, and become, in his turn, a servant of men?

+ *“Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it; Unless the Lord guard the city, the watchman stays awake in vain”* (Psalm 127: 1) ... As stewards of God, we watch over you; yet, we wish that He watches over us together with you.

We may be your shepherds, yet we are ourselves as well under God’s care, as your fellow sheep.

We may be your teachers, yet, as far as the Lord, the divine teacher is concerned, we are your fellow disciples.

If we wish for the glorified Lord to keep us, He who humbled Himself for our sake, to keep us; Let us as well, be humble, and count

ourselves as nothing; As nobody has any good, that he has not got from God, He who is alone Good.

(St. Augustine)

“For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give

the light of the knowledge of the glory in the face of Jesus Christ” (6)

The apostle Paul looks at the enjoyment of the inner enlightenment, as a work of creation, that no one can realize except God Himself. Here, he refers to what came in the book of Genesis 1: 3, where God said: *“Let there be light”*, when the darkness was covering the face of the earth, *“and there was light”*. So He looks at our hearts, on which the darkness of ignorance prevail, to shine on them with His divine light, to get enlightened by the heavenly knowledge, and to give it to others. As to saying: *“In the face of Jesus Christ”*, this enlightenment is realized by Christ, in whom we will enjoy the fellowship of His divine glory, and bear his righteousness and holiness.

+ Do you see how Paul show the glory that shined on Moses’ face, shining with great splendor on those wishing to see him? It shines in our hearts, as it did on Moses’ face (Exodus 34: 29-35). He reminds them of what happened at the time of creation (Genesis 1: 3); then he confirms that this renewable creation is greater.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + The un-seen divine nature perpetually remains, and could be recognized in the Manhood of Jesus Christ, who shines with, and sends forth rays of divine light.

(Theodoret, Bishop of Cyrus)

- + Saying: "*God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts*" (6), the apostle refers to the resurrection. He reveals that resurrection is a coming forth out of the old state, that was like hell (Sheol), in which man was imprisoned, and no light of the gospel secretly shined on him. Now this breath of life shines on him through hope in the resurrection, By it the dawn of the divine wisdom will shine in the heart of man, to become new, with nothing old in him.

(St. Isaac the Syrian)

- + "*If you do not know, O fairest among women, follow in the footsteps of the flock, and feed your little goats beside the shepherds' tents*" (Songs 1: 8).... This is the sure way to protect yourself; Meditate in how God created us in a level far exalted than that of the rest of creation; ... In how, when He created the heavens, the moon, the sun, the beautiful stars, or any of the other things you see in nature, He did not create any of them in His image; Only you, He created according to the likeness of that nature that surpasses imagination, in the image of the eternal beauty; ... and in having received, as well, the true divine blessings, and the seal of the true light, You will become like Him when you look at Him, and when you imitate Him, He who shines inside you (6), when His light is reflected through your purity.

(St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa)

In our contemporary rite, two weeks before celebrating the feast of the glorious resurrection, namely the Christian Passover, we read in the Sunday of baptism, that precedes Palm Sunday, the chapter of the gospel concerning the opening of the eyes of the man who was born blind. This is on account of our belief that the holy baptism is actually an opening of our inner insight to behold the secrets of the divine love, to receive the entrance of Christ, the Light of the world into our inner Jerusalem, to enjoy Him, as the secret of the true Passover, as a secret of enlightenment that touches our personal life.

By this we can understand the words of our Lord Himself, that without the holy baptism we cannot see the kingdom of heaven (John 3: 3, 5); Namely, without it, we shall not have the enlightenment of the inner insight that can perceive and enjoy the kingdom of light.

- + This cleansing – the baptism – is called enlightenment, on account of that, who learn these things, will have their understanding enlightened.

(St. Justin)

- + Our sins are forgiven by a great medication, by the baptism of the Word. By baptism, we are purified of all our sins, and instantly become justified from evil. That is, in itself the grace of enlightenment; that, after (changing our ways), we do not stay as we were before being cleansed; as knowledge comes together with the enlightenment, and shed light on the mind. After being before without knowledge, we instantly become learned by that knowledge granted to us. Learning leads to faith; and faith is given to us by the Holy Spirit in baptism.

(St. Clement of Alexandria)

- + Being baptized, we are enlightened; ... Being enlightened, we become adopted; ... And being adopted, we are consummate ... This action is called by many terms:

grace, enlightenment, consummation, and cleansing ... It is called enlightenment, on account of that, by it we see the holy light of salvation; Namely, by it we can clearly behold God.

- + By three plunges, and three supplications, the sacrament of baptism is consummated, to abolish the image of death, and to enlighten the souls of the one baptized through the delivery of the knowledge of God.

(St. Basil the Great)

- + The enlightenment, namely, the baptism, is a helper for the weak, ... a contribution of the light, ... a scattering of the darkness.
The enlightenment is a procession toward God; Walking with Christ is the foundation of religion, and the consummation of the mind.
The enlightenment is the key to the kingdom, and a restoration of life.
We call it a gift, a grant, baptism, enlightenment, the foundation of eternity, the non-corruption, the washing of the second birth, a seal, and everything honorable.

(St. Gregory the Neanzian)

- + Baptism is the daughter of the day; Opening its doors, night would flee away, that into which all creation entered.
Baptism is the great road to the house of the kingdom, He who walks along it will enter into the land of light.
That attire you put on, O man, in the font of baptism, was prepared for you by the Father, woven by the Son, and sewn by the Holy Spirit. In the water of baptism, you descended, and was divinely clothed. In baptism, the Holy Trinity presented the fire to burn up iniquity, to let the souls live together with God.

(Mar Jacob El-Serougi)

“But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us” (7)

Why do Paul and his co-workers not preach themselves? Because they are nothing more than earthen vessels, valueless in themselves, but their value is in the treasure they contain and preach.

The original term (ostrakinois) means a very fragile snail. And as the calcareous shell of the snail includes inside it a soft live animal; The word of truth lies in our depths that are “earthen”, formed out of dust, mud, then burned by fire.

In the Jewish literature it came that a princess went to Rabbi Joshua Ben Chananiah, and said to him: {How great is your knowledge of the law! And how ugly is your countenance! How could all this wisdom be contained in such a lowly vessel?! ... Here, the Rabbi inquired from her about the vessels in which she keeps her wine; and when she answered that she keeps it in earthen vessel as every one else does; the Rabbi said to her that it is befitting of her, being the daughter of the emperor to keep her wine in silver vessels; which she did, and eventually became totally corrupted. When the emperor knew that it was the Rabbi who gave her this bad counsel, he called him. The Rabbi told him all the conversation between the princess and himself; to teach her that wisdom is not given only to those with nice faces, but also given to humble looking men like him, like an earthen vessel.

- + It is the treasure they were given in this life to possess inside their souls, that *“became for us the wisdom of God, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption”*. ... He who found the heavenly treasure of the Spirit, and possessed it, would by it, easily and without effort, consummate all the righteousness of the commandment, and all the virtues, with purity and blamelessness.

Let us therefore supplicate to God, and seek from Him with the feeling of need, to grant us the treasure of His Spirit, to be able to walk in all His commandments with purity and blamelessness; and to consummate all the righteousness of the Spirit with perfection, through the heavenly Treasure, namely, the Lord Christ.

(St. Maccar the Great)

- + Do you still dare to boast your free will, and to dishonor the blessings of God, the Grantor of the gifts; when Paul, the chosen vessel clearly writes: *“But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us”* (7)?

(St. Jerome)

St. Jerome believes that the most valuable treasure, found in earthen vessels, is the Word of God hidden in the Holy Book; namely, in the letters of human languages.

- + *“We have this treasure in earthen vessels”*. Some others interpret this phrase in terms of the Spirit in the body. But I think that a better way to interpret it is that we have the most precious treasure, a divine treasure, in the Holy Book . written in such simple words.

(St. Jerome)

- + The greatness of the things, together with the weakness of those to whom they are granted, reveal the might of God. The expression “earthen” hints to the weakness of our mortal nature and fragile body, which is not any better than earthen vessels, that would easily break.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + By treasures we understand those of knowledge, and hidden wisdom; and by the earthen vessels, the humble way by which the Holy Book are written, that would be despised by the Greeks, yet in which the exalted divine power is clearly demonstrated.

(The scholar Origen)

4- THE SUFFERINGS OF MINISTRY AND THE DIVINE HELP:

“We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; We are perplexed, but not in despair” (8)

The Lord Christ confirmed to His disciples that *“In the world you will have tribulation”* (John 16: 33); And the apostle Paul and his co-workers were surrounded by tribulations on every side. Yet all those tribulations could not hinder his work; but they rather were a chance for him to discover the possibilities of God, God of the impossible, who can support, help, and turn the bitterness into sweetness.

The apostle expressed what they went through, as that they were:

- a- hard pressed on every side.
- b- perplexed
- c- persecuted
- d- struck down

Three of these terms were used in the wrestling contests ‘Isthmus’ that were held in Corinth; and the fourth term was used in sprinting.

The expression *“hard pressed”* in Greek, came to describe him who falls into the hand of his competitor who wrestles against him, and could

hardly complete the game.... The expression "*perplexed*" (Aporoumenoi) describes him who stands helpless, and does not know what to do before the ability and expertise of his adversary....

Although the apostle Paul experienced all those tribulations, Yet he was not crushed, nor fell into despair. Because by Christ Jesus, he could stand tall on his feet again, conquers, and get the crown of conquest.

- + All these tribulations do not mean that we utterly fall; but they are allowed by God as a kind of training and test.
- + Tribulations and afflictions, not only come from enemies, but even from members of one's own household and friends; allowed by God, not for our defeat, but rather for our chastisement.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + He who loves Christ, namely, the Word, would follow His lead as much as he can. Jesus, not only kept doing good to men, but, being treated with despite and blasphemy, he was longsuffering; endured without thinking evil of any of them; and ultimately died on their hands. In the absence of these three things, the works of loving one's neighbor, he who claims that he loves Christ or bears His kingdom, deceives no one but himself.

(Father Maximus the confessor)

- + Unless those three things happen, there would be no proclamation of the greatness of God's power.

(Theodoret, Bishop of Cyrus)

- + God saves us from sorrow, not that we would become without sorrow any more; as according to Paul, we shall be: "*hard pressed on every side*", namely, we shall never be without tribulation; Yet, with the help of God, we are "*not crushed*".
- + Because of that gift of love, the saints were never *hard pressed* by temptations, nor completely *perplexed* with doubt, or *crushed when struck down*; Yet their relatively light temptations will work to their account for the heaviness of the eternal glory. This description of temptations as only temporary and light, does not apply to everyone, but to Paul and those who are like him, through being given the complete love of God in Jesus Christ, poured in their heart by the Holy Spirit.

(The scholar Origen)

- + We should know that all men are tempted for three reasons:
 - a- Mostly to test (justify) them.
 - b- Sometimes to reform them.
 - c- In certain cases to punish them because of their sins.

To **test** them, as we read about the righteous Abraham, Job, and many other saints, who have gone through temptations.

To **reform** them; when God chasten His righteous for the sake of little sins (non-voluntary), to exalt them to a higher level of purity; cleansing them from unclean thoughts; according to the sayings: "*Many are the afflictions of the righteous*" (Psalm 34: 19), and: "*My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives.... For what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons*" (Hebrew 12: 5-8).

To **punish** because of sins; as it happened when God threatened to send pestilences on the children of Israel for the sake of their evil deeds, and saying: "*I will send against them the teeth of beasts, with the poison of serpents of the dust*" (Deuteronomy 32: 24); and the words of the Lord Jesus: "*See, you have been made well, Sin no more, lest a worst thing comes upon you*" (John 5: 14).

The mind of a righteous man should not be soft like wax that would take the form of a hard seal pressing on it, then would take the form of another; namely, would change according to the pressure applied on it; But we should instead, be as hard as the seal, itself, Our mind should keep its goodness and purity, and would instead seal, and leave its signs on everything else.

(Father Theodor)

"Persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed" (9)

The term "*persecuted*" (Diokomenoi) refers to a sprinter finds himself at the rear of the sprint race, not able to keep up with his competitors;

And the term "*struck down*", refers to a wrestler is struck down by his opponent. ... By Christ Jesus, the former will surpass all the others, and the later will get up to overcome and be crowned.

+ God was to them like a Shepherd, when they were in need. He looked after them, to keep them safe against their adversaries.

(Ambrosiaster)

+ As to the ruler of this world (Satan), who gets his authority wherever he finds vanity and disturbance; he keeps away from him, on whose life, peace and order prevail, and on whom the Son of God reigns. . When this inner peace abides on the inside,

all the persecutions provoked by the ruler of this world from the outside, would not be able to shake that well-established building; But the strength of the building on the inside will lead to the failure of the devil on the outside; The Lord says: "*Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*" (Matthew 5:10).

(St. Augustine)

"Always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body" (10)

Here the apostle talks about his continuous sufferings as conforming with those of Christ. It is as though the apostle partakes of the passions of Christ, which also work in the believers who carry the dying of the Lord Jesus in their bodies; who present an amazing example of receiving the passions of Christ with joy, and of proclaiming His life in themselves.

For the sake of the evangelic truth, the apostle was expecting death every moment of his life. And like the wrestlers who carry in their bodies the scars of wounds and bruises they received from their opponents, and boast of them after they are crowned with victory; So Paul did, seeing the scars of his sufferings as sign of glory, being a fellowship with Christ in His passions.

According to human mind, the apostle may die and his life may come to an end; But as Christ works in him, He grants him a new life every day, which is the life of Christ working in him.

- + Christ Himself partakes of the death of the martyrs; ... Their sufferings are His sufferings; ... His life purifies their bodies; ... Their sufferings are a true testimony that they are qualified to gain the life to come, promised by Christ.

(Ambrosiaster)

- + What does he mean by “the dying of Christ” which they carried with them? It is the daily deaths they went through, by which the resurrection is manifested as well. That is another advantage of the temptations, that they proclaim the life of Christ in our human bodies. What may appear like weakness and need, actually proclaim His resurrection.
- + You may say that Abel was distinguished because he offered a sacrifice well received by God (see Genesis 4: 4). But if we examine the sacrifice of Paul, we shall find that it surpasses that of Abel, as heaven is higher than earth. If you ask me what I mean; I shall say that Paul kept on presenting a complete daily sacrifice; and his sacrifice was double as much, because:

a- He died daily (1 Corinthians 31).

b- He always carried about in his body the dying of the Lord Jesus (2 Corinthians 4: 10). All the time, he confronted dangers; he desired martyrdom; and by putting his body to death, he actually became a sacrifice offering, and even more than a sacrifice, because he did not offer an animal sacrifice, but offered his own body and blood as a double daily sacrifice. That is why he dared to say: “*I am already being poured out as a drink offering*” (2 Timothy 4: 6).

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + As far as we are concerned, having not benefited by His life, and fell into sin, He descended into our death; so that by dying to sin, we would carry in our bodies “*the*

dying of the Lord Jesus", to receive His eternal life. Those who perpetually carry in their bodies "*the dying of the Lord Jesus*" will also gain His life proclaimed in their bodies.

- + In case man puts to death his human lusts, and by the Spirit puts to death the works of the body, he would perpetually carry in his body "*the dying of the Lord Jesus*" until he reaches a stage like that of an infant who has no feelings of sensual pleasures, and lacks the motives practiced by grown-ups. He would eventually have the emotions of a little infant; and would be considered the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

(The scholar Origen)

"For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh" (11)

We, who are perpetually in the danger of death, live offering our life a sacrifice of love to the account of the Lord Christ, who is glorified in us, granting us the resurrected life.

The scholar Origen believes that Christ Himself is the Lord of martyrs; the true Martyr who works in the lives of those who believe in Him. He (Origen), having gone through many eras of persecution, proclaimed that Christ allows for the martyr to suffer, and suffers together with him; then grants him the victory, crowns him, and receives that crown in Himself. He confirms that the absolute faithfulness of the Christian martyr, bears in itself a strong power of conviction, that can bring the heathens forth to see the truth.

“ So then death is working in us, but life in you”

(12)

He says: we, the apostles, being in continuous danger, practice the dying on a daily basis; While the congregation, receive the gospel that grants them the new heavenly life.

- + So says Paul, on account of the fact that he and Timothy were threatened by death, having by their preaching among the Gentiles, incited the hate of both the Jews and the Gentiles.

(Ambrosiaster)

- + We endure His dying to reveal the power of His life.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + If you believe that Paul was caught up to the third heaven and into paradise, and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for man to utter (2 Corinthians 12: 2, 4); You will be sure that you will get to know more and greater things that what were revealed to Paul. He eventually came down from the third heaven, but as far as you are concerned, you will not come down, if you carried the cross and followed Christ, our High Priest *“who has passed through the heavens”* (Hebrew 4: 14). If you do not apostate from following him, you will pass through the heavens upwards, not just over the earth and its secrets, but even over the heavens and their secrets as well.

(The scholar Origen)

“But since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written: ‘I believed and therefore I spoke’.

We also believe and therefore speak” (13)

As David wrote: "*I believed and therefore I spoke*" (Psalm 116: 10), So we also believe that we have received the realization of the divine promises, and came to have the right to enjoy the eternal salvation, and the fellowship of the glory together with the Lord Christ. That what we testify, and about what we speak.

What men of the old Covenant have believed through the proclamations of the Spirit, is the same as our faith; But hoping for enjoying it, it is befitting of us to testify to it.

- + Paul reminds us of Psalm 116: 10, that reminds us of the divine wisdom, and encourages us at the time of danger. The Psalmist uttered those words as he confronted the danger of death, and when there was no probability of escape except by the power of God. In like circumstances Paul says that we, having the same spirit, will also be comforted like he did. By that Paul shows the great harmony between the Old and the New Covenants, in both of which the same Spirit works. As men of the Old Covenant were in danger as we are; Therefore it is befitting of us as well to find a solution through faith and hope.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + Moreover, our Intercessor, having been proclaimed to us, intends to reveal the secret of our renewal. Concerning the righteous men of the Old Covenant, the thing was hidden; although they as well were to be saved by the same faith proclaimed at that time. We would not dare to claim that the believers of our time are better than the friends of God through whom the prophecies were presented. God proclaimed Himself as the "*God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob*"; and gave Himself that title to eternity... As they believed in the incarnation of the Lord Christ, to happen in the future, while it was still hidden; We, as well, believe that it actually happened.

- + Before His coming in the body they believed that He will come in the body. Our faith is their same faith: They believed that it will happen, While we believe that it actually did.

(St. Augustine)

“Knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus and will present us with you” (14)

Amid those sufferings that turned the apostles' life into a perpetual putting to death, the resurrection of Christ shined on them, to make them enjoy the deposit of resurrection together with Him. The apostles did not fear death, counting it as the joyful way of resurrection, by which they would cross over, with and by Christ, to glory.

- + He who raised Christ from the dead, will also raise us up, if we do according to His will, walk according to His commandments, and love what He loves, keeping away from every evil talk, greed, love of money, and false testimony.

(St. Polycarp)

- + Again, Paul fills the hearts of the Corinthians by exalted thoughts to save them from feeling indebted to the false apostles.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + Paul believed that he together with the believers, through the Work of Christ, have become greater than death; and that all of them will show up before the awesome throne of judgment.

(Theodoret, Bishop of Cyrus)

“For all things are for your sakes, that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God” (15)

By “*all things*” here he means the experience of suffering, the daily putting to death, and the deposit of resurrection and of the new life; All those experiences lived by the apostles are presented to the people. Suffering in the ministers’ life is the live way for gaining new souls, the edification of believers, and their spiritual growth.

+ God does not wish for anyone to be denied of His gift; Yet, as not everyone has received the word of faith, the apostle who knows the will of God, did not fear to endure persecutions and dangers, as long as he could preach to everyone, that many more would believe.

(Ambrosiaster)

+ God did not raise Christ for the sake of a single person, but for the benefit of us all.

(St. John Chrysostom)

“Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day” (16)

Despair will never crawl into our life; As on the outside, the body with its senses may eventually grow old, and dissolve through sufferings and temptations; But the nature of the soul within, seen by no one, would receive the divine light and the new life, to enjoy the sanctified and blessed life, and would be renewed day by day. While the body grows old, the soul would enjoy renewal more and more.

+ The renewal of humanity starts in the holy font of baptism; proceeds quickly in certain individuals, and slowly in others; if we, carefully and without prejudice, look into the matter, The apostle says: "*Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day*" (16); namely, that the inward man is being renewed day by day until he reaches perfection. Yet you should allow for him to start toward perfection. Do you truly covet that, or you are preoccupied with leading the ignorant in vanity to the truth, and not lifting the weak to strength.

+ Man is not just a body, or just a soul, but is formed of both. The soul is not the whole man, although it is its better part; and the body is not the whole man, although it is the lesser part. When the two are bound together they carry the name 'Man'. Although in a living man, each of them may be called 'man'; We describe the soul as the inner man, and the body as the outer man, as though they are two and not one and the same man.

(St. Augustine)

+ At times of persecution the soul grows more, adds every day more experience of faith; that even if the body perishes, it reaches eternity through the worthiness of the soul.

+ Even though the body may dissolve by scourging and torture, yet the inner man is renewed by faith, hope, and the will that looks forward to encourage those in agony; for the hope of the soul is proportional to the sufferings of the body.

(St. John Chrysostom)

+ He would not call her beautiful, unless he sees her image renewed day by day.

(The scholar Origen)

- + He who has better care in his heart, will care in particular for himself, by being true with himself, and will not cease to endure any sufferings for the sake of keeping himself away from defilement.

In case his body is dissolved by hunger, or by his strife with extreme weather conditions; if he got ill, or suffered violence from anyone; he will not care much, but will respond to the words of the apostle Paul, and say in all his circumstances: *“Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day”* (16).

If man has to take care of his body as something necessary for his well being, he should do that moderately and within a certain limit to keep it active to serve the soul.

(St. Basil the Great)

“For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (17)

The apostle believes that his affliction works to the account of his enjoyment of heaven, and that being temporary, it will eventually go away. Let us then make sure to use it, as it *“is working for us a more exceeding and eternal weight of glory”*. There is no comparison between the temporal earthly afflictions and the eternal heavenly glories. If the afflictions with all their weight and continuity in time, are compared to the glory prepared for us, they would be counted as temporary and endurable.

Here is how the apostle compare between the afflictions and the glories: the former being present, and the later futurist; the former temporary, and the later eternal; the former very light, and the later represents an exceedingly heavy weight.

- + If we do not have adversaries, there would be no battle, nor a reward set for the victorious; and there would be no kingdom of heaven prepared for us. *“For our light*

affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us as a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (17). And there would be for any of us, no hope in the great glory in the life to come, as a reward for the perseverance in the endurable afflictions.

- + That temporary sorrow was not a simple thing for anyone, if not for the perfect love for God in Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit, pored in their souls.

(The scholar Origen)

- + According to Paul, our present sorrows are light, happening within certain frame of time and a certain place. But, for such a light labor, we shall acquire the glory in a degree that surpasses any measure.

(Ambrosiaster)

- + Here we see the blessed apostle, fixing his sight on the greatness of the reward to come, and belittling his persecutions without limits, says: “*Our light afflictions, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory”* (17). This he also confirms by saying: “*I consider that the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us*” (Romans 8: 18). Therefore, whatever the extent of the strife of the human weakness is, it will not, by itself, reach the expected reward; and his strife does not mean that the divine grace is not free.

(Father Sherimon)

- + That is the way of the good: When they endure something for His sake, they would not care for anything that may happen, but would understand the cause behind it, and endure everything with self control.

That is how Paul the great teacher of the Gentiles knew the prison, the trials, and the daily risks, and all such unendurable afflictions, yet considered them as light burdens; not that they were truly so by nature, but because of the glory they would lead to. Hearing him say: *“Our light afflictions, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory”* (17); Through expecting that incomparable enjoyment would easily help us to endure the troubles, one by one, and count them as nothing.... Do you see how the Love of God would make the troubles lighter to endure, and would even take away from us any feeling of them? Because of that, that blessed man, Paul, endured everything with self-control, leaning upon faith and hope for God.

- + St. Paul has been one of the noblest men, and a role model of the exaltation of human nature, and its possibilities (through grace) in virtue. Speaking about the Person of Christ, and exhorting us toward virtue, Paul condemned those who believe in the corruption of human nature, and muted those who proclaim such nonsense, confirming that there is not much difference between angels and men, if the later intend to reach the level of perfection.

Paul’s nature or his soul were not different from our own, nor he lived in a different world; but he used to live in the same world, and to submit to similar laws and customs, Yet he surpassed in virtue all humans in the past and the present. ... Now, where are those who claimed the difficulty of virtue and the easiness of sin?! That man condemns them by saying: *“Our light afflictions, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory”* (17). If his afflictions were endurable and light, our own afflictions would comparatively be rather nothing, or could even be considered as pleasures!

- + The size and volume of the dangers Paul confronted, helped to increase the criticism directed against him, and led the critics to refer his greatness to some supernatural power. God allowed for him to suffer, that we may understand that his nature was just like ours; Yet his strong will made him, not only someone above normal, but as

though equal to angels. By such spirit and body, he endured many dying experiences, belittled both present and future afflictions, and led him to utter such words, considered by some to be almost impossible: *"I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh"* (Romans 9: 3).

(St. John Chrysostom)

"While we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal"

(18)

Sufferings are temporal, and could be felt by the senses. The physical eye can see what would dwell on man of afflictions, particularly those that may inflict his body. Whereas the spiritual glories are heavenly, and concern our fellowship with God, the unseen.

- + Paul says that those who long to the heavenlies despise the things of this world; for if compared to what they covet, they are considered as nothing.

(Ambrosiaster)

- + Our present sorrows would be light, and our future would be glorious, if we do not look at the things which are seen, and concentrated our sight, instead, on the spiritual things that are not seen.

What excuse would we give if we chose the temporary things instead of the eternal ones?!

Even though the present may be enjoyable, it will not last, while the sorrow it causes will. ... It would be impossible for those who enjoy

such a great gift to humiliate themselves by falling before the things of this earth.

- + I implore you, O beloved brethren, to meditate in the troubles of this life; which even though cruel, yet they are of short duration; whereas the good things that are to dwell upon us in the life to come, are eternal and everlasting. Therefore, I wish we endure what we confront without complaining, and not cease to strive in virtue, to enjoy the eternal and everlasting goodness.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + In case you seek the temporary things, pray for them publicly and with an open door. But in case you seek the eternal things, let your prayers be secret; as you covet, not for the things which are seen, but for those which are not seen.

(Caesarius, Bishop of Gebalah)

- + Let us, therefore, endure with complete self-control; ... Let us not care for the anguish, but for what we may acquire from it; Such a transformation, as you may see, is spiritual.
There are many who covet to realize riches, and are preoccupied with ways to increase their wealth, in ways that, although they may imply great dangers on land and sea; yet they are ready to go through every risk with great enthusiasm, not caring for troubles through their expectations of wealth. ... In a similar way, we are committed to concentrate our mind on the spiritual wealth and riches. We should rejoice and be glad, not caring for the things which are seen, but for the things which are not seen, according to Paul's counsel.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + David says for the Person of the Lord: "*Listen, O daughter Consider and incline your ear, Forget your own people also, and your father's house*" (Psalm 45: 10). He who says: "*Listen, O daughter*"; He who asks her to forget her own people (her old

habits), and her father's house, is certainly a father This happens through dying together with Christ to this world; according to the words of the apostle: "*While we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, , but the things which are not seen are eternal*" (18); Turning our eyes away from this seen temporal dwelling place, and lifting the eyes of our hearts up to the eternal things of benefit to us. This we can achieve when we are no more adversaries to God while we are in this life, proclaiming by our deeds and works, the way of the truth, about which the blessed apostle says: "*For our citizenship is in heaven*" (Philippians 3: 20).

- + Forsaking all our faults, we, as well, shall ascend to the heights of the third kind; exalting, not merely over the things of this world, or those concerning men, but over the whole world around us, which may seem as though glorious; yet, looking at it by our heart and spirit, and seeing it as vain, and will soon come to an end; we shall bring to mind the saying of the apostle: "*while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal*" (18).

(Father Pavnotius)

- + "*The world has hated them because they are not of the world*" (John 17: 14). The world has hated us since we started "*looking at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen*", because of the teaching of Christ; not that we do not belong to the world of heaven and earth, but we do not even humans who belong to those on earth in our company.
- + The apostle Paul teaches us that the things which are not seen, are understood through the things which are seen; and that the things unseen could be seen through their relationships with, and their likeness to the things seen. The seen world could tell us about the unseen world; And as this earthly scene includes a certain model of the heavenly things, we can ascend from the lowly things to the high up

things; and, by the things we see on earth, we can understand what concerns heaven.

(The scholar Origen)

- + To say that heaven, earth, and all things in creation are naught; or as the apostle describes as unseen; This does not dishonor the Creator of the universe; for we know from the Holy Scripture that all those things are not from eternity, and will not stay forever.

(St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa)

AN INSPIRATION FROM 2 CORINTHIANS 4

GRANT ME TO ENSLAVE MYSELF SO THAT BY LOVE, I CAN ACQUIRE MANY FOR YOU

- + How could affliction destroy me?
How could losing heart knock on my door?
You, Yourself, O Creator of all, has become a servant,
And by Your passion and cross, You opened the door to all.
Grant me, amid my sufferings, to partake of your passion.
Grant me to enslave myself by love to many;
And by Your grace to acquire every human soul.
- + Your Holy Spirit grants me sanctification;
To walk blamelessly, and without deception;
You are the true Truth;

To acquire You, I can think, utter, live the truth, and testify to it.

- + Let Your light shine inside me;
To reflect it on my brethren;
Even if it is veiled for the opponents,
whose eyes, the devil has so corrupted, to see Your light in me as darkness.

- + I enjoy the splendor of Your icon in my depths;
To preach to the account of Your kingdom, not to that of my glory.
I am just a servant to them, and with them, for Your sake.
Come to reign in my heart and in theirs..
To set the kingdom of the light inside me.
To let me enjoy the enlightenment of knowing You.;
That the night of ignorance would not dwell on me;
But to remain forever in the daylight of Your knowledge.

- + Although I am just dust and ashes;
Yet You did not despise me, but set out of me an earthen vessel;
To contain You in me, O You the Unique Treasure.

- + Let me enter by, and with You, into the narrow road.
Let the sorrows dwell;
You will turn my sorrows into unceasing joys.
If the enemy cast me down;
You will bring me by Your arms into the bosoms of Your love.
You would never let me perish;
But, instead of death, You would grant me the fellowship of the new life.

- + Let me bear the dying together with You, to enjoy the joy of Your resurrection.
Let me die every day, to live with You.
Let me, together with my brethren, experience the power of Your resurrection.

+ Let my outward man sing;
As, with every dying for him, I will get to experience a renewal of my inward man.
Let my body go through the temporal affliction;
To make my body together with my soul enjoy the fellowship of the glory.
Glory be to You, O You who raised my heart up to heaven;
Glory be to You, O You who turned my affliction into an experience of heaven.



CHAPTER 5

THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION TO THE HEAVENLY ONE

The apostle ends his talk about the ministry of the New Covenant, by raising the hearts to the heavenly throne to bring everyone forth into the bosom of the Father. Proclaiming his ministry, as an ambassador of the Lord Christ, his call came to be: “*Be reconciled to God*” (20).

1- Our heavenly habitation is waiting for us	1 - 11
2- All things have become new	12 - 17
3- Reconcile to the heavenly One	18 – 22

1- OUR HEAVENLY HABITATION IS WAITING FOR US:

The apostle intends to reveal the hidden reason, why the true minister does not lose heart, nor despair amid the daily afflictions and the many deaths he confronts; That he sees the gates of heaven open, and his house, not made with human hands, waiting for him; he sees a new unique life, whose guarantee he has got now, to enjoy its perfection in eternity; he sees the bosom of the Father waiting for him to settle down eternally.

The apostle here talks about what he expects, and surely hopes for, concerning the eternal blessed life that he will enjoy in the time to come.

“For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made of hands, eternal in the heavens” (1)

By saying: “*we know*”, he reveals the surety of hope in him, that he has a place in heaven, which he calls “*a house*”, while he calls his unsettled life here as “*a tent*”. High up there, he finds for himself a house, a habitation, a place of comfort, his father’s

house, or the eternal house, that God Himself has built for His beloved, not to be compared with any palace in this world.

While some believe that "*the earthly house*" is this world, St. John Chrysostom says that it rather refers to the body.

By the "*tent*", the apostle means the human body where the soul dwells as though in a tent, while being in its sojourn along the wilderness of this world, until it enters into the heavenly Canaan. With the destruction of this tent or the body, the soul sets forth to paradise to find a new habitation, whose guarantee it experienced while in the body, where it would dwell until the day of the Lord, when its body puts on incorruption, and man in his wholeness dwells in heaven itself.

What does he mean by saying: "*a building from God*"? Some believe that the apostle here, refers to a certain heavenly chariot sent by God to the souls on their departure from the bodies; Whereas others believe it to refer to the resurrection of the body; And still others believe it to refer to the blessed life of the saints who enjoy the kingdom of God. Our present body is our earthly tent; Whereas our risen body is our heavenly house.

In the fifth sermon by St. Maccar, it came that the true Christian, having got the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, being born from God high up; His city became in heaven (Philippians 3: 20), where the Spirit reveals to him the heavenly experiences as though in a mirror; grants him the peace of Christ, and the love of the Lord, through the sufferings, the sweat, the temptations, and the several spiritual wars; But he enjoys these things by the grace of God. The true Christian enters into an experience of a heavenly glory outside the body; is wounded by another unutterable beauty (non-carnal); those on whom the dew of the Spirit of life, namely the dew of divinity, has fallen down, to wound their hearts by a divine love for Christ, the heavenly King; and were bound to that beauty, to that inexpressible and incorruptible exalted glory, and riches of Christ, the true eternal King.

By such riches, man is trained on the royal life; that when the great day of the lord comes, he enters into the kingdom to find it not strange to his eyes, for he has already lived its deposit, and enjoyed its riches by the Holy Spirit while on earth.

+ All of us are committed to strive and to walk in every kind of virtue, and to believe that we shall eventually acquire this house, that we possess from now. For if the tent of our body is destroyed, our soul would have no other house to dwell in.

(St. Maccar the Great)

+ Paul here talks about two different worlds: one of them earthly, made with hands, and seen; and the other heavenly, not made with hands, eternal, and unseen. On the earth, our souls are clothed with the organic seen body; but once this body is forsaken, the soul moves towards the heavenly medium where it restores her body, yet transformed into a heavenly body.

(St. Dedymus the blind)

+ Again Paul hints to the resurrection that many Corinthians could not understand nor accept. The earthly tent is our body, which although undeniably not made with human hands, yet Paul simply compare it with the houses in which we live.

+ What is the “*building from God*”? It is the incorruptible body by which we shall be clothed in the resurrection. Now we groan, for what is going to happen later on is far better than what we in now... Surely, it is not a body that will come down to us from above; but the expression proclaims the grace which does come down to us from above ... That is why he calls it from now on, not a tent, but a house or a

building; which is rather more convenient, on account of that the tent could be torn into pieces, whereas the house stays unchangeable.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + The heavenly body is not a different thing; It is the same body we have now, but will transform.

(Theodoret, Bishop of Cyrus)

- + Concerning our carnal nature, we have to understand that there is no body we are using now in lowliness, corruption, and weakness; and a different one which we shall use later on in non-corruption, power, and glory. It is one and the same body, from which the present weaknesses are taken away, is transformed to some kind of glory, and becomes spiritual. The ultimate result is that what has been a vessel of dishonor, will itself be purified and become a vessel of honor, and a habitation of blessing. We should believe that our body we have now will, according to the will of the Creator, remain on this condition forever with no change. This fact is confirmed by the words of the apostle: "*We have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens*" (1).

(The scholar Origen)

- + On one aspect, our corruptible body is a burden on our souls; And on another aspect, being a burden, is not because of the nature and essence of the body. That is why, knowing its corruption, we do not wish to become un-clothed from the body, but rather to be clothed with its non-corruption. In eternity, we shall have a body, yet, it will not be a burden any more, for it will not be corruptible any more.

(St. Augustine)

+ Let us now talk about the ‘forsaking’ proclaimed by the Holy Book and the tradition, of three kinds; for man to meditate to become perfect:

a- The first kind that concerns the body, when man forsakes the riches and the possessions of this world.

b- The second kind, that concern the spirit and the body, in which we forsake all the old ways of behavior and iniquities.

c- The third kind in which the spirit becomes free of all things present and seen, and meditates in the eternal, and the heart becomes preoccupied with the unseen.

We are told by the Holy Scripture that God sought from Abraham to execute these three kinds of forsaking together, when he said to

him: “*Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house ...*” (Genesis 12: 1).

In case we faithfully execute the first kind of forsaking, we shall not benefit much unless we consummate it by the second kind, with the same zeal and longing. And once we manage to do this, we can reach the third kind, when we “*go from our (old) father’s house*”, having been “*by nature children of wrath, just as the others*” (Ephesians 2: 3); and concentrate our sight toward the high things. The Holy Book addresses Jerusalem, who despised God the true Father, saying: “*Your father was an Amorite, and your mother a Hittite*” (Ezekiel 16: 2). And in the gospel it came: “*You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do*” (John 8: 44).

Forsaking this father, crossing over from the seen to the unseen, we can say together with the apostle: “*For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens*” (1); and we can also say: “*For our citizenship is in heaven, from which*

we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be transformed to His glorious body” (Philippians 3: 20, 21); and can also utter together with David: “I am a stranger in the earth” (Psalm 119: 19).

We are committed to become like those about whom the Lord speaks to His Father in the gospel, saying: *“They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world” (John 17: 16); and to His disciples, themselves, saying: “If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you” (John 15: 19).*

(Father Pavnotius)

“For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven” (2)

Being in this body, we groan because of the weaknesses which dwell on us, and the temptations which we confront, when we feel that life is full of suffering and sorrow; as though everything around us cries out saying: ‘Go, depart from this body, in which there is no comfort’. Even the saints, sometimes feel the heavy weight of the body of sin and the corruption dwelling in it, and cry out, together with the apostle: *“O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” (Romans 7: 24).*

Indeed, the Christian feels that his body is a joyful divine gift, and so is his life; But tasting the deposit of eternity, inflames inside him the longing to have his body clothed in non-corruption, to be prepared for the heavenly life.

The word *“clothed”* came in Hebrew as (labash), to mean all what surround the body, or cover it. In the Jewish writings it came that when Moses entered into the cloud, he was clothed by it like a garment; and about the righteous, it is said that they are clothed by the light as a garment.

As to the “*habitation*” here, it came in Hebrew as (beeyt), and in the Tergom it came as (onkelos); the house of the face is the veil; that of the fingers is the glove, and of those of the feet are the shoes. Therefore, saying that the soul is clothed in a “*habitation*”, means it is clothed in certain features as the virtue.

Some Jews believe that the soul has clothes in this world and the age to come. God meant for the souls to be clothed in a garment through the study of the law and the good deeds. Adam after his fall became naked, as he, in the condition of sin, became without a garment that covers his soul.

They believe that the children of Israel got clothes to cover their souls on Mount Sinai; Yet, after worshipping the golden calf they became naked. This garment refers to man’s enjoyment of God’s icon through the holy life.

In the (Synopsis Sohar) about the divine wisdom, it came: [When the time comes for man to depart from this world, the angel of death takes away from him his mortal garment, and clothes him with one from paradise, in which he can recognize and meditate in the exalted wisdom. By that, the angel of death is said to be very compassionate to man, by taking away the garment of this world, and clothing him with a more valuable one made for him in paradise].

When the apostle says that “*they desire to be clothed with the habitation which is from heaven*” (2), he surely means that those who believe in God, and walk by the Spirit, are prepared for the enjoyment of seeing the Creator and Savior, which will fill them with joy.

The souls, sanctified to the Lord, will not be found naked in the age to come, but will be clothed in righteousness, praise, and glory, “*having washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the lamb*” (Revelation 7: 14). These souls, feeling the surety of hope in this heavenly garment, long to be clothed in it on their departure from the world.

Being clothed in the eternal wedding garment -- The Lord Christ Himself -- no power will be able to deny us the banquet of heaven, or to drive us out of it; As it is written: "*But when the king came in to see the guests, He saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. So He said to him: 'Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?'; and he was speechless. Then the King said to the servants, bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness, there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth*" (Matthew 22: 11-13).

St. John Chrysostom calls this garment: The incomparable, royal, spotless garment, shining with splendor.

- + If Christ is the Son of God, and you have been clothed by Him, covered by Him, and became like Him, You have become one with Him, and will bear His form.

(St. John Chrysostom)

Speaking about the clothes of a Christian, St. Clement of Alexandria seeks from us to put on the clothes that befit us as Christians; which differ according to age, nature, and circumstances surrounding each one of us.

Because what befits one may not befit another, we should have the spirit of discernment. And at the same time it is befitting of us to know that there is a more important garment that all believers are committed to put on; namely, the Person of the Lord Christ, a colorful garment, that provides us with many gifts, that stay bright, and no time would make it lose its beauty.

- + O my Lord, take away from me, by Your grace, the garment of desires and of the darkness of hell, and clothe me with the garment of Your holy light, which is the new world itself, before I depart from the body.

O my Lord, make me a member in the body of Your only-begotten Son, to make me feel the secret of His union with You, as much as my weak nature can bear.

+ Woe to the monk whose rags on his body do not smell the sweet fragrance of perfume; as his garment would look strange.

(The spiritual elder, John El-Deliaty)

+ The garment with which we are clothed is our Lord Jesus Christ, that covers us from head to feet; And its assorted colors are the colors of the flowers of wisdom, the Holy Books, and gospels, that would never fade nor lose their brightness with time.

(St. Clement of Alexandria)

+ Before his disobedience, Adam shared the enlightenment by the divine splendor; And while he was truly clothed by the garment of glory, he was not naked, nor found in a shameful condition.

The great Paul calls that divine enlightenment, and the grace, our heavenly habitation ... On his way from Jerusalem to Damascus, Paul was provided from God with a deposit of that divine enlightenment ... He consented to be purified of his persecution, when he entered into a debate with Him whom he has persecuted; or rather a light touch of that great light.

(Father Gregory Palamas)

“If indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked” (3)

He who is prepared for departure, and has got the deposit of Glory, will not be found naked, but will get the immortal eternal glory.

Saying. *“If indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked”*, the apostle means that, being clothed with the Spirit, He will not leave even our body naked, but will pour in it the glory of Jesus Christ, risen from the dead; saying: *“He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you”* (Romans 8: 11); *“that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body”* (2 Corinthians 4: 11); and *“that mortality may be swallowed up by life”* (2 Corinthians 5: 4).

By that, If our earthly house, this tent, namely our body, be destroyed, we would not appear naked, but, *“we have a building from God, a house not made with hands”* (2 Corinthians 5:1); Namely the heavenly glory of the lord Christ, that was hidden, would be manifested in our weak body. And as said by St. Maccar the Great, [Let us then seek to acquire that garment here through faith and virtuous life, that when we take the body off, we would not appear naked; and our body in that day would need nothing to glorify it, because each one, according to his worthiness to the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, by faith and diligence, will have his body glorified on that day; for all what the soul has stored inside it in this present life, will be proclaimed, and be clearly manifested in the body.

That glory of the Lord Christ, by which the Holy Spirit will clothe our souls, will be our own glory and not a borrowed one; Hence we live in this world truly rich in Spirit. We would be like, when a rich king invites some people to a banquet, he would present generously and with no fear that his inner riches would be exhausted; Whereas, when the poor invites some people, he would have to borrow what he presents to his guests; then would get back to his poverty once the banquet is over. “That is why it is befitting of us to seek from God to grant us to find this riches in our hearts; namely to find the true treasure of Christ by the power and the activity of the Holy Spirit.

- + He means (naked) of the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, and of getting united to Him, in whom alone, the believing soul would find comfort.
- + If the nature of the soul remains naked and on its own, and did not gain the union and fellowship with the divine nature, it would never be upright nor consummate, but would stay naked and worthy of rebuke because of its lowly and defiled nature.

(St. Maccar the Great)

- + We shall be clothed with our faith; which is a garment and a shield at the same time; a garment against nakedness, and a shield against the enemy.

(St. Augustine)

- + Despite the fact that this body will be dissolved at the designated time because of its initial disobedience, it would be put, as though in a crucible of the earth, to be created anew, not as the same corruptible body, but would be pure and incorruptible; Each body would restore its own soul ... , and would acquire all what belong to it on all aspects; not different from its present form of body ... But as it departs from this life, whether in sins or in righteous deeds, so it will be clothed with its previous state; to be justly judged.

(St. Erinaos)

- + The wicked unbeliever, even though we may assume that he becomes clothed with a heavenly body, yet he would stay naked, for he did nothing to warrant gaining the garment of the inner man.

(St. Dedymus the blind)

+ Be of good cheer; but work diligently with all zeal; Nothing will be wasted; whether a prayer you raise, a psalm you sing, a good deed you do, every fasting, every keeping of marital duties, every chastity for God's sake; ... Everything will be counted; You will be raised up, clothed, either with your sins or with your righteous works.

+ A righteous man will be provided with a heavenly body, capable of conversing with angels; Whereas a wicked man, will get a kind of body that would endure eternal punishments for his sins; to burn in eternal fire without ever getting destroyed. God will justly designate the state of our body; because we have done nothing outside it.

(St. Cyril of Jerusalem)

+ There, we shall not be without a body, but we shall receive the same body, yet incorruptible.

The resurrection is general for all; Yet the glory is not. But some will be risen in honor, and others in dishonor; Some to the kingdom, and others to punishment.

(St. John Chrysostom)

+ Everyone, the righteous and the wicked, will be clothed with non-death; yet the later would be delivered to hell, and be found naked.

(Severian. Bishop of Gebalah)

"For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed,

that mortality may be swallowed up by life" (4)

We who are in this tent, burdened with physical weakness, troubles, and afflictions, groan because of the burden to which we are committed to carry. He as though says that human life as a whole is a kind of labor, particularly as far as we are concerned, being perpetually subject to persecution, and carrying the dying of the body of the Lord Jesus; even though we experience the exulted risen life in Christ Jesus.

We do not wish to be unclothed of this life, and for our hour of departure to dwell before the time chosen by God for us and for the edification of the church, and the glory of His holy name.

We want to be further clothed (above what we have now), to be completely prepared for the eternal glory. We do not seek death until the will of God is realized in us, and everything is consummated by His divine wisdom

By our enjoyment of the deposit of eternity we become excited to know that "*mortality is swallowed up by the eternal life*", and that sin or corruption have no more authority over us.

- + We do not want to get rid of the body, but of the corruption in it. Our body is a burden on us, not because it is a body, but because it is corrupted and prone to pain. But when the new life dwells, it will take away this corruption; I say this corruption, and not the body itself.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + Showing the prophet Moses as an example, for the glory of the Spirit that shined on his face, that nobody could stir at it, the apostle means to demonstrate that in the resurrection of the righteous, the bodies of the worthy will be glorified by a glory that the holy and faithful souls have got from now. those who are counted worthy of acquiring it within, namely in the inner man.

(St. Maccar the Great)

- + Are these not the utterances of a citizen of the heavenly Jerusalem?

“My tears have been my food day and night” (Psalm 42: 3).

“All night I make my bed swim; I drench my couch with my tears” (Psalm 6: 6)

“My sighing is not hidden from You” (Psalm 38: 9)

“My sorrow was stirred up” (Psalm 39: 2)

Are they not the children of God who *“groan being burdened, not because they desire to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life”*? (2 Corinthians 5: 4). Are they not, even those *“who have the firstfruit of the Spirit groan themselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of their body”*? (Romans 8: 23). Was not the apostle Paul himself, the citizen of the heavenly Jerusalem, all that, when he was burdened and in unceasing sorrow of heart for the sake of his Israeli brethren?... Yet, there will be no death in the city, except when it is said: *“O death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law”* (1 Corinthians 15: 55).

(St. Augustine)

- + After our resurrection to come, our body will be the same, and at the same time, it will be different. It will be the same concerning nature; and yet different concerning glory. It is the same in essence, yet different in strength. It will be delicate, for being incorruptible; yet will still be sensed, as it will keep its true nature.

(Pope Gregory the Great)

- + The righteous will justly get the reward of their sufferings in the body, in which they were sorrowful and justified by sufferings in every way. In the same body the martyrs were killed for the sake of their love of God, they will live; In the same body they endured the bondage, they will reign.

(St. Erinaos)

- + Life for the apostle Paul was very valuable, because of the good chances he has got; Yet for him, at the same time, it was very cheap, because of his longing for heaven where he will be with Christ. And as I previously said, and still say, there is no one with more contradictory tendencies than him. He was always ready to take the side that gives more privileges. No one on earth loved life like him; But on another contradictory aspect, he did not care much for this life, having denied himself all human desires; Nothing on earth took hold of him, but all his being was united with the will of God. At times, he would think that his need for his life on earth and his ministry, is more demanding than to be with Christ; And at other times you find him groan and seek the moment he would set forth from the body. His only desire has been to be where he would realize the abundant profit with Christ.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + We should not rebuke anyone on account of his fear of strikes; but what to be truly rebuked is to commit sin because of the fear of strikes. He who fears without being disturbed or terrified by the struggle, would be more worthy of commendation than he who does not ever fear; on account of that this reveals his strong will as a clear proof. Fear of strikes is a natural thing; But to reject the sin resulting from the fear is the true victory of the will over the weakness of the human nature. Sorrow in itself is not to be blamed; but to blaspheme the name of God because of the sorrow, is a sin to be rebuked.

If I say that Paul did not carry the same nature of our body, you would have the right to quote his human weaknesses to prove the falsity of my words. But if I say, and confirm that he is human like us, and not better in nature, but just more exalted in his strong will; All your objections would then be of no value, and would even become for Paul's favor; as that would prove how he has overcome nature against all his human weaknesses. Beside commending him, we would mute the lips of those who foulmouth him, who present as their excuse, the weakness of human nature; We exhort them to practice strengthening their own will instead.

You may object that at certain times Paul feared death; Yet that is also something very natural; "*For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened*" (2 Corinthians 5: 4); And, "*We ourselves groan within ourselves*" (Romans 8: 23). We see how he balanced between the weakness of nature and the strong will. Many among the martyrs, on their way to martyrdom, were extremely fearful and terrified; Yet that is what made them distinct: They truly feared death, yet they went ahead to confront it for the sake of Christ. So did Paul ... Although he trembled before death, Yet he longed to vanish away .

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + The saints while "*in this tents groan, being burdened*", Yet in the body of their humility they did everything as is befitting to be found in the secret of resurrection. When God conforms a new body for those who truly become disciples of Christ, it will not be in humility, but "*conformed to Christ's glorious body*" (Philippians 3: 21).

(The scholar Origen)

"Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee" (5)

It is God who granted us our being and our body, to live eternal by the body, and to have our whole being glorified; He granted us the hunger and thirst for the righteousness and eternity.

The main idea of a “*guarantee*” (or a deposit) is to provide a portion of the payment to guarantee the full payment later on. What we enjoy now of the comforts of the Holy Spirit, the peace that surpasses every mind, and the glorious joy, are all a guarantee of the glory that we shall fully have later on.

- + Here, Paul reveals that these things are not issued just now, but were prepared from the beginning of creation, when Adam was created. God did not create the early man to die, but to make him eternal. To confirm this, Paul adds that we have been granted the Spirit as a guarantee, presented by God as a pledge for us to realize His promises. So did Paul to reveal that what he says is more acceptable by those who do not pay attention to him.
- + Adam was not created to die, but to strive for the sake of eternity. And to reveal his authenticity, and to present a further proof, the apostle adds: “*Who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee*”... Now God works through baptism, and gives us a worthy guarantee, “the Holy Spirit”.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + Although the Spirit refuses to be mixed with the unworthy, yet He seems to be there when they are sealed; anticipating the salvation to follow their change ... But, when it is time for God to judge the world in righteousness, the Holy Spirit will be there together with Him ... And the Spirit will be utterly taken away from the soul that defiled His grace. Hence it is written: “*In death there is no remembrance of You; In the grave, who will give You thanks?*” (Psalm 6: 5). As there will be no more help from the Holy Spirit; How could we understand that the judgment will be

realized without the Holy Spirit, when the Word refers to the fact that He Himself will be the reward of the righteous?

(St. Basil the Great)

- + As God, the Creator, had prior knowledge of Adam's sin, He prepared a treatment for it beforehand. He Himself gives us the firstfruit of the Spirit; that, by the miracles done by Him among us, we come to be sure that the promises concerning the future are true.

(Theodoret, Bishop of Cyrus)

- + Anyway, *"For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known"* (1 Corinthians 13: 12). The present possibility is to see in the Holy Books, dimly and in part to a certain extent; yet in harmony with the Catholic faith.

He presents the guarantee, provided by the virgin church, when her Groom descended; And she will get married at His ultimate coming, in glory, and she will see Him face to face; He now gives us the Holy Spirit as a guarantee, according to the apostle.

(St. Augustine)

"Therefore, we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body, we are away from the Lord" (6)

We completely understand what is our portion; having enjoyed the guarantee of the Spirit, and came to have the abiding hope.

The words in Greek came carrying a sense of surety. While inhabiting the body; an expression that carries the meaning of traveling among strange people, yet absent from the Lord.

Heaven is the home of the true believer, and its inhabitants are the people to whom he belongs. The soul, while dwelling in the body is sojourning away from its city and people; being prepared for the glory befitting for it, to be in the presence of the Lord, and to meet Him face to face.

The apostle Paul speaks from experience; having himself set forth to the third heaven to see what God has prepared for His beloved, and accordingly, he truly feels that his soul is a sojourner in this world, a traveler, longing to reach the place where she will settle down forever.

- + In this world we are "*Away from the Lord*"; we indeed walk on earth, yet we hasten on our way to heaven; here we have no perpetual place, but we are passers-by, and travelers like our fathers.
- + God is still there; but because we do not see Him, as long as we are in the body, we say that we are "*away from Him*".

(Ambrosiaster)

- + As a matter of fact, man brought death upon himself, as well as upon the Son of Man. Yet the Son of Man, by His death and His resurrection, brought life to man ... He intended to endure death before the sight of His enemies, to let them think that He is forsaken; and to grant us the grace of the New Covenant, to teach us to seek another happiness, which we possess now by faith, but will see it later on ... Now we live by hope, but later on, we shall enjoy the fact.

- + Before you can see, believe in what you cannot now see. Walk by faith to get what is by sight. What is seen would not make man ultimately glad, unless it is supported by faith on the way. Hence the apostle says: "*While we are in the body, we are away from the Lord*" (6); Then he adds right away: "*For we walk by faith and not by sight*" (7)
- + Being away from the Lord while we are in the body; Compared to the saintly angels, we are counted now as babes, suckling faith. But one day, we shall reach the stage of "sight" promised by St. John in his epistle, saying: "*Beloved, Now we are children of God, and it has not yet been revealed, what we shall be*" (1 John 3: 2).
- + In the time being, these eyes are enlightened according to what suits their weakness, by faith; but later on they will be enlightened by sight, in what suits their new strength ... Now, as long as we are in the stage of faith, it is said about us? "*Now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face*" (1 Corinthians 13: 12).
- + According to the prophet Isaiah: "Unless you believe, you will not understand" (Isaiah 43: 10). Let us then walk by faith as long as we are away from God, until we reach the stage of "sight" when we see Him face to face. Walking by faith let us do good deeds; by which we love God for His own sake, and we also attempt to love our neighbor.

(St. Augustine)

"For we walk by faith and not by sight"

(7)

Here we live by faith, we trust in the word of God and in His divine promises, and enjoy the deposit of glory as a pre-taste of what we shall see face to face, by sight. Now we walk by faith to be prepared for the life by sight.

Those who are born by the Spirit from above, feel that they are sojourning here, until they encounter God their Father in His heaven.. They close the eyes of their hearts to what is in this world, until they open them in the world of glory, where faith will be transformed to “sight”.

- + Faith is the entry to secrets, What is done by the eyes of the body concerning the sensed things, is done by faith by the eyes of the soul; looking at the hidden treasures.

The way we have two eyes of the body, we have, as well, two eyes of the soul,. But these two eyes of the soul do not have the same work of the insight; By the we see the hidden glory of God, veiled within nature; together with His might, wisdom, and eternal mind toward us; All of which we can understand, in particular, through His divine care toward us. By these same eyes we can also see the spiritual hosts, our fellow creatures.

When God intends to present spiritual secrets, He opens up the sea of faith very widely in our minds.

(St. Isaac the Syrian)

- + The Holy Scripture says: *“By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would afterward receive as an inheritance. And he went out not knowing where he was going”* (Hebrew 11: 8). ... When he ceased to attach his mind to anything on earth, Abraham surpassed in understanding and wisdom all those of his generation, and even the well known Chaldean philosophy at the time. Surpassing all what could be realized by senses, and all other beauties, he could behold the true divine beauty, and saw everything that would be attributed to God, like righteousness, love, and the ability to do anything He wills. Abraham

understood all that, and took them as provisions in His journey to heaven; His faith grew bigger, and he rose beyond the vision of material things.

(St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa)

- + By faith we have hope in God, as He is unseen for us; But we believe that we shall dwell together with Him, and see Him as much as the human being could. Moses saw him while he was still in the body (Exodus 24: 9-11; 33: 11). And the angels see Him in the way suited to them.

(Severian, Bishop of Gebalah)

- + Now, we are not able to see how we shall be later on, but we can perceive it by faith alone. That is why, after the death of the body we wish to stand in the presence of God.

(Father Theodoret, Bishop of Cyrus)

- + The understanding lies in the sight and in the perpetual encounter; Whereas faith feeds us like babes in the swaddles of temporal things. Unless we walk by faith; we shall not get to reach the perpetual sight, as our understanding is purified by our abidance to the truth.
- + Amid the shadows of this life, in which we are "*away from God*", walking by faith and not by sight, the Christian soul is considered as deserted, would not cease to pray, and to look by the eyes of faith to the word of the divine Holy Book.

(St. Augustine)

"We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord" (8)

Walking now by faith we long to enjoy what is by sight. In the midst of our many labors we trust in what we have gained of the deposit of the Spirit and the divine promises, longing to come out of this body and to sojourn from it for some time, to get to the glory we shall enjoy and see.

- + Paul put the greatest thing at the end; As the company (the dwelling) with Christ is greater than getting an incorruptible body.

By avoiding the direct reference to the painful issues like death and the end, Paul deals with these things in a way that makes his listeners long for them, being "*presence with the Lord*". In the same way, he mentioned the sweet things in this life with painful expressions, calling them "*absence from the Lord*". He so did, that we would not be satisfied with what we get now, but be prepared to depart to what is better.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + What I seek, is never to have our souls disturbed, but, in the midst of the troubles and the swords hanging over our necks, to resort to the stronghold of the peace of God that surpasses all understanding, when we count those who are strangers to the body, as dwelling with the Lord.

(The scholar Origen)

"Therefore we make it our aim, whether or absent, to be well pleasing to Him" (9)

Any way, what we should make our aim, and what we should strive for, is God's pleasure with us. The words "*we make our aim*"

(philotimoumetha), refer to the love of honor, and of eternal glory, or longing for getting it; as we should not cease to strive, to please, to serve and to love Him, who has granted us our existence, and who will grant us the eternal glories. Therefore, whether we are alive or departed, what is befitting of us, or what we should long to have, is to be the subject of God's pleasure.

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad” (10)

The secret of the believer's heart desire to be the subject of the pleasure of God, is his anticipation of appearing before the divine throne on the day of judgment, to enjoy the work of the grace which has supported and justified him, to receive according to what he has done while he was in the body. For what man do in the present world while being in the body, he will receive its fruition in abundance on the great day of the Lord.

St. Cyril the Great used this verse to rebut those who say that the body is given as a punishment to the soul.

- + If it is just for the sake of those things done in the body, that man receives punishment, or be counted as worthy of a fitting reward; There is no reference to sins prior to being in the body, nor to giving an account of what happened before its birth; Therefore, how could there be an existence of the soul before its existence in the body? And how could it be humiliated because of sin, as some claim? Judgment is on what man has done in his life on earth.

(St. Cyril the Great)

- + As far as we are concerned, occupying a position in between the perfect man, and the one apostatized from faith; When we stand before the seat of judgment of Christ, we shall receive what we have done, whether good or bad. As we are neither utterly pure, so that our evil works do not attach to us, or have utterly fallen, so that our good works become forgotten.
- + The account of the whole life is elaborately presented before the seat of judgment of Christ, for everyone of us to receive what he has done in the body, whether good or bad. In this concern, every idle word man has spoken (Matthew 12: 36), and every cup of cold water given in the name of a disciple (Matthew 10: 42), will be taken into account.

(The scholar Origen)

3- RECONCILE WITH THE HEAVENLY ONE:

*“Knowing, therefore, the fear of the Lord, we try to persuade others; but we ourselves are well-known to God,
and I also trust we are well-known to your consciences” (11)*

Enjoying the fear of the Lord, and anticipating His great day of judgment, we try to persuade others to receive faith in Him who can justify, sanctify, and glorify them on that day.

The fear of the Lord which is the beginning of wisdom, motivates us to testify to God and to care for the salvation of men, not to please men or to receive a reward from them, but to please Him who searches our hearts and knows our inner intentions. In so doing with the uprightness of the heart, we hope that this would be revealed before the inner consciences of men, to make them imitate us and to strive together with us.

- + We should plant virtue inside our souls, while not disregarding our outer appearance; namely, we should care for what is honorable both before God and men.

(St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa)

“For we do not commend ourselves again to you, but give you opportunity to boast about us, that you may have something to answer those who boast in outward appearance and not in the heart” (12)

Paul says that defending himself and those who work with him, is not for his or their sakes, nor that he seeks something from them, but in order to provide them with something to answer those who accuse him, so that no one would, by any way, hinder their ministry.

- + Those who oppose Paul; while internally void, are clothed by outer appearances of piety and vain honor, and have no true good works.

(St. John Chrysostom)

“For if we are out of our mind, it is for God; Or if we are of sound mind, it is for you” (13)

It was not easy for the apostle Paul to defend himself, as, by so doing, he counted himself as being beside himself or out of his mind, for the sake of God, and that ministry would not be hindered. He does not care to appear as such, but he seeks what is for God, and what would support them in their ministry.

According to St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa, by saying “*out of their minds*”, the apostle means being spiritually drunken with the divine beauty that surpasses imagination.

Having to defend his ministry, he raised their hearts together with his, to heaven to see the apostle preoccupied, not with staying in the temporary tent of the body, but in the heavenly building, and the heavenly issues, like someone drunken with the love of God and the eternities; entering in what is called the spiritual drunkenness or trance.

- + Some may accuse us of being out of our minds... The apostle Paul previously said to Festos the Governor: “*I am not mad, most noble Festos, but speak the words of truth and reason*” (Acts 26: 25). So has the apostle Peter experienced that spiritual trance through hunger and thirst (Acts 10: 10).

(St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa)

- + My remarks here are not unfounded, but would rather explain the difficulty to evaluate the wisdom of the apostle Paul, who is to be commended, when he flees from risks, the same way when he confronts them. As in the former case he sees it as wisdom, and in the later he sees it as courage. Whether boasting or not boasting, his words bear the meaning of humility; In the former case he speaks with discernment, and in the later with meekness. ... As the goal of all his works and tendencies, is the salvation of the souls of the multitudes, he says: “*If we are out of our minds, it is for God, and if we are of sound mind, it is for you*” (13).

We shall never find anyone else, who has got what is worthy to boast, and at the same time with no trace of pride or glory. Just meditate in his words: “*knowledge puffs up*” (1 Corinthians 8: 1), words that we all should acquire. Although in truth, he was more knowledgeable than anyone else, it did not make him proud, but humble; saying: “*For we know in part*” (1 Corinthians 13: 9).; And: “*Brethren, I do*

not count myself to have apprehended” (Philippians 3: 13); And: “If anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know” (1 Corinthians 8: 2).

(St. John Chrysostom)

“For the love of Christ constrains us, because we judge thus; that if one died for all, then all died” (14)

Paul was not preoccupied with defending himself, as much as with his love for the Lord Christ, who filled his heart with the sweetness of love, and drew all his being to the cross; to see Him died for all, for all to die together with Him, to be risen together with Him to His heavens, and to partake of His heavenly glories.

By that, Paul drew his readers, from talking about his love, and of those with him, for them, and about his and their faithfulness in ministry, to make them enjoy the practical divine love through the cross, and to raise their hearts to the heavenly. At the cross, all, in particular the ministers, die together with Christ; as the minister does not seek what is his, but what is for the glory of God and the edification of His church.

+ Do not talk to me about cities, peoples, kings, armies, riches, and authorities; as all these are mortals; But you should care for the heavenly joy, to behold the exalted love of Christ.

For Paul, the glory of the angels, the archangels, or of any thing else, is of less importance than the love of Christ. In his inner depths, he possessed the greatest of what any man could possess; namely, the love of Christ, by which he considered himself the happiest of men; and without which he would lose any desire for authority, principles, or power.

By such love he preferred to count himself among those of lowly ranks, than to be counted among the greatest of nobles without it. To be deprived of it, was the most horrible punishment, and even hell itself. On the contrary, the possession of the love of Christ is heaven, life, and the whole world for him.

Outside that there is nothing, neither joyful nor painful; he despises the whole seen world, as he despises a dry rotten tree leaf; The people full of wrath are in his sight no more than tiny insects; And death, tyranny, and persecution, are like children toys. For the sake of Christ he embraces everything with joy; and considers his chains and shackles as a reward more valuable than the crown of Neron, His prison became like heaven, and he endured the scourges like the longing of a racer for the trophy of victory.

(St. John Chrysostom)

“And He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves but for Him who died for them and rose again” (15)

That was the plan of the Lord Christ in His salvation work: that being *“lifted up on the cross, He draws all people to Himself”* (John 12: 32); to make them live together with Him as His own body; suffer together with Him; die together with Him; glorified together with Him; are risen together with Him; and are lifted up to where He is in His heavens.

- + In other words, the human life, in itself means less and less, but grows in Christ, that those who live, live no more for themselves but for Him who died for all, and rose again; And that everyone of them would say together with the apostle: *“It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me”* (Galatians 2: 29). Yes indeed *“He must increase, and I must decrease”* (John 3: 20).

(St. Augustine)

“Therefore from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer” (16)

“*We regard no one according to the flesh*”; meaning, we do not connect to, nor appreciate someone for the sake of family relationships, blood relationships, or of his carnal and material possibilities, but recognize him through the exalted love of Christ, as a partner with us in the heavenly sufferings and glories.

The sign of the true union with the Heavenly One, on the negative aspect, is to be (weaned) from the world; and on the positive aspect, to enjoy the new creation, in the image of the Creator.

The believer is (weaned) from the world and from the carnal things, even in his relationship with Christ Himself; namely; his knowledge of Him should not stop at the body, or else he would be counted as still not knowing him; The love of Christ sets forth to our hearts, and the love of the world slides down under our feet.

Although Paul has not enjoyed knowing the Lord Jesus while in the body in this world, as the other disciples and apostles did, Yet that does not belittle his apostleship, as he has encountered the Lord Christ dwelling in heaven; who transfigured before him, and even in his depths.

The Jews have so evaluated themselves, considering Abraham as their father according to the flesh; and some teachers of Jewish origin in

Corinth, boasted of having seen the Lord Jesus according to the flesh; and accordingly counted themselves better than the apostle Paul who has not seen Him while in His ministry on earth.

- + Every mind is lifted up and is conformed in prayer according to its purity; In case he cares for the earthly things, he would bear that view before his inner eyes in his vision of the Lord Christ, whether when He came in His humility in the flesh, or when He is to come in His great glory. Such people cannot behold the Lord Christ coming in His kingdom; as long as they stay holding fast to that Jewish weakness (namely the material way); and they would not be able to say together with the apostle: *“Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no more”* (16).

As to those, on the other hand, who rise above the lowly works and thoughts, ascend up the high mountain of solitude (seclusion), freeing themselves of being disturbed by all the earthly troubles and thoughts; They are safe against the intervention of sins, glorified by strong faith; can, by pure eyes, behold His deity; and up in the height of virtue, discover His glory and the image of His exaltation.

To those in the cities, the country and villages, namely those preoccupied by doing their worldly works, Jesus is proclaimed, yet not in the same splendor by which He is proclaimed, to those who ascend together with Him on the solitude of the previously mentioned mountain of virtue ... where God appeared to Moses and talked with Elijah.

(Father Isaac)

- + Notice how He Himself, who is the Truth and the word, By whom everything has been; having become a body to dwell among us, and yet the apostle says: *“even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer”* (16); For Christ did not intend only to give possessions to those who

consummate the journey, but also to make Himself the way to those who start walking.

(St. Augustine)

- + We learn from the apostle not to know Christ now, the same way He was before ... Namely, by which He proclaims to us His temporary ordinance; but by which He proclaims His eternal existence.

- + He proclaims this great secret through His incarnation, that purity is the only perfect sign of the presence and the coming of God, And that no one can truly guarantee this to himself, unless he sojourns completely from the desires of his body. What happened with St. Mary, the immaculate virgin, through whom the perfection of the Deity in Christ has shined, can also happen with every soul that practices the life of virginity. Of course, the Lord would not come any more in a material presence: "*We know Christ thus no longer*", but it will be a spiritual presence; dwelling in us, together with the Father, as we are told in the gospel.

(St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa)

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; Old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (17)

How dangerous it is for man to cherish his knowledge of Christ through reading alone, or through the seen miracles, without changing his nature to become an icon of Him! He who is in Christ, namely, the true believer, will enjoy the dwelling of Christ in his heart by faith, and the continuous renewal through the work of His Holy Spirit; and thus will practice his sonhood to God, denying his old sonhood to the devil and his evil works.

In Christ we get a new heart, a new thought, a new behavior, and a new life; and we live as well in a new creation in the heavenlies.

He who is in Christ lives free of sin, of the love of the world, and of the desires of the body; he is no more preoccupied with what is seen, but with what is unseen.

The true believer does not only enjoy the continuous renewal inside him, but sees everything as new; Through the eyes of Christ, he sees around himself a new creation.

The term “creation” came in Greek as (Ktisis) in feminine, as most feminine names end with “sis”, while the masculine ends with “ma”. The feminine gender refers to movement, work, and production. The creation here is not static, but dynamic, working, and fruitful.

- + He who believes in Me would come to another creation, namely would be born again by the Spirit ... We should live for Him Paul exhorts us to have a life of virtue ... showing that it is “*a new creation*”, and adds that “*Old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new*” (17). What are the old things, but the sins, and the lack of piety, namely, keeping the Jewish practices; Or rather mean this and that.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + That is the same goal, for the sake of which the Lord Jesus Christ came; namely, to change the human nature, to transform, and to renew it. He creates the soul a new creation.

Christ came to unify the human nature with His own Spirit, namely, the Spirit of Deity. He came to make a new mind, a new soul, new eyes, new ears, and a new

spiritual tongue, in short to make a new man altogether; That is what he came to do in those who believe in Him; to make them new vessels, to anoint them by the light of His divine knowledge, and to pour in them the new wine, namely, His Spirit; for He says: "*New wine should be put into new wineskins*" (Matthew 9: 17).

- + Man's whole nature has become sinful in the person of the one first created; But now it is justified anew in Christ; who became to us a new beginning for our race after that early beginning; In Him all things have become new.
- + We have a new world through the coming of our Savior, in whom all things became new for us.

(St. Cyril the Great)

- + Once the early creation has grown old and disappeared, there was a need for a new creation in Christ. According to the apostle, we shall see in the new creation no more trace of what has grown old; saying: "*taking off the old man with his works and lusts, we put on the new man created according to God*"; "*If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away, behold, all things have become new*". ... In the early creation, the Creator took dust from the earth and conformed man; In the new creation, He again took dust from the Virgin Mary, and conformed, not just a man, but a Man for Himself. ... He who created became Himself a Creation, The Word created a body, then became Himself a body, to transform our body to a Spirit, having become with us a partner in flesh and blood. ... By such a new creation in Christ, by which He Himself started, He is called the Firstfruit of all; of both those who are born in this life, and those who lived by the resurrection from the dead.
- + Once again, having made Himself "*the Firstfruit of resurrection*", and having got the title "*The Firstfruit of those who have fallen asleep*", He has the priority in everything; Then, according to the apostle: "*The old things have passed away*". He

became the Firstfruit of the new creation of men in Christ, by a new double birth: one by the holy baptism, and the other as a result of the resurrection from the dead. In both of them He became for us "*the Prince of life*" and the "*Firstborn*".... This Firstborn has as well brethren, about whom He says to Mary Magdalene: "*Go to My brethren and say to them: 'I am ascending to My Father and your Father; to My God and your God'*"*John 20: 17). In those words He summarized all His goal from His ordinance of becoming a Man.

(St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa)

- + To prove by our works what we proclaim by words, he says: "*Old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new*" ; "*And if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation*" (17).

(St. John Chrysostom)

"Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation" (18)

All these gifts that touch our inner renewal, namely the new creation, are gifts from God, that we enjoy through the reconciliation with the Father in Jesus Christ. If sin has taken away our attachment to God, destroyed our relationship with Him, and turned it into animosity, the salvation work of Christ is the reconciliation. God has reconciled us to Himself by His only begotten Son Jesus Christ.

The source of all the graces we get from God has been realized by the atoning Intercessor the Lord Jesus Christ.

Our God has given us the ministry of reconciliation, and granted us the Holy Book, the divine Word, being the word of reconciliation, having enjoyed peace with God through the blood of the cross. The cross has taken away the spirit of animosity that prevailed upon the heart toward the divinities and the heavenlies; and presented the spirit of reconciliation to and the attachment to it.

- + By saying: "*He has given us the ministry of reconciliation*", he means to say to us: Do not assume that we work by our own authority; we are only ministers. He who does everything is God, who reconciled the world by His only begotten Son.

(St. John Chrysostom)

"That is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation" (19)

By so saying, he proclaims that God Himself is the One who seeks the reconciliation.

We initiated the animosity, opposition, rebellion, and stubbornness; and He initiated love, and sought reconciliation; He walks toward us, presenting His gospel "*the word of reconciliation*".

- + There is a wicked world and a good world; The wicked world is all the wicked men in this world; and the good world is all the good men in it.
- + "*The world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him*" (John 1: 10). What world that was made through Him? And what world that did not know Him? It is not the physical world; namely the heaven and the earth. Because how could heaven not know Him, when, in His passion the sun was darkened? And how could the earth not know Him, when it trembled, as he was hanged on the cross? But the world did not know Him, who said: "*the ruler of this world comes, he has*

nothing in Me" (John 14: 30). The wicked and the non-believers are called "the world"; so called because of what they love. By our love for God, therefore, we become "gods", and by loving the world, we are called "the world", Yet God reconciled the world to Him in Christ.

(St. Augustine)

- + The gospels are four; being the four elements of faith of the church; through which the world which was reconciled to God has indeed gathered together in Christ.

(The scholar Origen)

"Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us; we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God" (20)

If God is the Initiator of the reconciliation, it is befitting of His ministers, being His ambassadors, to initiate reconciliation in their turn; to plead with the sinners to accept this reconciliation to God.

The ministers being ambassadors for the Lord Christ, they represent Him, proclaim His will in their reconciliation to the Father, and reveal God's exalted love for the congregation. As representatives of Christ, the atoning Intercessors, they pray for the sinners, and plead to them to accept His atoning work, in order to enjoy His divine bosoms which carry them to the bosom of the Father.

- + As ambassadors for Christ, namely, His representatives, having succeeded Him in His work, do not assume that it is sought for your sake, from Him through us, but Christ Himself seeks you through us ... He, who grants His blessings to tens of thousands, was attacked; Yet He did not use justice, but He even delivered His

only begotten Son to reconcile... What does He seek? "*Be reconciled to God*". He does not say "Reconcile God to you", as God bears no hatred, but it is you who bear it; God never bore hatred.

(St. John Chrysostom)

"For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (21)

He who knew no sin became a sacrifice of sin offered on our behalf. The Hebrew word (hamarita) that came here, was translated in the Septuagint version in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, and the Numbers, as "*a sin offering*".

Having consented to become "a sin offering", our Christ had all the hands of humanity put on Him to bear the whole weight of their sins.

Having taken our place, our Christ was counted as though the greatest sinner; And He granted us, bearing the righteousness of Christ, to take His place, to be counted as "righteous" in the sight of God the Father.

This chapter therefore presents to us a magnificent concept of salvation and the ministry of reconciliation to the Father, to enjoy the righteousness of Christ; as Christ took our place, and presented Himself a sacrifice of sin on our behalf. It is indeed a unique presentation that reveals the exalted experience of the apostle with the cross of the Lord of Glory Jesus Christ.

+ He means to say that He, who is Righteous, has become a sin; namely suffered as a condemned sinner, cursed to die.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + What did happen is that He became obedient, having “taken *our weaknesses upon Himself, and bore our infirmities*”, healing the disobedience of men by His obedience.; that by His scourges He would heal our wounds; and by His death He drive away the general death from all mankind. For our sake He became obedient; and for our sake He became a “sin” and a “curse”; for the sake of the ordainment to our account, and not according to nature; but He so became in His love of mankind.

(St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa)

- + Who is He, who knew no sin, but Him who said: “*The ruler of this world is coming, and he has nothing in Me*” (John 14: 30).
“*He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us*”. What does this mean, O brethren? If it is said: “He made Him sin”, it would be unbearable; So how could we bear saying “*He made Him to be sin for us*”? Namely that Christ Himself becomes a sin?!

Those who have knowledge of the Old Testament would understand what I say; As this is not an expression that came only once, but is repeated several times. The sacrifices for the sake of sin are called “sins”. As an example goats and rams offered for sin, were called “sins”. In the law we read: “*He shall lay his hand on the head of the sin offering*” (Leviticus 4: 29) ... The way the sin was offered, the blood of the Savior was shed and made void the bill of the debtor ... the blood which is shed for many for the remission of sins (Matthew 26: 28).

(St. Augustine)

AN INSPIRATION FROM 2 CORINTHIANS 5

MY SOUL PRAISES YOU IN THE TENT OF HER BODY, ANTICIPATING HER ETERNAL DWELLING WITH YOU

- + Glory be to You, who granted me the tent of the body.
A beautiful tent, the work of Your hands.
Yet, it is temporal and temporary.
By my own corrupted will I corrupted it.
Through it, my soul departs, setting forth toward You.

- + I wonder when shall I encounter You, to enjoy the heavenly habitation!
When shall I bear a spiritual body like Your body risen from the dead?
In which there is no corruption;
And in which there will be no more death.

- + I often get preoccupied by the clothes on my body.
Yet they would not take away my nakedness before the heavenlies.
When shall I hide in You, and put on an eternal attire?
Here on earth, although I put on clothes, yet I am naked.
There I shall not put on any clothes;
As Your splendor will reflect on me as my heavenly garment.

- + I wonder if I shall enjoy the deposit of Your Holy Spirit?
To enjoy having an incorruptible garment that would never be worn-out.
To enjoy the deposit of eternity instead of being preoccupied with temporal things.

- + By faith, I behold You, and enjoy You.
Yet, while dwelling in this body I am away from You.
Let me dwell together with You, and become away from this mortal body.

Can I say:

The body lusts have no place in me!

For where You dwell, is no place for sin.

- + My soul groans in me;
Come to dwell in my depths.
Whether I live here, or depart from this world,
I am only preoccupied with what brings You pleasure.
Let me please You; As who can love me like You?
You love me together with all my brethren.
Your love perpetually surrounds me.

- + By Your love You consented to die, that I, together with my brethren may live.
How can I pay You back; as I am all Yours?
Let me live for You, O who came to the world for my sake.
To enjoy uniting with You beyond the limitations of the body.

- + You made me a new creation;
And destroyed the corruption of my old nature.
Glory be to You, O who renewed my life.

- + You reconciled me, the sinful enemy.
I see my soul hide in You.
When shall see all with me in You?
I am Your ambassador.
I have no other goal but to see all humanity righteous in You.
When shall see all enjoy the fellowship of glory with You?

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DIVISION 3

HIS APOSTOLIC WORK

(Chapters 6 and 7)

CHAPTER 6

THE MINISTRY AND THE FEATURES OF THE MINISTER

The apostle Paul talks to us about how the minister should be in his behavior in his life, and his relationships with others:

1- The acceptable time	1 - 2
2- Without offense	3
3- His strife	4 - 10
4- His heart should be wide open	11 - 13
5- The minister should have no fellowship with the darkness	14 – 18

1- THE ACCEPTABLE TIME:

“We then as workers together with Him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain” (1)

It is befitting of the minister to have his mission harmonize with his evangelic mind; for its goal to become the *“reconciliation to God”*. By that he would receive the riches of the grace of God working in, and by him, and his work would not in vain.

When the minister works on drawing the hearts of those he ministers to the grace of God and to His salvation work, he would be worthy of being called *“A worker together with God”*; which the apostle cherishes saying *“We are workers together with God”*; working together under His leadership, and to the account of His kingdom and heavenly glory.

The apostle says: *“receive the grace of God”*, and not use, or get benefit from the grace of God. As the believer, in receiving the grace of God, finds in it what satisfies his depths; In itself, it is riches beyond evaluation, as it means the enjoyment of God Himself dwelling in us. What does *“not to receive the grace of God in vain”* means, but declining to receive the good works by the help of His grace.

- + Paul exhorts his listeners not to get slothful, by the mere assumption that God searches for them and sends them as ambassadors for Himself; But on the contrary, and for this same reason, we are committed to please Him, and to reap our spiritual blessings.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + Actually, he who does not put before himself the will of God as a goal in his life, would become in danger; As, in case he is feeling well, he should zealously reveal the works of love of the Lord; Otherwise, he should joyfully endure, and persevere.

The most prominent and great danger is that, by not practicing the will of God, man would separate himself from the Lord, and would sever himself from the fellowship with his brethren.

Moreover, although being unworthy, he would dare to partake of the blessings prepared for those truly worthy of them. Here we should remember the words of the apostle, exhorting us not to receive the grace of God in vain; Those who are called the brethren of the Lord, should not receive such a great divine grace by a spirit of slothfulness in realizing the will of God; but should abide to the apostle's words saying: *"I beseech you to have a walk worthy of the calling with which you were called"* (Ephesians 4: 1).

(St. Basil the Great)

"For He says: 'In an acceptable time I have heard you; And in the day of salvation I have helped you' Behold, now is the accepted time; Behold, now is the day of salvation" (2)

God says in the book of Isaiah: *“In an acceptable time I have heard You; And in the day of salvation I have helped You. I will preserve You and give You, as a covenant to the people to restore the earth, to cause them to inherit the desolate heritage”* (Isaiah 49: 8); which the apostle Paul quoted from the Septuagint version.

What is the *“acceptable time”*, but that of the coming of the Messiah, the time of God’s pleasure and mercies, expected by all believers. And what is the day of salvation, but that when the believer receives the salvation of God by the cross, and responds to it.

The apostle says that what the prophet Isaiah prophesied, and the believers of the Old Covenant desired, have been now realized. We are reconciled to the Father; and the disciples and the apostles have delivered the word of reconciliation through the sacrifice of Christ, by which the forgiveness of sins is consummated, and we gained an abundance of the divine grace. By that the apostles became *“workers together with the Lord, and receive God’s grace not in vain”*.

“Now”, the *“acceptable time, the day of salvation”*. is in our possession; Whereas “tomorrow” is not in our hands, and we do not know how we shall be, in case we postpone the salvation work of God!

Today is an acceptable time to receive the Holy Spirit who reveals our hidden wounds, and enlightens our eyes to realize the extent of our spiritual illness; and to carry us to the heavenly Physician, who will grant us His free rich grace that grants us His amazing divine righteousness instead of our weakness The Holy Spirit will also present to us the experience of the deposit of the non-corruption; and will make us enjoy the resurrection of the soul, and her eternal glory, to be shared later by the body. That is the day of salvation, the acceptable time, before we cross over from this life, and find the door closed.

+ The apostle says: *“Now is the accepted time; Behold, now is the day of salvation”*
(2)

This is the time of repentance; Whereas the life to come is the reward.

Now is the time of endurance; Whereas then, it will be that of comfort.

Now, God is the Helper for us to return from the evil path; Whereas then, He will awesomely ask about the thoughts, the words, and the works of mankind.

Now, we enjoy Gods longsuffering; Whereas then, we shall know His justice; when we are risen, some to an unceasing punishment, and others to an eternal life; Each one will receive the reward of his own works.

(St. Basil the Great)

When man encounter God, his Savior, he would regret the time he has lost.

+ I am awfully late to reveal my Love for You, O the whole beauty, perpetually old and new! I am awfully late in loving You.

+ Let us now praise, O brethren, not to rejoice for comfort, but for our labor. Like travelers, singing and praising on their way.

If you show progress, you are walking forward; Let there be for you progress in goodness, in true faith, and in upright life, so as to sing while consummating your journey.

(St. Augustine)

2- WITHOUT OFFENSE:

"We give no offense in anything, that our ministry may not be blamed" (3)

The faith of the apostle Paul, his flaring zeal, and his perpetual labor for the sake of his own salvation and that of others, left no chance for any offense; having been wholly

keen on not giving any offense to the Jews or to the Gentiles, for the sake of whom Christ died. When speaking about the law, he always confirms that it is good, and that he does not stand against it, but only against the literality of keeping it. Yet, at the same time, in order to gain the Gentiles, he also confirms that there is no more need for observing the statutes of purification, both the literal and the symbolic.

- + The apostle presents three features of preaching the word: an enflamed forthcoming zeal; a soul ready to endure any probable risk; and knowledge and wisdom, connected together. His love of adventure (in preaching), and his blameless life, would have no benefit for him, if he has not received the power of the Spirit.

Meditate in what kind of man should be, he who confronts such torrential storms, and cleverly stands against such great obstacles on the way of the common good. He has to be reverent without boasting; respectful, yet compassionate; a firm administrator, yet sociable; and humble, yet, amiable; ... to be able to overcome such mighty difficulties.

- + It is befitting of the priest to shine with his good behavior on all men, to let them follow his example. But, if his light turns into darkness, What would dwell upon the world?! Would it not be desolation?!
- + The Lord put us here to be lights, to teach others, to be a leaven, to walk like angels among men, as spirituals among naturals, to let them benefit from us; and to be seeds that produce fruits.
There is no need for words, if our life shines with light!
There is no need for teachers, if we show good works.
There would be no idolaters, if we are true Christians.
If we keep the commandments of Christ, endure suffering, let others benefit from us, If we bless when reviled; and do good if ill-treated, There would be no more violence; and all would resort to goodness.

There is nothing worse than to become philosophers in words and not in deeds.
There is nothing easier than words; It is better to teach me by your way of life.

+ We are in need of good behavior and virtue, not of eloquence of speech; For works, and not for words.

(St. John Chrysostom)

+ What would be my profit, occupying the first place in the congregation, and possessing the honor of prominence; if I have no good works that make me worthy of such honors?!

+ For him who receives the responsibility of leadership, being free of sin is not good enough; He is committed as well to rise up to the level of doing good; according to the commandment: "*Depart from evil and do good*" (Psalm 37: 27).

All traces of sin should not be wiped off his spirit, that should also be equipped with virtues; he would surpass his flock in virtue, more than exalting over them in honor.

He is committed to designate for himself no limitation for doing good, or spiritual growth ... And not to count his prominence over the laics a great achievement.

He should not measure himself as compared to others, whether wicked or spiritually ahead; but should measure himself in the light of the divine commandments.

(St. Gregory, the Neanzan)

3- HIS STRIFE:

“But in all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God; in much patience; in tribulations, in need; in distress” (4)

The apostle consummates his talk, showing that he, and his fellow ministers, are doing their best to realize the ministry of reconciliation, whatever would be the cost or labor, not only by giving no offense in anything, but by appearing as true ministers of God.

Commending the apostle Paul, St. John Chrysostom says: [Oh, If I could cast myself on the body of Paul; attach myself to his grave, to the dust of that body that *“filled up in his flesh, what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ”* (Colossians 1: 24); who bore the features, and cast the seeds everywhere?! Yes, the dust of that body, through which Christ spoke!

How would I be happy to touch the dust of those eyes which, after having been blinded by the splendor of glory, restored their insight for the sake of the salvation of the world! Those eyes which, while in the body, were found worthy to behold Christ! Those eyes which saw indescribable things!

I should like to touch the dust of those feet that tirelessly covered the whole world]

“They work in much patience, in tribulations” Paul confronted persecutions on every side; from his own kinsmen, and from the Gentiles.

“In needs”; having suffered hunger, thirst, nakedness, need for life necessities; that he had to work with his own hands to cover his needs together with those of his co-workers.

“In distresses”; that he did not know what to do.

That is the portion of the faithful servant, to share the cross of his Christ, to enter together with him into the narrow path, and to confront

limitless difficulties; and in all that he remains faithful to his mission; not only doing God's work with diligence, but to receive readily everything that could dwell upon him with thanksgiving and the joy of heart. He would find his pleasure in enduring every labor for the sake of ministry, in practicing every virtue, and forsaking every thing with joy.

While the false ministers, are only preoccupied with pleasing their listeners; the true ministers are preoccupied with pleasing God whom they serve; They partake of the passion of the Lord, and do not seek any temporal honor or commendation from anyone.

- + That is the grace of the Holy Spirit that fills the soul and the whole house with gladness and strength; grants the soul sweetness to endure the passions of the Lord; and the present suffering would have no physical impact because of the hope for the things to come.

Now, as you approach the ascension to the high power and glory, you have to run your life as such; through co-operating with the Holy Spirit, to endure every suffering and temptation with joy; to appear worthy of the dwelling of the Spirit in you, and qualified for the inheritance of Christ; You should neither be puffed-up, nor weakened by slothfulness to the extent of falling down yourselves, or becoming the cause of others to fall into sin.

(St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa)

- + We hear the apostle, while under that (light yoke and burden) say: "*In all things we commend ourselves, as ministers of God, in much patience, in tribulations, in needs, in distresses, in stripes, etc.*" (4, 5). And in the same epistle he says: "*From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one ...*" (2 Corinthians 11: 24); beside other sufferings that could not be endured except by the help of the Holy Spirit.

(St. Augustine)

- + That was called by the blessed apostle a “gift”, in case man is ready in faith to suffer for the sake of his hope in God; saying: “*For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for his sake*” (Philippians 1: 29). And St. Peter, in his epistle also wrote: “*If you should suffer for righteousness sake, you are blessed*” (1 Peter 3: 14, 4: 13). Therefore, if you find yourself on an easy way and in gladness, do not rejoice; And when a tribulation happen to dwell upon you, do not bear a gloomy countenance; and do not count that as something foreign to the way of God, which has long been treaded by all ages, along all generations, through the cross and death. How could you assume that sorrows do not belong to the way? Do not you desire to follow the lead of the saints? Or you wish to choose for yourself a way on your own, that has no suffering?!
- The way to God is a daily cross. No one could ascend to heaven by the easy way, which we all know where it leads!

(St. Isaac the Syrian)

“In stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labor, in sleeplessness, in fasting” (5)

“In stripes, in imprisonments” Although the book of acts presents a live testimony of some of what the apostle confronted, yet it certainly did not cover them all.

“In tumults” (skastastasiais); having faced more than once such dangerous armed riots and loud outcry, because of his preaching of the gospel, and his testimony to the Lord Christ. He probably means that the apostle often had to move from one place to another because of

the disturbance that chased him everywhere.

“In labor”. He did not cease to labor continuously in every city and country, to spread the gospel of God.

“In sleeplessness” He spent many sleepless nights without giving his body its due rest; watching all night to pray for the sake of his people.

He was a man of prayer, who helps his people by his prayers, to overcome their unseen enemy.

- + I wish every priest would perpetually pray for the sake of the congregation under his care, to help them have the conquest on the unseen host of ‘Amalek’, namely the demons who attack those who long for a life of piety in Christ.

(The scholar Origen)

- + Although those who strive for the sake of the true faith, have not yet been rewarded; The Truth Himself exhorts His beloved followers to persist on confronting any danger for the sake of the true faith. This is testified by the apostle Paul who says: *“For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels ... shall be able to separate me from the love of God”* (Romans 8: 38, 39).

Can you see, O my friend, the flame of those feelings? Can you feel the heat of that love? Paul does not covet what is Christ’s, but he covets Christ Himself; Such a kind of love could never get satisfied; He is ready to forsake with joy any temporary present or future pleasure; Yes, and even to endure all kinds of sufferings; to keep this flame perpetually live in him

Paul gave us an example by deeds as well as by words; he left us with memories of his sufferings. Recalling him, together with the fathers Patriarchs, prophets, apostles, martyrs, and priests; I could not help but rejoice in what we normally

consider as misery. I feel ashamed when I recall how those who have not got the lessons we had; but by nature, but have gained by nature prominent positions in the race to virtue.

(Father Theodoret, Bishop of Cyrus)

“In fasting” some of which could have been for lack of food; and some by his own choice, for the grace of God to work in him and in his ministry.

“By purity, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by sincere love” (6)

“By purity” (hagnoteeti), meaning the purity of the mind, its simplicity, the purity of emotions and conscience; together with the holy life of chastity, required by the gospel; As it would be impossible to testify to the Savior, and to give compassion to the souls to make them enjoy the salvation work, without the purity of the preacher; And it would also be impossible to receive salvation, and to enjoy the fellowship with God, in His Son, by the Holy Spirit, unless man is purified from the love of the lusts of the world.

+ It is befitting of the priest who ministers to the divine altars, before anything else, to gird himself with purity; As he would not be able to purify the old and to establish what is new, unless he becomes clothed with linen. We often talked about the linen clothing, in particular in our dealings with the priestly attires, and said that this kind of clothing bears the appearance of purity; although linen itself has its origin in the earth.

(The scholar Origen)

“By knowledge”. As any zeal for work without the knowledge of the divine secrets, and of God’s plan toward man, could turn to madness.

“By longsuffering”. Whatever the extent of disturbances.

“By kindness”, A preacher should not only, with longsuffering, endure those who attempt to make him lose his temper, but, with kindness, he should accept what they do; in compassion like a father dealing with a sick son; doing it with everyone, in particular his persecutors.

“By the Holy Spirit”, the Grantor of love, joy, peace, etc. (Galatians 5: 22, 23), a preacher realizes that he would not be able to practice his ministry and his testimony, without the grace of the Spirit in him.

“By sincere love”, which the apostle Paul often expressed by giving up one’s own life for his brother’s sake, for the sake of the salvation of others, and for the spread of the kingdom of God.

+ This kind of virtue makes man like God.

Considering the many other virtues which are less important than love; those that go around man’s strife against lusts, greed, love of money, and anger; Man would find out that love is the virtue which he shares with God Himself; about which the Lord Christ, Himself, says: *“Pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you; that you may be sons of your Father in heaven”* (Matthew 5: 44, 45).

Discovering how love is the crown of virtues, Paul sought to plant it with the utmost care.

It would not be easy for man to love his enemies, bless those who curse him, do good to those who hate him; But if he takes into consideration the mutual nature which he shares with them, he would no longer care for the sufferings they cause him; The more they spitefully treat him, the more he treats them with compassion, like a father who feels sad when he sees how his mentally disturbed son grows more violent.

Diagnosing the kind of infirmity that creates such violent and wild attacks against him, he grew more caring for his adversaries as sick people. We hear him talk with exalted compassion about those who five times scourged him (2 Corinthians 11: 24), who stoned him, shackled him, shed his blood, and desired to cut him into pieces, saying: *"I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge"* (Romans 10: 2); And, warns those who spitefully use him, saying: *"If God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either"* (Romans 11: 21); And when he foresaw the judgment that will dwell upon them, he could not help but unceasingly weep and mourn for their sake.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + Referring more to what could not be evaluated for price, he adds *"by purity"*, beside all the other well known fruits of the Spirit ... In case man receives the counsel of Solomon, and takes the true wisdom as a helper and a life partner; saying: *"Do not forsake her, and she will preserve you; love her, and she will keep you"* (Proverbs 4: 6); he will then appear worthy of this love, and would celebrate together with the rest of guests who are invited to that joyful wedding, in an undefiled garment, and would not be driven out for not wearing the proper attire for the wedding.

(St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa)

"By word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left" (7)

"By the word of truth", namely by the testimony of the word of God, the divine truth presented by God.

"By the power of God", Talking as though with authority from God, the word set forth from the heart to the heart, to move the whole being of the listener by the divine power. By the power of God here, he does not mean mere miracles, but the divine work in renewing the will of

the listener, his mind, and emotions; namely his longing to receive the divine word.

“By the armor of righteousness, on the right hand and on the left”. The apostle

Paul, in (Ephesians 6: 13-17), talks about the armor of God that includes the girdle of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the footwear of the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit. By such a complete arsenal of the arms of God, the evil enemy would be defeated in all circumstances.

By saying *“on the right hand and on the left”*, the apostle means that we shall overcome in the time of joy as well as in the time of sorrow;

namely, in opposing evil and corruption, as well as in opposing the self righteousness.

- + He calls them those things *“on the left”*, that seem as sorrowful, as though they deserve a reward. Does he call them as such according to the understanding of many ; Or because God commanded us to pray, not to enter into temptation?

(St. John Chrysostom)

The virtue works on two fronts: Faith and behavior, according to our conscience. If we grow on both fronts, the enemy would not be able to touch us by his temptations; Putting on the shield of faith, *“By the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness, on the right hand and on the left”* (7).

(St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa)

- + He who truly search for righteousness according to human understanding, will be provided by the armor of righteousness on the left hand; Whereas he who search for it according to the teachings of the truth; and searches in this work for the Son - - “the Righteousness”, will carry the armor of the right hand.

(St. Dedyms the blind)

- + The armor of righteousness of the right hand brings gladness to the mind; while those on the left hand do nothing of the sort.

(Father Theodoret, Bishop of Cyrus)

- + For him whose mind is lifted up, all things seem equal in honor, he does not prefer something to another, for the duration of life is full of contradictions. As for each of us, there is a power for life, either good or bad, according to the words of the apostle: *“by the armor of righteousness, on the right hand and on the left, by honor and dishonor”* (7, 8); he who purifies his mind, and truly examines the truth of existence, would walk along his way from birth to death, not corrupting it by pleasures, nor destroying it by violence; Yet, according to the normal way of travelers, it will be slightly affected by the things he confronts.

As it is common for travelers to hasten up at the end of their journey, whether going through green pastures or rough wilderness; not hindered by pleasures, nor by sorrows; he would likewise hasten without diversion toward the goal set before him, and would cross over this life looking forward only to heaven; like a good skipper who directs his ship to his designated destination.

(St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa)

“By honor and dishonor, by evil report and good report; as deceivers, and yet true” (8)

“By honor and dishonor”, Whether honored or dishonored by people, that would not affect his mission, his zeal, and his love for the salvation of his brethren. It is befitting of the preacher to expect war on the two fronts: by being exaggeratedly honored, which would make

him forget his mission, and care for his own dignity; Or by being dishonored and wounded, which would make him preoccupied with defending himself and justifying his actions, forgetting his salvation and that of his brethren.

“By evil report and good report”, In case he is insulted, he would count it necessary, for God to be glorified in him, even by evil report. And by good report, he would count it as though God is covering up his weaknesses for the sake of the edification of the kingdom of God.

“As deceivers, and yet true”, Having been sure of the truth he has received from God, the apostle Paul was not disturbed when he was accused of presenting vain and deceiving teachings.

- + Do not be inclined toward the commendation, lest while getting it, you would dishonor God. The apostle says: *“If I still pleased men, I would be a servant of Christ”* (Galatians 1: 10). A servant of Christ would cease to please men, and would walk, whether by a good report, or by an evil report; No commendation would make him boast and rejoice; and no rebuke would destroy him.; He is neither puffed up by riches, nor destroyed by poverty; He equally despises both temporal joy and sorrow; *“the sun shall not strike him by day, nor the moon by night”* (Psalm 121: 6).

(St. Jerome)

- + If we lead a life worthy of a *“good report”*, and something favorable is said about us, Let us then endure the *“evil report” of the wicked*. ... If we are admired by those who truly love the truth; Let us then laugh when we are called ‘deceivers’. ... When we were spared from several dangers, many said that we are favored by God; Now, let those who wish to say that we are not, have their way. When we endure

what happen to us, we may be punished, yet we are not killed; While we are rejoicing, we may look sorrowful.

(The scholar Origen)

- + Many commend the good more than they should; So lest any trace of boasting would probably crawl into the good because of this exaggerated commendation, the Almighty God allows the wicked to distort their reputation and to violently rebuke them; That is why the teacher of the Gentiles testifies that he goes on preaching "*by evil report and good report*", and adds: "*as deceivers and yet true*"

If a bad report was given about Paul, who was called 'A deceiver', How could any Christian, if he hears some painful words for the sake of Christ count it something difficult to bear? If the Lord Himself who became man for our sake, was accused of being a demon; and a deceiver, before and after His death by His persecutors (Matthew 27: 63).

(St. Gregory the Great)

- + Let him who wishes to laugh or make fun goes his way, That would never bother me; as I have only occupied this position to be rejected and to become a laughingstock!

I am ready to endure anything!

He who persist on his behavior, and would not listen to my warnings, I shall forbid him from entering into the church, as though by the sound of a trumpet, even if he is a prince, or even an emperor!

Relieve me of my work, or else, do not commit me to come under curse!

How could I sit on this chair, if I do not do what befit it? It would be better for me to leave it; As there is nothing worse than a bishop who does not benefit his congregation!

(St. John Chrysostom)

“As unknown, and yet well-known; as dying, and behold, we live; as chastened, and yet not killed” (9)

Those who hated Paul and his co-workers, counted the daily tribulations that dwelt upon them as a fruit of their wickedness; Yet those same ministers, while preaching the word, experienced daily the power of the resurrection of Christ to let them rejoice in their tribulations.

“As unknown, and yet well-known”, People may despise the preacher and count him as unknown, insignificant, and of no dignified position in the society; While heaven itself glorifies him. Paul and his companions were unknown to the wicked, yet well-known to believers, holy in the Lord.

It would look as though we preach in secret, shyly, and in fear; While we actually publicly testify to our salvation, wherever we go; and would never do anything in secret.

“As dying, and behold, we live”, Through so many continuous dangers, persecutions, and labor, Yet in all that, we experience the new resurrected life as a gift given to us through the fellowship with Christ the Conqueror of death.

“As chastened, and yet not killed”, As though we are rebellious and disobedient children, worthy of chastisement to death; yet, behold, we live and not killed, according to the pleasure of our heavenly Father.

“As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing all things” (10)

“As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing”, In all circumstances, and despite all the persecutions and tribulations, we may look as sorrowful, yet we are always rejoicing, for we enjoy the exultation of conquest and victory. We have conquered, we conquer, and, by the divine grace, we shall always conquer. The comforts by the Holy Spirit amid the anguish never forsake us.

+ As long as Paul is in this ‘tent’ proclaiming death, and under the heavy weight of this existence, he stays sorrowful all along his journey, as testified by the Psalmist in his heavenly song. They truly were living in the darkness, those who traveled in those living ‘tents’; while the preacher always moaned through this journey.

(St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa)

“As poor, yet making many rich”, The preacher may be despised as being poor and having nothing in this world, while he presents to the empty hearts an abundance from the riches of the storehouses of Christ. He may have no silver, gold, houses, or lands, yet he presents the King of heaven and earth, who is in his depths, for many to enjoy and be satisfied.

“As having nothing, and yet possessing all things”, Apparently we have nothing, but in the depths we enjoy having the treasures of exalted grace, the fellowship of inner glory, and the deposit of the inheritance of the eternal kingdom.

It may happen that a Christian is given the choice, either to renounce his faith, or he would lose the right to have a house or to have any possessions. At certain times some Christian rich people chose to forsake all their possessions for the sake of Christ, than to deny Him for the sake of their material possessions. By such a crucial decision they

became “*as having nothing, and yet possessing all things*” (10); possessing the eternal life in the age to come; lest by denying Christ for the sake of riches, they would fall into the eternal death.

+ The apostle Paul was rich in the other world; he who said: “*as having nothing, and yet possessing all things*”.

(St. Augustine)

4- HIS HEART SHOULD BE WIDE OPEN:

“O Corinthians! We have spoken openly to you, Our heart is wide open” (11)

The apostle presents himself to the Corinthians like a father caring for his children, demonstrating to them his warm feeling toward them. He carries a heart wide open, where all the Corinthians could find a place. By such a wide open heart, he spoke to them with complete frankness, together with compassion; As though he says to them: My talk to you does not come out of a desire to teach, as much as it is out of an abundant love from a heart, preoccupied with each one of you, and wide open to keep you all in the warmth of love,

- + This warmth, which is a virtue and zeal, usually involves width, which is the work of love ... There was nothing wider than the heart of Paul, who loved all believers with such purity, to make him endure everything for the sake of realizing his compassion, to say: “*We have spoken openly to you, Our heart is wide open*”; enough to accommodate you all!
- + Lest he would deeply wound their feelings, he does not say: “You do not love us”, but says: “not as much as we love you” ... In his epistles he bears a testimony that

'he loves and is loved in return, albeit not equally'... You receive one person; whereas I receive the whole city with its huge population.

- + 'Job' had his door wide open before the guests to whom he gave hospitality in his house. Paul, on the other hand, had his heart wide open to accommodate the whole world; and his hospitality was combined with internationality, that led him to say to the Corinthians: "*We are not withholding our affection from you, but you are withholding yours from us*" (12)

- + For that, I perpetually embrace you; And I do not feel any more the labor of teaching; Its burden becomes lighter when the listeners are responding and having benefit. This reward for me is enough to renew my energy, to give me wings to lift me up, and to incite me the more to endure any tough labor for your sake.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + Despite such greatness of God, You can, O soul, receive His Spirit, to dwell in you, and to guide you.

(St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa)

"We are not withholding our affection from you, but you are withholding yours from us" (12)

In case you think that you find no way wide enough by love to walk along; It is not because of narrowness in our hearts, or of lack of our love; but it is a reflection of the narrowness of your hearts toward us; You are reflecting on us what is actually in you; You are not opening your hearts for us as we do for you.

- + The strong attach himself to the weak, supports him, and would not let him perish. In the same way, attaching oneself to someone slothful, he sets him up, and provokes him to work. It is written: 'A brother helped by another, is a strong city'. Such a relationship is not hindered by distances, nor even by death; but it is stronger and more active than any other thing. If it even comes from a single soul, it would make it capable of embracing a multitude at the same time. Listen to what Paul says: "*We are not withholding our affection from you; but you are withholding yours from us*".

(St. John Chrysostom)

"In return – I speak as to my children – open wide your hearts also" (13)

The same way a father opens his heart wide to his children, it would be befitting of them to open theirs to him, in order for them to experience the sweetness of mutual love. Opening their hearts would help open their insight to realize the width of their father's heart. It is as though the apostle Paul says to them: Love me as I love you, to realize my love, that you have not yet done.

- + You have seen a man who traveled the whole earth; whose ambition and goal was to lead everyone to God, which he realized with all his might; It is as though the whole world became his children. He was perpetually wandering, and zealous to call all mankind to the kingdom of heavens, offering care, counsel, promises, prayers, and help; beside casting demons out, who persist on destruction.

He used his personal possibilities, appearance, epistles, sermons, works, and disciples, to haul up the fallen, and to support those who strive, to stand fast in their strife. He counseled the repentant, comforted the suffering, warned the hostile, and closely and strongly watched the opponents and the adversaries.

He shared with the divine Leader and the healing Physician His struggle; by stretching the hand to help, to attack, to defend, and to give counsel, according to the need in the arena of work; He was everything to those preoccupied with strife.

In his greatness, he was more flaring than any flame of fire; And as far as the crown of all virtues, namely “love” he surpassed all. And like when iron melts in fire to become itself fire; so did Paul, who melted in love, to become himself an embodied love.

He became as though a father to the whole world, competing in his love with that of the fathers in flesh; or rather surpassed them all in both the physical and the spiritual love, and in his care; giving all his possessions, words, body, and spirit, and his whole being for the sake of those he love.

(St. John Chrsostom)

5- NO FELLOWSHIP WITH THE DARKNESS:

“Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness?

And what communion has light with darkness?” (14)

The apostle warns them against any fellowship with the wicked unbelievers; considering friendship with unbelievers a “yoke”, through which the believer’s ear is weighed down under the yoke of offensive words, and his eyes under the yoke of seeing things corruptive to his depths; and all his senses, holy to the Lord, would bow to carry what is not befitting.

Here he seeks the rejection of any fellowship with them in their worship, in their lawless behavior, and in their works of darkness. It so seems that some Christians kept their friendship with idol worshippers; accompanied them to their temple, where they partook of their banquets and feasts, that were filled with ethical corruptions. The apostle further more, meant being married to unbelievers; when the believing partner would not have the chance to experience in his home the heavenly church life, nor to enjoy the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Grantor of holiness. Such people would not be able to practice the Lord's prayer, saying: "Lead us not into temptation"; For, with their complete free will, they bowed down to carry a temptation and a yoke, that would certainly destroy their practical faith.

In the Old Covenant, it was forbidden to put the yoke on two different kinds of beasts, like for example a donkey and an ox together; Nor to plant a diversity of seeds mixed together in the same field. So how would righteousness mix with iniquity; and light with darkness?!

- + The apostle says: "*What communion has light with darkness?*" Here there is absolute contradiction. He, who partakes of the two together in his life, would achieve nothing; as his faith would provide for the light side, Yet his dark habits would quench the flame of his mind.

As it is impossible and against reason to conform between light and darkness, he who embrace the two together would become his own enemy, splitting himself two ways: virtue and evil. He creates a battle within himself, in which the victory of one side would involve the death of the other. This inner battle would create an utter confusion in his life. as it is impossible to have the two elements in the same individual, Acquiring evil would mean the loss of strength to acquire virtue.

- + As there is no communion of light with darkness (14); if darkness withdraws, light has to replace it. The same way, in case evil retreats, virtue has to replace it. In this case, the strength of the body would be unable to oppose the Holy Spirit (for putting the body to death would make it lose the ability to oppose the Spirit). In such a case, the body would come to be meek in nature, and an obedient servant to the Holy Spirit. Once the cruel soldier disappears with his evil, he would be replaced by the soldier, armed with virtue, wearing the breastplate of righteousness, carrying the sword of the Holy Spirit, protected by the complete armor of God, the helmet of salvation, the shield of faith, and the sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 6: 14-17). Then the body would come to be a servant to the master, namely, the mind, and would respond to all its commands in virtue, which works to serve the body.

- + It so seems to me that God says to such a corrupted man: You, whose life is corrupt, Would you call for the help of the Source of non-corruption – God the Father? Why would you defile that pure Name by your unclean words? Why would you dishonor the non-corrupt nature? If I am a Father to you, your life should befit my good attributes. I cannot recognize the image of My nature in you; your features wholly contradict My features. *“What fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness; and what communion has light with darkness?”* (14). What relationship has life with death? And how could purity conform to defilement?!

- + There is no way by which we can find harmony between contradictory things, with nothing in common. According to the apostle Paul, there is no fellowship of righteousness with lawlessness, or between light and darkness; And in short between the attributes and the special name of the essence of the nature of God , and everything that contradicts them concerning evil; Hence, we can perceive that the corrupt soul is a sojourner and a stranger from goodness.

(St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa)

- + Concerning how the apostles look at the heretics, we find in all their epistles that they hate defilement, and say that there is no fellowship between justice and injustice; or between light and darkness; As how could darkness give light; or how could injustice give justice? They are not from God, but from the spirit of the antichrist; Therefore how could the enemies of God, whose chests are filled with the spirit of the antichrist, deal with the divine spiritual issues?

- + As there is no accord between Christ and Belial (15), and between justice and injustice, two contradictory kinds of love could not be found in the same individual ; it is impossible for one soul to love both good and evil; It cannot love good unless it hates evil.

(St. Jerome)

“What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever?” (15)

Christ’s plan, interests, and mission are completely different from those of Belial; How could man serve both of them together, and how could he please both of them at the same time?

- + Because the Holy Spirit is our true baptism, we remain perpetually baptized. He is perpetually in us, and nothing can deprive us of our baptism. However, in case we deny God, and harmonize with the devil, the Holy Spirit would retreat; refusing to stay in the same place where the devil dwells.

(St. Felixinus)

“And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has

said: 'I will dwell in them, and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people" (16)

The believer is the temple of God, dedicated to the ministry of God, who promised to live in his depths, walk with him, and receive him as His own son. How then could there be an agreement between the temple of God and that of the idol? God, being a jealous God would never give His glory to someone else; nor share the same heart with someone else. As there is nothing in the eyes of a Jew, more defiled than to set an idol in the temple of the Lord, It is unbefitting to have a fellowship of the two kinds of worship. The idol worshipper will never worship God; And the Christian would never worship an idol. Therefore, how is it possible for these two to get married, and to live under one roof?!

The apostle confirms God's longing to set His holy house in the heart of the believer as His own temple. He is no passerby who comes to spend one night or more, but He is the Owner of the believer's heart, a perpetual Dweller in it, and would never have a partner; He walks in his depths, proclaims that He is his God; he would be one of His people, receives His divine work, of teaching, enlightenment, help, protection, guidance, and satisfaction; and receives blessings with no limits.

- + Because of His dwelling, we would get all what concern God the Father, as well as all what concern His only begotten Son.
- + So was the pleasure of God to come down from His Holy heaven, and to take over your reasonable nature; He took a body from the earth, and united it with His divine Spirit; so that you (the earthly) could gain the heavenly Spirit. And once your soul has a fellowship with the Spirit, and the heavenly Spirit enters into your soul, you would be a perfect man in God, a heir, and a son.

- + It is befitting of the divine temple to have incense of the sweetest fragrance. Every virtue is a mental incense, well received by the God of all.

(St. Cyril the Great)

- + St. John saw the holy city of God coming down from heaven, built on foundations of precious stones, and has twelve gates (Revelation 21: 1-21) ... In this city Christ reigns, dwells, and walks among His people, its inhabitants.

Just meditate in how the saintly soul is holier beyond description; It embraces Christ whom heaven itself is not wide enough to accommodate ... It has to be a wide house for Him to walk in!

It is written *"You are the temple of God, and the Spirit of God dwells in you"* (see 1 Corinthians 3: 16). Let us then prepare our temple, to be good enough for Christ to come and dwell in it; Our soul would become Zion, a tower set in the highest; perpetually up, and never down.

(St. Jerome)

*"Therefore, come out from among them, and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean,
And I will receive you" (17)*

Owing to the seriousness of the situation, the apostle seeks from his people to separate themselves from idol worshippers, like someone fleeing from a leper.

"I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty" (18)

Separating himself from the wicked, the believer will lose nothing; but will have his eyes opened to see God as his Father; Such a great honor and happiness! He will enter into a reference to the divine family; and will bear the features of that family, of a holy, exulted, secure, heavenly life.

“Says the Lord Almighty”.... However great is the love and compassion of the earthy fathers, they often are not able to fulfill the needs of their children, for the lack of power or possibilities. God, Almighty, on the other hand promises and fulfills; and offers His children more than what they ask for or need.

Yet, He demands from us to separate ourselves from all uncleanness and defilement, to receive us as His own children. That is why the apostle exhorts us to be pure.

+ Paul seeks from us to set a separating wall between ourselves and the Gentiles who still live in defilement; and to separate ourselves, as well, from the heretics, who do not believe in purity, and even in God.

(St. Clement of Alexandria)

AN INSPIRATION FROM 2 CORINTHIANS 6

**LET US WORK TOGETHER WITH YOU, WITH A WIDE OPEN
HEART**

- + Your exalted grace draws me to work together with You.
What an honor for me to work with, and by You!
It is an acceptable time, and a day of salvation.
Your mercies anticipate to embrace every soul.

- + Sanctify me to be qualified to minister to Your children, O Holy One.
To be blameless in my mind, my words, and my behavior.
To preach by my life, the work of Your grace.
That no one would be offended by me;
Nor blaspheme You because of me!

- + Grant me to follow the lead of Your apostle Paul
To find my joy perpetually in the sufferings for the sake of Your ministry.
For me, watching the night would be more sweet than sleep.
And fasting would be better than any food.
Ministering to Your children is the best part of my life.

- + Grant me the wide open heart
Where everyone would find a place.
It would never get narrow, as long as You dwell in it.
It will never seek a reward for its unceasing eruptive love!
Love itself would be the only reward I want.
Because he whose heart flows with love, will acquire You in it.

- + I shall minister to You, O true Light.
I shall not receive a fellowship with the darkness.

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CHAPTER 7

LET US DIE TOGETHER

AND LIVE TOGETHER

The apostle Paul goes on to reveal to his people the concept of the true fatherly love. He is ready to die and to live together with them. This kind of love is not set upon mere human emotions, but upon the longing to encounter together as one family in the bosom of God. What brings pleasure to the heart of the apostle Paul is their repentance, salvation, and enjoyment of the eternal glory.

The apostle was comforted by what his disciple Titus told him of the repentance of the Corinthians, and God's comforts to them. "*Titus' spirit, has been refreshed by them all*" (13), and the apostle Paul rejoiced with, and in him. The minister's comfort is in the true repentance of his congregation

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1- A PROGRESS IN HOLINESS:

Revealing how his heart exulted because of their repentance, the apostle Paul confirms to them that the ultimate goal of his faith and preaching, is to enjoy, together with all the people, the holy life inside and outside, and to walk along the way of holiness in the fear of God.

“Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (1)

Here, he refers to the divine promises, mentioned in the previous verses: That He will be their God, and they shall be His people (16); that He will become a Father to them, and they shall be His sons (18); and that He will receive them, once they separate themselves from all uncleanness (17).

Longing for the realization of those divine promises, we are committed to seek perfection and holiness, as He is both; We are committed to care for the purity of the body and the soul; as the Holy God is glorified in both.

The apostle Paul demands from us, not only to cleanse ourselves from the filthiness of the body, but from “*all filthiness*” of the body, to be found in the holiness of the spirit, in the fear of God by the name of Jesus Christ; For he who separates himself from iniquities, but not in Christ, will not be pure and righteous in Him.

+ Here we find a teaching to seek the unutterable gifts of God in Christ Jesus, and in a greater fear to cleanse ourselves from all the filthiness of the body and the soul.

(St. Basil the Great)

+ In the compassion of His divine love, God presented to us purifying commandments; that, if we wish, we can, by keeping His commandments be purified, not only from sins, but from desires as well. As the sin is something, and the desire is something else; the desires are like anger, boasting, love of pleasures, hatred, filthiness, etc.; Whereas sins are the practical execution of these desires; namely, that man, by his body, puts into action the works provoked by his desires. Man could have desires; yet he probably does not bring them into effect.

The law (in the Old Covenant) had the goal of teaching us to refrain from doing what we do not wish for ourselves; namely from the practical execution of evil. But now (in the New Covenant), we are sought to drive away the desire itself which motivates us toward evil; to drive away hatred, ego, love of dignity, etc.

- + I wish we can get rid of the filthiness of sin, so as to reveal the early beauty of virtue. I wish we get purified to reveal the image of God in us. That is what God desires from us: to be blameless

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(St. Dorotheos)

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the foundation of the holy life; As the Holy God works in those who fear Him, who hope for His mercy.

The believer is committed to flee from everything that would defile his body, whether through the eye, the ear, the hand, or the belly; through greed, adultery, or slothfulness; And also from everything that would defile the soul; through the enjoyment of the commendation of others, anger, etc. That is on the negative aspect; And on the positive aspect, to have the enjoyment of the fear of God as children who are keen on honoring the feelings of their holy Father. By that, the believer would enjoy having the mind of Christ, and walk along the way of holiness, to enjoy its perfection.

- + In case someone wishes to gain the love of God, he should have the fear of God; For fear produces weeping, which in turn produces strength. And once all that are consummate in the soul, it starts to have fruition in everything. And once God sees those good fruition in the soul, He would smell them as sweet fragrance of incense, would rejoice in it together with His angels, would satisfy it with joy, and would keep it in all its ways, until it reaches the place of its comfort without any harm.

And when the devil sees the Great Mighty Guard covering the soul with His protection, he would not dare to approach it. Therefore, acquire this strength to make the demons tremble before you, that your affairs would be easy, and that you would enjoy the good taste of the divine work; as the love of God is sweeter than honey.

Many monks and nuns in monasteries have not tasted this divine sweetness, nor acquired that divine strength; although they think that they have acquired them, despite their lack of strife. He who strives for its sake, will certainly acquire it through the divine mercies; for God does not look at the outer appearances.

He who wishes to have the light and the strength of God, is committed to despise the honors and the uncleanness of this world, to hate all the things in this world and the pleasure of the flesh, to purify his heart of all the bad thoughts, and to present to God fasting and tears, day and night, in unceasing pure prayers; Then God would grant him that strength in abundance.

Strive, therefore to gain this strength, to do all your works with easiness, to have great daring before God, who will certainly grant you what you ask for.

(St. Abba Anthony)

Love is the seed of non-desire; which, in turn is the flower of the working life, that does its role in keeping the commandments.

The fear of God is the guard on practicing the commandments; and is a fruit of the sound faith.

The dogma (the mere theoretical mental faith) is the inner goodness of the soul; which may be found, even in those who do not believe in God (in a practical way).

(St. (Mar) Oghris)

- + St. John says: "*Perfect love casts out fear*" (1 John 4: 18); And the blessed David exhorts the Lord's saints to fear Him.

Here, two kinds of fear are revealed: The first kind is primitive, and the second is perfect.

The first kind concerns the beginners; while the second concerns the perfect saints, who have reached the stature of the perfect love.

He who obeys the will of God out of fear of punishment, his fear would be of the first primitive kind; Whereas he who obeys the will of God, out of his love for God, to please Him; has reached with this love to the perfect kind of fear; through which he would fear lest he would lose that gladness he is enjoying of his presence with God; That would be the perfect fear, born of love, that casts away the primitive kind of fear.

(St. Dorotheos)

2- LET US DIE AND LIVE TOGETHER WITH YOU:

"Make room for us in your hearts. We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have exploited no one" (2)

He asks them to love him as he loves them; and to receive him as an apostle; having confirmed to them that he is sent by God; and that he is faithful in his apostolic work. He does not mean to ask them to receive him and his co-workers as persons, but to receive the gospel they preach; As the Corinthians had no reason to reject the ministers.

Being particulate to offend no one, he said to the priests in the church of Ephesus: “*I have coveted no one’s silver or gold or apparel*”

(Ephesians 20: 33). And here he says: “*We have wronged no one*”, namely, we have not practiced anything against justice; “*corrupted no one*”, with false or harmful teaching; and, “*exploited no one*”, namely, never coveted anything belonging to anyone, nor sought a temporal thing.

- + That is the feature of the true minister; Let us listen to what the prophet Samuel says to his people: “*Here I am, witness against me before the Lord, and before His anointed; Whose ox have I taken, or whose donkey have I taken, or whom have I defrauded? Whom have I oppressed? or from whose hand have I received any bribe with which to blind my eye? I will restore it to you*” (1 Samuel 12: 3).

It is as though, Paul says to them: Look what the false teachers have done to you; they oppressed you, corrupted your mind, and deceived you!

“*Make room for us in your hearts*”; namely, receive us, love us. Who has cast us away from your hearts?

(St. John Chrysostom)

“*I do not say this to condemn, for I have said before that you are in our hearts, to die together and to live together*” (3)

He did not write to criticize or to condemn them, but to open their eyes to discern between the true and faithful apostles and ministers, on the one hand, and the false teachers on the other hand; As the later ones could not say that the people are in their hearts, to die together and to live together. The apostle Paul does not only covet anything belonging to anyone, but finds his pleasure to have all enter into his heart, to

find in it the exalted love; to encounter his Christ who partakes of the suffering of men, to let them have fellowship in the gladness of His heavens. In the apostle's heart there is a practical demonstration of the fellowship of Christ with His believers, and that of the believers with their Christ. He is the ambassador of Christ, walking by His Spirit.

- + He shows great compassion, even when treated with despite ... He chooses to live and to die together with them ... In case of danger he is ready to endure anything ... Life or death do not mean much to him ... For their sake he would prefer one over the other.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + He who is to be ordained for priesthood is committed to be like the prophet Moses ... Who, when horrible death was poured over some rebels, hastened to place himself in between death and life to let no one of his people perish.
- + He who has the spirit and mind of priesthood, being a good shepherd, he, with a pious spirit, would readily approach death for the sake of the flock of the Lord. By that he would be like Moses, in breaking the sting of death, confronting its power, and nullifying it to a great extent.
Love would be the support that justifies him, when he would rather die for the sake of his opponents.

(St. Ambrose)

- + O you, intercessor of the divine sacraments, Talk love ...
He, who teaches and does not love, should keep quiet; as his labor to present much talk would be in vain. A successful teacher who wishes to gain his listeners, should love abundantly, and talk a little to his disciples.

- + A priest approaching the sanctuary should be clothed with abundant love; as with this attire he can approach God.

(St. Jacob El-Serougy)

3- COMFORTING NEWS AMID THE TRIBULATIONS:

“Great is my boldness of speech toward you, great is my boasting on your behalf. I am filled with comfort.

I am exceedingly joyful in all our tribulation” (4)

On his side, his love for them is without limits, Together with them he is ready to live and to die. On their side, their love for him has provided him with great confidence and boldness to write with complete frankness. He cherishes their love for him, and boasts it. Their love filled his heart with comfort amid his tribulations and sufferings; he became exceedingly joyful. He is like a father who forgets all his labor once he feels his children’s love for him, and sees them open up their hearts to him. The expression *“I am exceedingly joyful”*, in Greek (Huperperisseumai) is a verb rarely used, and was never used in the whole New Testament except this once.

The apostle Paul was so convinced that the Corinthians responded well to his rebuke in his first epistle; to be encouraged to do it again. Their response provided him with complete comfort despite all the tribulations and afflictions that were dwelling upon him, for the sake of their salvation. That response of the people by repentance gave the apostle several blessings, amongst which are the following:

- A confidence that his people are the people chosen by God.
- A boasting and cherishing of the work of God in them

- A comfort that filled every void in him.
- A great joy that afflictions could destroy.

The people's repentance is a support for the priest, which he cherishes, have comfort, and joy for the grace of God working in them through him. It is the sign of their love for God and His faithful ministers. Honoring their priest is greatly shown through their repentance, that makes his heart exult and have comfort by the salvation of his brethren in the Lord.

St. John Chrysostom often demanded from his congregation to express their love for him, not through cheers and applause, but by daily repentance and obedience of the divine commandment.

+ I do not need applause or cheers. I need only one thing, to which I wish you would listen attentively and with reason: Do what I say! That

would be your commendation for me, and your thanksgiving!

We are not in a theater here, and you do not see before you actors or entertainers to applaud; This is a spiritual school, in which we show our obedience by our works.

(St. John Chrysostom)

“For indeed , when we came to Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were in trouble on every side. Outside were conflicts, inside were fears” (5)

The apostle Paul who was always very cheerful, was going through some kind of depression, because of the persecutions of the Jews and the Gentiles, of the false teachers, on the outer side, and of his fear for the people inside. He left Ephesus and went to Troas for some time, then came to Macedonia where he wrote this epistle. He

was anticipating the return of Titus, to tell him about the effect of his first epistle; and got depressed because of his delay.

+ The apostle Paul had to fight two wars: an outer war against enemies, and inner ones within his own congregation. He feared the probable diversion of believers to harmful things.

(Theodoret, Bishop of Cyrus)

+ “*We were in trouble on every side*” wars on the outside against the unbelievers, and fears on the inside for the weak among the believers, lest they would probably be lost. That was not confined to the Corinthians alone, but extended to other places as well.

(St. John Chrysostom)

“Nevertheless, God who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus” (6)

The apostle Paul refers the inner comforts of his heart, first to God who comforts the downcast, then because the arrival of Titus, who provided him with a joyful report of the effect of his first epistle on the church in Corinth. His encounter with Titus rejoiced his heart, as Paul greatly cherished friendship, especially among those working on the account of the kingdom of heaven on earth. He greatly cherished Titus like his own son, and a fellow in faith (Titus 1: 1). Yet the news he brought to him were a comfort much greater than the personal friendship. What brought gladness to the apostle’s heart is their repentance and their sorrow which brings forth joy in the Lord. As according to the wise Solomon: “*He who rebukes a man will find more favor afterward than he who flatters with the tongue*” (Proverbs 28: 32).

But before referring his comfort to his friendship with Titus, or to the good news from Corinth, he referred it to God, who comforts the downcast, as the Source of every comfort and every goodness.

Some believe that the arrival of Titus has brought forth comfort to Paul, For a suffering person finds comfort when someone faithful approaches him. And St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa believes that by using the term “*comfort*” her, the apostle refers to God’s power to heal.

“And not only his coming, but also by the consolation with which he was comforted in you, when he told us of your earnest desire, your mourning your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced even more” (7)

The secret of his comfort are:

- * The coming of Titus, as a son, a friend, and a faithful co-worker with him.
- * That he came with divine comforts, because of the positive situation of the Corinthians,
- * That Titus revealed to him their longing to see his person, and to correct their behavioral, dogmatic, and clerical faults.
- * That he revealed to him their mourning because of what they have done before.
- * That he revealed to him their zeal to support the apostle in his preaching and ministry.

4- THE SORROW OF REPENTANCE AND THE SORROW OF THE WORLD:

“For even if I made you sorry with my letter, I do not regret it, though I did regret it. For I perceive that the same epistle made you sorry, though only for a while” (8)

The apostle Paul, after writing his first epistle, hesitated to write again with the same firmness. It is as though he wished to say to them: You committed me write to you in that way, despite my strong intention to be more compassionate and loving. And although he regretted after writing it, yet he regretted no more, but even rejoiced to see the abundant and increasing fruition it produced. That is what he means by saying: *“I do not regret it, though I did regret it”*.

But now, the time is not for sorrow, but for mutual joy. I have regretted because I wrote to you with such firmness, and you became sorry for what you have done. Now, let us be comforted and joyful together: You became sorry, only for a while, and now, you and I will forever have joy by the salvation of the Lord and His work in you.

“Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, so that you were not harmed in any way by us” (9)

Your sorrow for repentance led to a great change in your mind and behavior. While the sorrow of the world destroys the soul, corrupts peace, and weakens the body, Your sorrow, on the other hand, is the sorrow of repentance, that renewed your soul. brought joy to all. and caused harm to no one through us.

- + Here the apostle Paul teaches us that this kind of sorrow, whose goal is God and not the world, is the most valuable. He says that they were right to feel sorry, as it led to their repentance to God. Recall those, in the Old Covenant, who, because they were sorrowful amid their intense labor, they gained grace; whereas those who found joy in pleasures, deserved punishment; The Hebrews who groaned because of their bondage in Egypt (Exodus 2: 23), and ate the bread of grief and fear, gained the grace of the righteous and enjoyed the spiritual goodness.

(St. Ambrose)

“For godly sorrow produces repentance to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death” (10)

The apostle discerns between two kinds of sorrow:

- (1) Sorrow according to the will of God; caused by breaking the divine commandment. This holy sorrow is for the sake of the enjoyment of the joy of salvation. A repentant man would not have rest until he finds a place for himself in the divine bosom through the salvation work of Christ; so that his heart would be lifted up to heaven.
- (2) Sorrow of the world, set upon the loss of some of the material or the mental things of the world; whether temporal possessions or rights or earthly honor. This kind of sorrow destroys the soul, and brings forth emaciation of the body, together with ailments, and leads to death and temporal and eternal perdition.

Here the apostle presents a magnificent evangelic concept of the sorrow according to the will of God, that it leads to repentance, namely to a return to the bosom of God, and not to despair; produces a continuous reform and renewal, and is accompanied by the peace of God and an inner joy. Man would never regret or grieve on practicing this holy sorrow.

- + He says that there are more than one kind of sorrow: one is the sorrow of the world, and the other is the sorrow according to the will of God. The former produces death, while the latter produces repentance for salvation. Once the soul mourns on its wicked life, being aware of its evil results; such painful feeling is referred to the blessed kind of sorrow.
- + Nothing brings the heart back to wisdom like sorrow; and nothing is sweeter than the pious sorrow.

(St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa)

- + He who grieves according to the will of God, would be grieving in repentance on his sins, and on his evil deeds, to produce justice.
- + Listening to the prayer of someone, I heard him say: 'O God, have mercy on me; Heal my soul, for I have sinned against You'; He mourns his sins. I see the field, and anticipate the fruition ... Digging in a good place is not without benefit, it will have its produce. It is indeed the time for fruitful sorrow, It is the time to grieve on the condition of our death, on the multitude of temptations, on the secret and fast attacks of the wicked, on the conflict between the desires, and on the struggle between wishes, that perpetually rebel against the good thinking. We therefore, should grieve and feel depressed on such conditions.

(St. Augustine)

Amid the rejoice of the resurrection of the suffering crucified Christ, St. Augustine talks to us about that good sorrow, which he sees as a fruitful field, which will produce a heavenly gladness.

- + Any way, I marvel how God, who from the beginning, brought forth on humanity the suffering produced by sin; how He would, by a decree, retract, and bring to voidance that decision. Now listen: Sin produces pain, and through that pain sin is brought to voidance. Listen carefully: God threatens the woman, and brings on her punishment for her disobedience, and says to her: "*I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children*" (Genesis 3: 16); by which he reveals that pain is the crop of sin. Then, He generously turns this punishment itself to salvation. ... Sin brings forth pain, and pain destroys sin.... The way a tree brings forth a worm that would itself destroy the tree that brought it

forth. The same way, that pain brought forth by sin, would kill the sin, through repentance.

Pain is good for those who faithfully repent. Sorrow that follows sin is convenient for those who sin.

Let us, therefore, grieve on the sin, and not on the punishment. Make peace with the judge before standing for trial before him, through the intercession of friends or any other way. The same way concerning God. You cannot convince the divine Judge at the time of judgment, but you should do that beforehand.

- + Repentance is a fire that consumes every human weakness; It takes away slothfulness, laziness, the weight of the body, and provides the soul with wings by which to fly to heaven; And on such a high summit, it would recognize the vanity of this present life.

He who does not ascend to the vantage post, would not be able to see a sound picture of the earth and its contents; as there are many things that hinder the range of vision, deafen the ears, and confuse the tongue; That is why it is befitting of man to take himself away from this chaos, and enter into a seclusion, to find the deep peace, the tranquility, together with the enlightenment.

When the ears concentrate on the love of God, and hears nothing but His words, as a sweet spiritual symphony, the soul would become a captive of God, and would even despise food and sleep.

The noise of the world and the material interests would indeed slide on the soul, but would not enter into it; And by so rising up, it would care no more for the violence of the earthly storms.

And as the inhabitants of the mountains hear no more the noise of the city below, and see no more of what go on in it; but count them like some vague murmur; it is the same for those who forsake the world by their own free will, and set forth flying up to the heights of philosophy (wisdom), They would no more realize the things of the world, for their senses are concentrated toward heaven.

Let us seek, not just the seclusion of the wilderness, but that of the inner desire; Let us hide up on the highest summit of the soul, where nothing earthly exist.

The repentance is as strong as a blast of air that scatters the dust, and wipes away the lusts like smoke.

(St. John Chrysostom)

“See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done. At every point you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter” (11)

The apostle reveals the fruits of that holy sorrow; which are:

- (1) An **earnestness**, namely, the practical care for the souls of others, to make them enjoy the holy life in the Lord. Diligence to enjoy the blessings of the obedience to the divine commandment, and to get rid of every corruption that came because of sin.

+ Virtue is divided into two things: forsaking evil, and doing good. Withdrawing from evil is not enough to reach the virtue; but it is just the start of the way leading to it. Then there would be a need for greater activity.

+ In case you uprooted the thorns and thistles and left the field idle and unused, It will become filled again with useless weeds. There is therefore a vehement need to occupy the field, and to plant the good seeds and useful plants.

Let us then drive away the wrath, and do compassion.

Let us uproot every bitterness, and hold fast to love.

Let us put away the hatred and the envy, and plant tolerance instead.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- (2) **Clearing oneself and indignation;** meaning rejecting the response to any sin that crawled into the congregation. Repentance would bring forth a holy uprising against corruption.

+ Regret your iniquity as long as it is still in the heart, before it turns into deed.. And even if the iniquity gets out of the brain, and turns into action, do not despair, Clear your conscience, for as long as the dead body is inside the house. it is not standing aright, but is carried on the shoulders.

(St. Augustine)

- (3) **A fear for the fatherly divine feelings:** The repentant wishes to be committed to keep a holy relationships of love with God, and not to wound them by any apparent or hidden sin. And it may also mean here the fear for bringing grief to the heart of the apostle who seeks their salvation.

- + It is befitting of you to stay on this cross all your life long; for there is no way to take it away in this life. The prophet Davis says: “ O God, Nail Your fear in my flesh”.

The body has carnal desires; the nails are the commandments, and the fear of God is what raises you on the cross, and what makes an accepted sacrifice to Him.

Live perpetually here. If you wish not to plunge in the mire of the earth, do not descend from the cross.

(St. Augustine)

- (4) **A longing to encounter God**, and to enjoy fellowship with Him, and longing to see the apostle Paul despite his firmness in his first epistle.

- + Come along to Christ, He is your goal, and there is no other way but to Him. Let your Savior be a goal you long to reach; you who are not called to earth, but to heaven; You are not called for an earthly happiness, but for a heavenly one ... for an eternal life together with the angels.

Let your Redeemer be your ultimate Goal , He is your hope, and your strength.

Run after Him to find rest, Christ came for you to follow Him

Run now, to rejoice after that in your ultimate home.

(St. Augustine)

- (5) **A zeal for the sanctity of the church**, and the preaching work done by the apostle.

- (6) An **indignation on the devil**, or on the sin and not on the sinner.

By their behavior, the Corinthians showed that they are innocent (hagnous), not only that they bear no spirit of rebellion, disobedience, and opposition, or that they are not persisting upon their faults and disgraceful behavior; but in that they are blameless concerning their endeavor to take away the corruption and faults. That does not imply that they are completely faultless, but that they are serious to reform, to seek the salvation of their souls, and to please God.

A repentant fears to fall again into sin, but he who is aware of how he got distorted by sin, longs to reform himself, and has zeal to reach perfection in good works.

+ He, who incites good sorrow in us, is doing us good.

(St. Basil the Great)

+ He tells them that the growth in zeal and the prompt reform are the work of those who have fear; And lest he may seem as though glorifying himself, he hastens to make the situation lighter by saying: Yes, what longing have I toward you! Yes, what zeal! For the sake of God. Yes, what indignation in defending the statutes of God!

(St. John Chrysostom)

5- His LOVE FOR THEM IS THE GOAL OF HIS WRITING:

"Therefore, although I wrote to you, it was not on account of the one who did the wrong nor on account of the one who was wronged, but rather that before God you could see for yourselves how devoted to us you are" (12)

The apostle Paul made it very clear that forgiveness should be given to those who have sinned, not only for their sake, but for that of the church; For when one sins he would cause trouble to many.

He also showed his goal of sending his first epistle concerning the man who sinned with His father's wife, that he wrote not to have that man punished, nor to have the wronged father appeased, but what preoccupied his mind was the sanctity of the church as a whole. He is not a judge to condemn this or that, but the apostle who cares for the salvation of everyone, and for the sanctity of the church as a whole.

6- A MUTUAL COMFORTS AND REJOICING:

“Therefore we have been comforted in your comfort. And we rejoiced exceedingly more for the joy of Titus, because his spirit has been refreshed by you all” (13)

In this epistle, the apostle Paul often revealed the fellowship of love and of rejoicing, as well as of sorrow. If they are comforted by repentance, he is comforted in their comfort; And if sorrow according to the will of God led them to rejoice, he exceedingly rejoiced for the joy of Titus. The secret of Titus' joy is that his spirit has been refreshed by the sanctity and the salvation of the church.

“For if in anything I have boasted in him about you, I am not ashamed. But as we spoke all things to you in truth, even though our boasting to Titus are found true” (14)

The apostle was not ashamed of cherishing the Corinthians, and of boasting of them before his disciple Titus. That boasting was not based upon human compliments, nor as a sort of flattery, but upon evangelic truth, namely based upon his care for the salvation of their souls and their spiritual growth.

“And his affections for you is all the greater, as he remembers the obedience of you all, how with fear and trembling you received him” (15)

“His affections for you is all the greater” is an expression that reveals his great joy, whose secret is his own obedience to the apostle Paul in the Lord, and his increasing love for them, as a reaction to their love for the apostle Paul. That, beside their reception of him in great reverence, as having authority from the Lord.

The apostle Paul says that Titus’ mind and emotion cared very much for them, having noticed their progress; as the mind of the saint cares for everything good.

“Therefore I rejoice that I have confidence in you in everything” (16)

It is clear that the apostle Paul is convinced of the truth of their repentance. Titus’ rejoicing on them reflected on the apostle himself, who rejoiced in his turn, and his soul was at peace, trusting that no vain teachings of the world could shake their faith.

+ It is not the multitude of sins that bring forth despair, but it is the corrupt intention that would do that.

Falling in itself is not as serious as staying in the state of falling.

The wound in itself is not deadly, as much as the slothfulness of the wounded to treat the wound.

I do not say this, so that you would be slothful, but rather not to despair.

It is as well a magnificent encouragement for the strife on the way of repentance and virtue without despair. Starting to reform your

ways, Even though you may disobey your law once, twice, thrice, and even twenty times; Do not despair, but stand upright again,

Resume your activity, You will certainly become conquerors!

(St. John Chrysostom)

AN INSPIRATION FROM 2 CORINTHIANS 7

CARRY ME BY LOVE TO YOURSELF, THAT BY LOVE, I WOULD CARRY MY BRETHREN

- + Your divine promises glitter before my eyes.
I wonder when will they be all realized?
When shall I encounter You, to carry me forth to Your secret place?
There, I would realize the splendor of Your holiness.
Say a word; and every defilement would flee from my soul, as well as from my
body.
Say a word, And I, together with my brethren would enjoy the holy life.
Say a word, and we all would live in You, O Holy One.

- + Nail Your fear in my flesh, that I would covet sanctity.
It would bring me over to Your love, to reach Your bosoms,
Your fear is the way to love.
Your fear is the way of holiness.

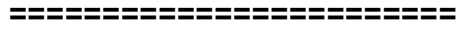
- + Grant me to minister to my brethren
I covet nothing but to carry them over to Your throne, by Your Holy Spirit.
I would carry them by love, to live and to die together with them.
I will put on the attire of love, the hidden attire of priesthood
By them I would be able to enter into the Holy of holiness.
And without them I cannot encounter You.

- + Grant them to love me.
Let them honor me by their repentance to You, and their attachment to You.
When I see them perpetually growing in Your bosom,
My soul is filled with trust and a confirmation of their salvation.
I would boast Your work in their life.
The comforts of the Spirit would pour on me.
I would rejoice in the truth;
And even death would not be able to destroy my joy in them.

- + Grant me to sanctify the sorrow of their repentance,
When they grieve for their sins, I grieve together with them.
I am a partner with them in weakness.
When they rejoice in the gladness of their salvation;
I would partake of their gladness, and be comforted.
Your Holy Spirit works in them, as well as in me.

- + Let the fruitful sorrow of repentance be in me and in them.
Let me stretch my hand and pluck from the tree of repentance, fruits so sweet
Diligently pluck to enjoy Your righteousness.
That my heart would flare against corruption,
Let me acquire Your fear that bears me into Your divine love.
Let my longing increase to have fellowship with You.
And my longing to see You.
Let me bear Your zeal toward Your sanctuaries.
Finally, let me acquire the weapons of righteousness, to destroy the devil my
serious enemy.
These are the fruits of my joyful sorrow
That is the work of Your Spirit in me and in all Your people.
Who grants us a heavenly comfort, and, in turn, He would find comfort in us.
Let me, together with all your people, pluck the fruit of repentance.

Let us walk together in the procession of Your conquest.



DIVISION 4

MINISTERING TO THE SAINTS

(Chapters 8 & 9)

Together with caring for his own spiritual life, and those of others, the minister would not disregard ministering to the saints, not as mere human giving, but as spiritual work.

1- The apostle asks them to give themselves before they give their money (8: 1-8);

“They gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God” (8: 5).

2- It is the fruit of the work of Christ, who practically taught us to give: *“Though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, that you*

through His poverty might become rich” (8: 9). It became a race among them, who would become rich, enjoying the optional poverty of Christ.

3- Giving in abundance: *“For God loves a cheerful giver” (9: 7).*

CHAPTER 8

GENEROSITY IN GIVING

Having talked in the previous chapter about the mutual comforts, and his great joy for the repentance of the Corinthians; the apostle Paul talks in the present chapter about the practical love toward the poor saints in Jerusalem who suffered from persecution, famine, and wars. And he sought from the church in Corinth to receive his disciple Titus and his two companions.

As an apostle to the Gentiles he did not disregard the needs of the Christians of Jewish origin, nor counted the ministry in Jerusalem as something out of his concern. But as a loving father for all mankind, like His Lord, felt the commitment to provoke the Christians of a Gentile Origin to contribute abundantly to cover the needs of the church in Jerusalem.

In the present chapter, the apostle demonstrates his great care for the poor wherever they are, and not just those in the churches which he ministers. He also referred to the necessity of choosing certain trustworthy persons, faithful before God and people, to deliver their gift to Jerusalem. He also asked them to bind the giving of money to that of the heart, and to bind the generosity in giving to wisdom and moderation.

1- The generosity of the churches of Macedonia 1 - 6

2- A call for giving 7 - 15

1- THE GENEROSITY OF THE CHURCHES OF MACEDONIAH:

“Moreover brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia” (1)

The apostle took the chance of that the churches of Macedonia -- those of Philippi, Thessalonica, Perea, and others in the province of Macedonia – have generously given, to provoke the Corinthians, and the Christians of Achaia to follow suit. The generosity of those churches did not come out of an atmosphere of competition, nor for the sake of appearance, or out of a mere human emotion, but was a fruit of the grace of God that works in the heart, not only to give money, but also to give oneself; It is a giving through the divine love poured upon the soul.

Every giving, and every good virtue is a gift or grace from God. It is the grace of God that turns our life to become constructive and of benefit for the life of others.

About the Corinthians, the apostle Paul says that they receive God’s grace, and have received the word of faith with piety.

+ Giving is a business, whose headquarter is in heaven, and its owner is not a man but God Himself.

(St. John Chrysostom)

+ By the grace of God, Paul means every good work. And by so saying he does not exempt the role of the free will. Yet the lesson here is
that every good work becomes possible by the help of God.

(Theodoret, Bishop of Cyrus)

Working in the heart, the divine grace opens up the believer's heart in love for his brethren, to become like God.

+ There is nothing that makes us close to God, and in His image, like the good work.

+ Giving alms is a deed, so powerful and of so much authority, that it could loosen the chains and the shackles, scatter the darkness, quenches the heat of the fire of hell, and qualify its doer to liken God, who says: "*Be merciful, just as your father also is merciful*".(Luke 6: 36).

+ Being merciful toward others is a virtue that makes glad the heart of God; ... It is an exalted feature of the good souls, that makes them more proud and noble; ... It is a feature of God.

(St. John Chrysostom)

Two works of mercy make man free: 'Forgive to be forgiven'; and 'Give to be given'.

+ What does the poor beg from you? Bread. And what do you beg from God?: Christ who says: "*I am the bread coming down from heaven*" (John 8: 35).

+ In case you wish for your prayers to fly up to God, Provide it with two wings: fasting and almsgiving.

(St. Augustine)

"for during a severe ordeal of affliction, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a

wealth of generosity on their part” (2)

Although the Christians in Macedonia, themselves, were poor, persecuted, and suffering a great deal of affliction, yet they were extremely rich in joy and gladness, having found a chance to give to brethren going through more affliction, poverty, and persecution.

Through the grace of God, the poor churches that go through affliction feel the commitment to support the churches that suffer more poverty and affliction. In other words, no Christian is exempted from giving, and groaning together with those who go through more labor and need.

Liberality in giving provides an abundance of inner joy; By giving from what he has, man opens up his heart to receive generous gifts from heaven.

Despite the fact that the Macedonians were lacking material resources, their souls were rich, and were ministering the saints with pure conscience, in an attempt to please God and not men.

+ That is the highest praise: that in sorrow one stays in peace; and in the depth of poverty, he gives generously of what he has.

(Theodoret, Bishop of Cyrus)

+ He who has a merciful soul has a treasure of blessings; being a fountain for the needs of his brethren, and a source of enjoyment of all the rewards set by God.

+ Mercy would lift man up to a high altitude, and would provide him with a great daring with God.

(St. John Chrysostom)

+ Being sorrowful while giving, you lose both the gift and the worthiness, For God loves a cheerful giver.

(St. Augustine)

“For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing” (3)

In their liberality they did not set a limit to their giving, like giving the tithes or a little more; but they were willing to give everything they could; And even surpassing this principle, they gave themselves to God by their whole heart, and gave from their own needs more and more beyond their ability, following the example of the poor widow who threw in the treasury of the temple two mites, all what she had, her whole livelihood (see Mark 12: 41-44).

“implored us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints” (4)

The apostle, in his compassionate fatherhood, despite the need of the church in Jerusalem, rejected that gift, on account of that it was beyond the ability of the Corinthians. Yet his rejection inflamed their hearts to persist on their offer, and to implore him with urgency to receive their gift, counting it a grace they gain from God, and a fellowship in the needs of the saints. Their persistence in complete confidence in faith, and with such a pure mind, looking forward to the heavenly rewards, made the apostle finally give his consent.

“The fellowship of ministering to the saints”. By giving we proclaim our working fellowship in the holy body of Christ. What we offer to the needy is the cover for the head that cares for all the members of his holy body.

+ As much as man is one of the “little brethren”, Christ would come to you through him; For he who gives a great man would do it with boasting; Whereas he who gives a poor man, would do that with purity for the sake of Christ.

(St. John Chrysostom)

“And this they did, not as we had hoped, but first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God” (5)

The apostle did not expect such an amazing kind of giving by the Corinthians; having not only given beyond their ability, but they gave themselves to the lord, to the apostle, and to those with him according to the will of God. They first gave themselves to the Lord, and when they saw that it would be according to His will to give it to His ministers, they realized this divine will to the account of the glory of God.

A gift would not be received unless it is given first to the Lord, according to His will, and to the glory of His holy name; presenting oneself or his heart before his possessions.

The words: *“Not as we had hoped”*, refer, not only to the wish of the Macedonians to give, but to the volume of the gift as well.

(Theodoret, Bishop of Cyrus)

“So we urged Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also complete this grace on you as well” (6)

Titus had begun collecting for the saints of Jerusalem during his first visit to Corinth; when the church there received him with great honor; and all felt his great love for them. Now the apostle Paul sends him to consummate this mission of giving.

- + He does well by calling the giving “grace” ... As it is a great goodness and a gift from God Feeding Christ when he is hungry is far greater than raising the dead in His name ... By making miracles, you become indebted to Him; While by giving, you make God indebted to you.

(St. John Chrysostom)

2- A CALL TO GIVING:

“But as you abound in everything – in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all diligence, and in your love for us – see that you abound in this grace also” (7)

The apostle encourages them for having such abundance of talents and progress, and seeks from them to add to them the grace of giving.

He showed the abundance of those gifts, starting by faith, and ends by their love for the apostles and the ministers; as though he says that they have got the possibilities of enjoying this grace of giving, as long as they have such an abundance in faith, and in love. As faith is the source of graces, especially if combined with knowledge and diligence. Their church has treasures of the live testimony, the true knowledge of the will of God, and the persistence on growth in the kingdom of God. What then do they lack? They are actually qualified for giving as is befitting. Being rich in faith and love, together with the true spiritual knowledge, they are qualified for the inheritance of the kingdom; which should motivate them to give to those persecuted for the sake of the kingdom, and for the needy.

“I do not say this as a command, but I am testing the genuineness of your love against the earnestness of others” (8)

He did not intend to give it as an order, nor to put certain limits to their giving, to give the opportunity to each to show his inner love, which exalts above any committing law. Their law in giving should be their pure love, their wide hearts, their true knowledge of the will of God, and their own free will. As to the practical example before them, it is the zeal and diligence of the others (the churches of Macedonia); and above all, the Lord Christ Himself, saying:

“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet, for your sakes, He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich” (9)

The Creator of all, for our sake, *“emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave,... humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death”* (Philippians 2: 8); so that by such an optional poverty, we would enjoy His love, become rich by His grace, and have the right for a fellowship with Him in the eternal inheritance.

- + The Lord became poor to give comfort to the poor; he became poor with men, so that no one would despair of salvation because of his poverty.

(St. Jerome)

- + If you attempt to liken God within the possibility of your nature, You will certainly become clothed in that blessed form.

(St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa)

- + Who, among men, can claim to know all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, hidden in Christ, and concealed by the poverty of His body? Though He is rich, He became poor for our sake; that, by His poverty, we might become rich. When He clothed Himself by our mortality, He put death to death. He appeared in poverty,

yet he promised riches to us, which he postponed for a little while; He did not lose the riches that He has forsaken by His own free will.

(St. Augustine)

- + Nothing can provoke the great wise soul to consummate the good works like knowing that by that it would liken God. There is no greater encouragement? That Paul personally knows when he exhorts them to humility.

(St. John Chrysostom)

“And in this I give my advice: It is appropriate for you who began last year, not only to do something, but even to desire to do something” (10)

He does not speak as though giving a command, but giving an advice, that as you have begun this work a year ago, it would be befitting of you to consummate it with willingness.

By saying “*to desire*” (thelein); he means to exhort them to consummate the good work with willingness or with pleasure. Their work is like a bud that started to blossom, but it needs special care so as not to die.

“Now finish doing it, so that your eagerness may be matched by completing it according to your means” (11)

The apostle does not disregard their true will to work; but says that it would be befitting of everyone to do as much as possible. The will needs serious work, without which, what is good in it would be killed. And work without serious will would take away the joy and gladness from the soul.

“For if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has – not according to what one does not have” (12)

If the will is there and active, it would be acceptable to God if translated to serious work as much possible for the believer; according to what he has, and not to give of what he does not possess; like robbing the right of his parents on him, or that of his children and wife, under the pretence of giving.

“I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you” (13)

Man has to be wise in his giving; so that love would be bound to wisdom.

“But it is a question of a fair balance between your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need” (14)

Man should wisely give of his abundance to others; and accept from others of their abundance to fulfill his needs; So that there would be a kind of balance and equality. The divine providence allowed for the existence of inequality among men; to open the door for practicing love by mutual giving between them.

+ How could be giving spiritual things for the sake of material thing be called ‘balance’ or ‘equality’? It would only be as such, either because of abundance and need; Or he so says concerning the present life? That is why, after saying “balance”, he hastened to say “present abundance” (namely in the present life). He so says to counter the haughty thoughts of the rich; and to show that after our departure from here, the spiritual things will have a far greater value. Here, we may

enjoy equality, but there, there will be a greater discernment and exaltation, when the righteous will shine with a more splendor than the sun.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + He who gives temporal help to those with spiritual talents, are considered as partners in these talents. As those with spiritual talents are but a few compared to those with an abundance of temporal things; Yet, by this those who have an abundance of possessions would have the opportunity to share in the virtues of the needy, through providing of their abundance to the saintly poor.

(Pope Gregory the Great)

“As it is written: ‘He who had gathered much had nothing left over, and he who gathered little had no lack’ (15)

Here he refers to what came in the book of Exodus (16-18), when the children of Israel gathered the Manna in the early morning hours before the sun gets warm. Those who gathered too much, what was left over got corrupted; And those who gathered less have eaten to fulfillment, to need no more. Such would be our giving or taking; By giving we do not become in need, and by taking we shall have no leftovers; because we shall eventually leave everything when we depart from this world.

3- RECOMMENDING TITUS AND HIS TWO COMPANIONS:

“But thanks be to God who puts the same earnest care for you in the heart of Titus” (16)

What preoccupies the heart of Paul, preoccupies the heart of Titus his disciple, who set forth, of his own accord to Corinth to provoke them to

give. Here, the apostle presents a sacrifice of thanksgiving to God who has put in the heart of Titus what He did in his own heart toward them.

“For not only he accepted the exhortation, but being more diligent, he went to you of his own accord” (17)

The apostle was not offended because Titus moved of his own accord to work, but, on the contrary, he rejoiced in him, and thanked God who worked in the heart of his disciple as he did in his own heart. The apostle exhorted Titus to go to them, to discover that he has put in his heart to do that before being asked.

“And we have sent with him the brother whose praise is in the gospel throughout all the churches” (18)

Some believe that that brother whom the apostle asked to accompany Titus was Luke the preacher, who was well known by his ministry, and was commended in several churches. Whereas some others believe that he was Silas, or Barnabas, or Mark, or Apollos. Anyway that brother was well known to the church in Corinth as a co-worker with the apostle Paul, who says:

“And not only that, but who was also chosen by the churches to travel with us with this gift which is administered by us to the glory of the Lord Himself and to show your good will” (19)

He is a trustworthy minister who works to the account of the kingdom of heaven, and to the growth of the church in Corinth. By saying: *“chosen by the churches to travel with us”*, reveals that the apostle Paul appreciated the view of the congregation even in choosing

those who accompanied him in his preaching trips.

- + It so seems to me that he is referring to Barnabas. And by saying: “*with this gift which is administered by us*”, he means the proclamation of the word and preaching the gospel, or in the matters concerning the money; or rather to both of them.

(St. John Chrysostom)

“We intend that no one should blame us about this generous gift that we are administering” (20)

The apostle, very much caring that no one would be stumbled because of him or of anyone of his company, particularly that this ministry involved being trusted with a great sum of money, he insisted that his co-workers should be chosen by the churches from among those with good reputation and blameless behavior, to protect them against anyone evil-minded who may attempt to distort their reputation or accuse them of greed or treason.

“For we intend to do what is right, not only in the Lord’s sight, but also in the sight of others” (21)

A minister should be trustworthy, not only in the sight of God who knows what is hidden in the hearts, but also in the sight of men, to avoid any probability of offense in the churches.

- + While striving for the sake of the upright life, the apostle cared as well for his own good reputation in the sight of God and men; fearing God, and caring for men. In that same talk, he chose to please the others by works more than by words; on account of that a thing would be described as being good, if it is according to the

practical actuality; The teacher, being committed to have control on his words, and would never allow words to control him, he says: “... *Not with the wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect*” (1 Corinthians 1: 17).

(St. Augustine)

“And with them we are sending our brother whom we have often tested and found eager in many matters, but who is now more eager than ever because of his great confidence in you” (22)

They were accompanied by a third minister well known to the apostle Paul, in whose zeal, love, and faithfulness he trusted; and whose zeal and activity became more apparent, when the Corinthians proclaimed their trust in him as well. The way a faithful minister inflames the hearts of the people of God to work, the confidence of the people in the minister would motivate him to work with more zeal and diligence. The relationship of the shepherd with his flock is a mutual relationship, each of them support the other. The third minister is believed to be Apollos.

“As for Titus, he is my partner and co-worker in your service; as for our brothers, they are messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ” (23)

He ended his talk by commending all: Titus as a partner in ministry (although he is his disciple), and the two other ministers, who were messengers of the churches to work for the glory of Christ, were most probably Luke and Apollos the apostles.

“Therefore, openly before the churches, show them the proof of your love, and of our reason for boasting about you” (24)

Having commended those whom he was going to send to the Corinthians, he demanded from them to translate their love for them in a practical way, in order that he would boast about them as a congregation who love the faithful ministers of Christ.

+ By saying “*before the churches*”, he means for the glory and honor of the churches; As, by honoring them, they would be honoring the churches that sent them and ordained them; and much more it would be to the glory of God, by honoring His minister.

(St. John Chrysostom)

+ Elijah the servant of God was not in need of favor from anyone, as the ravens were commanded to bring him bread and meat (1 Kings 17: 4-9); Yet, to bless the pious widow, God sent Elijah to her; And he who was fed secretly by God, was fed by her. Proclaiming the reward of that service, the Lord says: “*He who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man’s reward*” (Matthew 10: 41, 42).

(St. Augustine)

AN INSPIRATION FROM 2 CORINTHIANS 8

**MY HEART IS IN YOUR HANDS
GRANT IT THE LIFE OF GIVING**

+ You came down to me, O You Rich One.
To let me acquire You;

You became poor for my sake, to make me dare to unite with You.
To make me enjoy You, by granting me the fellowship of Your heaven.
To give me Your resurrected life, to make me eternally rich.

- + Who opens my heart with love, to make its pleasure in giving.
Your grace, O You Rich One, grants me love.
Bear my heart up to Your spacious heaven;
To be conformed by Your fiery Spirit, to become Your icon.
To make it very spacious, to become heavenly, and to give abundantly and cheerfully.

- + Yes. Your grace conforms my depths.
Turns my heart of stone into one of flesh
You make me close to You, and to liken You.
You loosen the chains of my love for the narrow world.
And destroys the strongholds of my selfishness.

- + Behold, my will is in Your hands.
It harmonizes with Your will, and works according to Your grace.

- + I find my pleasure in giving, like You, O the Beneficent.
I count all I have as Your possession.
You made me a steward on it to the account of all men.
So as not to become like a mouth that closes shut on food, and does not pass it to the stomach.
It would be then rot, and would destroy with it all the body..
What I distribute is the possession of all; on which I have no favor.

- + Accept the giving of myself to You, together with that of my brethren.
Grant me the spirit of cheerfulness while giving.
To let me experience the deposit of the exultation of heaven.

- + To give is more better than to take;
Together with every giving, I see You granting me the enjoyment of Your presence.
Together with every giving, You flow with Your abundance on me.



CHAPTER 9

ENCOURAGEMENT ON GIVING

For fear that some may probably misunderstand the last chapter as an accusation of the church in Corinth of being mean in giving, the apostle here presents an apology for his zeal in exhorting them to practice that grace (1-5). Then he goes on to give some instructions concerning the well-received gift, and how to practice it.

1- An apology for exhorting them on giving	1 – 5
2- The bountiful giving	6
3- The cheerful giving	7
4- Increase in giving	8 - 10
5- Almsgiving alms and the sacrifice of thanksgiving	11 – 16

1- AN APOLOGY FOR EXHORTING THEM ON GIVING:

“Now concerning the ministering to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write to you” (1)

Although the apostle Paul was known for being frank in his writing, whether to individuals or to churches; Yet through love he appeases his listeners and encourages them before revealing their wounds and rebuking them. Here he counts what he has written in His first epistle concerning exhorting them to give, as a sort of superfluity; for they love to give, and understand the importance of giving; so it was unbecoming of him to remind them of this virtue.

Yet, while writing to apologize, he encourages them in an indirect way to give with more liberality, and let them feel that they are already doing it, not because of his exhortation, but through their pleasure in giving. In this he follows the lead of his Lord Jesus Christ in His talk to Simon Peter after the resurrection (John 21: 15-17); who Although knowing

for sure how much His disciple loves him, yet he repeated three times His question :
“*Do you love me?*”, which although seemingly superfluous, yet it was truly a strong
motivation to Peter to resume his shepherding work, full of love.

- + Paul so uttered to gain the Corinthians to his side; As some of their elites,
assumed that they were in no need to be exhorted; at least for they did not like to
appear as less than others in giving.

(St. John Chrysostom)

*“For I know your willingness about which I boast of you to the
Macedonians, that Achaia was ready a year ago,
and your zeal has stirred up the majority” (2)*

In the last chapter he presented Macedonia as an excellent example in giving; And here
he presents Achaia with its capital Corinth, as has already begun, and its zeal has
stirred up the hearts of all; Now, having begun with zeal, it is befitting of them to
consummate the way.

- + Paul present the Macedonians to the Corinthians, and the Corinthians to the
Macedonians, as examples to follow.

(Theodoret, Bishop of Cyrus)

*“Yet I have sent the brethren lest our boasting of you should be in vain in this
respect, that, as I said, you may be ready” (3)*

The apostle confirms to them that they are the subject of his boasting and cherishing,
not only in his depths, but before others as well.

Talking to his congregation with all respect and appreciation of their feelings, he cleverly apologizes to them for his seemingly superfluous exhortation on giving; that, while apologizing, he exhorts them more in a sound evangelic way. It is as though he says: I wrote enough about this issue, and you do not need to read more of it. The apostle knew that the whole province of Achaia, and not just Corinth, were ready a year ago to contribute in supporting the poor suffering saints of Jerusalem; and he boasts of this zeal that stirred up the hearts of many to follow suit, and among them were probably the churches of Macedonia.

“Lest if some Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we (not to mention you) should be ashamed of this confident boasting” (4)

He seems as though apologizing for sending Titus and the others with him for this purpose; Yet, as a reason for sending them he demonstrates that it was high time to deliver their gift abundantly, and in a hurry. As he boasted of their achievement, he feared of delay; Knowing that some Macedonians might accompany him, finding the collection not yet ready, he would appear in shame, as what he boasted of was not true.

“Therefore I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren to go to you ahead of time and prepare your bountiful gift beforehand, which you have previously promised, that it may be ready as a voluntary gift, and not as extortion” (5)

Writing the word “extortion” here, refers to the fact that some Corinthians after collecting in the previous year, claimed that the collection was based on some kind of extortion; Therefore the apostle confirms here that giving, being a blessing to him who gives, he is actually the beneficiary party. And probably the apostle meant that some of those who gave, having given, not with the concept of getting its blessing, gave sparingly and not bountifully.

- + Demanding from them to contribute bountifully and with their complete free will, the apostle says: *“that the blessing may be ready, as a voluntary gift, and not as extortion”*. He started by what is more cheerful and joyful, referring to the fruit of giving, confirming that it is full of blessing.
- + Then he adds that it is not an “extortion”; as though he says: Do not think that we take your gift as extortionists, but to become for you a cause of blessing. For extortion is done against the free will.

(St. John Chrysostom)

2- THE BOUNTIFUL GIVING:

“Now, this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly; And he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully” (6)

The Jews used to understand the word “to sow” to mean “to give”; and interpret what came in the book of the prophet Isaiah: *“Blessed are you who sow beside all waters”* (Isaiah 32: 20), to mean: (blessed are those who are always ready to give help to every needy). To him who shows mercy to his brother, God will show him His mercy.

As a matter of principle, No one could reap except what is proportional to what he has sown. *“He who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully”*

- + Anyway, there is no way more secure for somebody to store a portion of his resources, than to store it in the mouths of the poor.

- + More clearly, By helping the miserable, we are actually helping ourselves. It is more profitable to distribute our resources more widely; Taking into consideration the future reward, Everything you give to the poor is counted for you as a profit.

As “He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly”. So will be he who distribute sparingly will get sparingly; And he who distributes nothing will also get nothing. ... Therefore, if we wish to reap a crop of joy, let us then sow now bountifully with our tears

(Father Valerian)

- + Saying: *“Now, this I say: ‘He who sows sparingly ...’*; By “now” the apostle means to say: As long as we are in the present time, let us hasten with zeal to acquire the gift of the eternal life; As once the world comes to an end, this gift is only given to those who acquired it for themselves by faith before they become able to see it by their own eyes.

(St. Augustine)

- + Let us then sow these good seeds bountifully, so as to reap bountifully in due time; I ask you not to disregard that now is the time to sow; so that, by the time of harvest, we can reap the fruit of what we have sown here, and enjoy the compassion of the Lord.

(St. John Chrysostom)

3- THE CHEERFUL GIVING:

“So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver” (7)

It is not good enough of man to give bountifully, knowing that what he does is a blessing he will later reap; but he should give according to the law of love, namely, to give as much as possible with joy and the gladness of heart.

What he does has to come out of his heart, with his complete free will, and with all his feelings and senses. He should not give grudgingly, nor under outer pressure. And as it came in the book of the prophet Isaiah: *“If you extend your soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul, then your light shall dawn in the darkness, and your darkness shall be as the noonday. The Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your soul in draught, and strengthen your bones; You shall be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail”* (Isaiah 58: 10-11).

The Jews used to have in the temple, two boxes for almsgiving: one called (Shel Chewbah), the box of the necessities, in which man puts what the law commits him to do; And the other called (Shel Nedabah), the box of bountiful giving, in which man puts, with his complete free will, what is beyond the commitments of the law. Some used to put in the first box just what they are committed by the law, grudgingly and with grief. While others used to put in the second one far beyond that, joyfully, for the sake of their love for God and for the needy. Here, he is not talking about the former category, but about the second one, to say: “Whom God loves”. Through feeling committed, together with the grief of the heart, the first category loses the blessing of the grace of giving, as they see in what they give a loss of their possession; while the second category see in it a burial of their seeds, to produce a far greater crop.

While the first category consider their giving as an attempt to appease the wrath of God, the second one see it as a demonstration of exalted love toward God. Their gift is the subject of God’s pleasure, incomparable with any material loss, whatever its value is.

When we cheerfully give, we are giving together with our gift, an exulting heart, and will reap a double exultation when we encounter the Groom of our souls on the day of eternal joy.

Being an essential issue in the life of a believer, almost all of the fathers of the church spoke of the giving, either directly or indirectly.

St. Basil the Great, considering the one mean in giving a thief, says: [Are you not greedy and a money lover, when you keep for yourself what you were entrusted to give to the servants of God?].

And St. John Chrysostom says in an essay on “almsgiving”, that God commanded it, not only for the sake of the needy, but also for the sake of its givers. Hence the apostle, not only spoke of fulfilling the needs of the poor, but of the “cheerfulness in giving”, for the benefit of the givers, to enjoy the blessings of the joy in this age, and in the age to come.

And Father Maximus, Bishop of Torin says that there is a great difference between him who pays the tax of Caesar grudgingly, and in fear under the commitment of the law, and him who presents alms to Christ, cheerfully and for the sake of the pleasure of heart; The first one pays for fear of punishment; while the second gives in anticipation of the heavenly reward.

4- INCREASE IN GIVING:

“And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, have an abundance of every good work” (8)

There is no reason for us to lose confidence in the fulfillment of God's promise concerning almsgiving; He is faithful in his promises, and able to realize them, to provide us with what to satisfy our needs with the abundance of His blessings on us, beside granting us an abundance of every good works.

- + Notice how Paul does not pray for the sake of riches and abundance, but only for what is just enough for the sustenance of life; That is what he prays for the Corinthians, to have "*sufficiency in all things*" of this world, yet "*an abundance of every good work*".

(St. John Chrysostom)

"As it is written: 'He has dispersed abroad, He has given to the poor, His righteousness endures forever;'" (9)

That he quotes from (Psalm 112: 9). By saying "*dispersed*" he means giving outside his own family, the way he gives inside it; sowing in his own land and in other lands.

The alms that man gives will go away, whether he presents it or keep it; What endures, is the righteousness that is behind the act of giving.

- + As the things given will go, but their activity will remain, We should not be preoccupied with counting what we have got, but give bountifully. Thinking about what men give to actors and dancers; Why do not they give half as much to Christ?!
- + The power of mercy is eternal, incorruptible, and absolutely imperishable. All works are mortal, but the fruit of mercy will endure, and will not be affected by the factor

of time ... The passing of days will not wipe them out, nor death will be able to destroy them, but they will be secure until they reach the tranquil haven.

- + Quenching the thirst of someone for Christ is far greater than raising the dead in His name. By doing the former thing, you do good to Christ; whereas by consummating the later, Christ would do you good.

The reward is for him who does good, not for him who received it from another.

By performing miracles, you would be indebted to God, While by doing an act of mercy, God will be indebted to you.

The act of mercy is probably consummated when you do it readily and bountifully, not expecting a reward nor thanks; As by it you get a grace for ourselves.

(St. John Chrysostom)

*“Now may He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown
and increase the fruits of your righteousness” (10)*

The apostle raises a prayer to God to support them to present more seeds, namely to open their hearts more to almsgiving, to reap more. God supplies seeds to the sower, and multiplies the seeds sown to give more fruits. The word “*supplies*” (epichoreegoon), came to mean also (guides); as God guides the soul toward giving as is befitting, and in the proper time; and provides it with a rich crop of graces and blessings, and of the righteousness of God.

In the book of Hosea, as God proclaims His betrothal to the soul, He responds to her demands, and heaven and earth responds as well: “*The earth shall answer with grain , with new wine, and with oil; They shall answer Jezreel. Then I will sow her for myself in the earth*” (Hosea 2: 22, 23).

- + If God rewards those who sow the soil of the earth with an abundance of crop, How much more would He reward those who sow the soil of heaven through caring for the soul?

(St. John Chrysostom)

5- ALMSGIVING AND THE SACRIFICE OF THANKSGIVING:

“While you are enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving through us to God” (11)

That is how God enriches the soul that covets almsgiving, and practices it with joy as much as it can; He enriches it to flow with an abundance of thanksgiving to Him. The soul that rejoices in almsgiving, will come to be an icon of Christ, to bear an abundance of His righteousness, and to share with Him the nature of thanksgiving.

- + While being enriched in everything, you give with (open-handedness), to present thanks to God ... God allowed us to manage the great things, and left the lesser things for himself. He is the One to care for the sustenance of the body; through controlling the rain and the seasons of the year. Whereas He left the spiritual supply to our charge; as by our own free will, we can decide to have or not to have an abundant crop.

(St. John Chrysostom)

“For the rendering of this ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints, but also overflows with many thanksgiving to God” (12)

As the poor saints find what fulfill their needs; the giver, understanding that the favor of this fulfillment is not referred to him but to God, will

rejoice and give thanks to God.

- + Paul refers to that giving to the poor is not a subject of fulfilling their urgent needs but has other results, and leads to diverse blessings.

(Theodoret, Bishop of Cyrus)

“While, through the testing of this ministry, you glorify God by your obedience to the confession to the gospel of Christ, and by the generosity of your sharing with them and all others”

(13)

- + The apostle commends the poor saints because they, despite their own poverty, give thanks for the sake of the blessings given to the givers. Although it is only natural for the poor to be envious, yet those people are so free of this evil tendency, that they rejoice for the sake of the blessings given to others.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + The Corinthians will reap the benefit of the prayers of the poor, which are the produce of great love.

(Theodoret, Bishop of Cyrus)

The apostle enumerates the benefits of this joyful giving as:

- 1- Fulfilling the needs of the needy saints.
- 2- Gladness of the heart for the work of God, that the giver offers a sacrifice of thanksgiving to the Lord.
- 3- A feeling of obedience, and a joyful submission to the evangelic commandment.

- 4-The hearts of the receivers of this gift glorify God for the sake of the givers, for being evangelic by faith as well as by work; or for being faithful in their faith.
- 5- The hearts of the receivers of this gift pray to the Lord for the sake of the givers.

“While they long for you and pray for you because of the surpassing grace of God that He has given to you” (14)

In the issue of almsgiving, the apostle concentrates on the “*grace of God*”. As the giving in itself is a divine grace, by which God opens up the heart by love to give with generosity. It is the grace that presents the seeds of giving, and also gives the harvest, as the reaper enjoys the righteousness of Christ; And works, as well, in the hearts of the receivers of the gift to give thanks to God, and praise Him for His grace that works in the Givers, and pray to Him to grant them an abundance of divine graces.

“Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift” (15)

The apostle Paul gives thanks to God for His indescribable gift given to believers.

Some interpret this gift as the grace that grants the heart the joy of liberal giving; While others interpret it as the Lord Christ Himself who dwells in the heart to make it an icon for Him, and let it find pleasure in the practical love and the giving with generosity and joy. The Lord Christ is the Gift of the Father, or the Gift of love enjoyed by the believers, that the angels covet to behold.

- + It is a custom of Paul to praise God every time he explains some divine ordinance or another.

(Theodoret, Bishop of Cyrus)

AN INSPIRATION FROM 2 CORINTHIANS 9

LET ME SOW BLESSINGS TO REAP BLESSINGS

- + Grant me the humility to get filled with zeal.
To follow the lead of my brethren, and to have the spirit of giving.
To have no shame for imitating them, as we are together members of the same body.

- + Grant my mind, my heart, and my will the readiness to give.
The day is the day of my salvation, and the time is that of acceptance.
To acquire my eternity by the practical love;
To hasten in zeal, believing in You, Who desires to give bountifully without measure.
Grant me the spirit of giving to my brethren, to enjoy Your giving Yourself to me.
To give my love together with my gift; while You give me Yourself, together with Your glory, as a free gift.

- + Support me with Your grace, to sow goodness before the times passes by.
When shall I cross over, and reap, by your amazing love, the blessing of Your glories.

- + Grant me to present a flaring heart, exulted by giving.
I am not presenting a committed gift for fear of the law.
But I am presenting an exulted heart, anticipating to encounter you.
By joy, I give to my beloved brethren

And You pay my pleasure back with a greater pleasure, when I share with the
heavenlies their exultation.

- + Let my heart become wider with love, and let my hands stretch open with giving.
For all what I possess will come to an end; But the love I acquire will remain with
me forever.

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DIVISION 5

HIS DEFENSE OF HIS LOWLY PRESENCE

(Chapters 10 to 12)

In no other place has the apostle Paul suffered so much opposition from the false
teachers as in Corinth, who have taken from him an
adversary position. It was easier for him to be persecuted by the Jews and the
Gentiles; but, it was extremely bitter to be opposed by false
brethren under Christ's name.

The apostle Paul was accused of being very gentle and humble in dealing with his
people when present in their midst; whereas in his epistles
he was very firm and bold. He had to write to defend himself so as not to cause offense
to any one:

- (1) In his presence he had to be humble, and to disregard his authority, talents, and
possibilities, so that all would glory in the Lord (10: 17).

- (2) As a friend of the Groom, he had to care, not for himself; “*For I have betrothed you for one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ* (11: 2). He is not like the deceitful teachers who seek what is for their glory at the expense of the bride, and the gospel of the truth.
- (3) Although “*He is not at all inferior to the most eminent apostles*” (11: 5), yet he humiliated himself to minister to them; and refrained from using his authority as an apostle to spare anyone of being offended (11: 12).
- (4) He warned them against the crafty false apostles; as “*Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light*” (11: 14).
- (5) He committed himself to talk like a foolish, although he is a Hebrew, Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, one of the best ministers of Christ, and of those who endured the most of labors. He gave a short list of what he endured of afflictions and persecutions.
- (6) He enjoyed several proclamations from the Lord (12: 1-10).
- (7) He was granted the ability to perform signs and wonders (12: 11-12); and his power lies not in the body but in the spirit (10: 1-6).
- (8) He does not use his authority for destruction (12: 7-18).
- (9) He was not burdensome to anyone (12L 13-18).
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CHAPTER 10

HIS SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY AS AN APOSTLE

Although his life was almost blameless, together with a fiery heart in his ministry, and his care for everyone, the apostle was attacked by the false teachers.

1- The spiritual authority of the apostle Paul	1 - 7
2- His authority is for edification and not for destruction	8
3- His authority is both in his presence and in his absence	9 - 11
4- His authority is with no boasting	12 - 16
5- His boasting is only of the Lord	17 – 18

1- THE SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY OF THE APOSTLE PAUL:

Starting to defend his apostleship and his spiritual authority, he writes with a spirit of humility and meekness; confirming that he will never use his authority for the sake of his personal honor.

“Now I, Paul, myself am pleading with you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ – who in presence am lowly among you, but being absent am bold toward you” (1)

In the beginning of the epistle he added the name of Timothy to his name; but here, talking about his apostleship, he talks for himself alone against the false teachers.

By saying “*Now*”; namely, after talking about the mutual love between himself and them, and that between them and the repentant man; And about the commitment to compassion on the needy with generosity and joy, he intends to defend his apostleship, not to establish his own personal honor, but for the sake of the edification of the church and the growth of the ministry; all of which he postponed until he puts all the other things in order.

Some may wonder why would St. Paul be accused of being lowly in his presence, yet bold in his epistles?

- (1) Theodoret, Bishop of Cyrus believes that some Christians in Corinth, of Jewish origin sought from those of Gentile origin, to observe the Mosaic law literally, concerning the circumcision, the observation of the Sabbath, and the body purification. They claimed that Paul himself observed the law secretly; yet, at the same time, he relieved the Gentile of observing it, especially in his epistles.
- (2) Some believe that Paul had a short stature, did not care much for his attire, and in his presence, talked in a simple way to the multitude; While his epistles were characterized with great eloquence; as though he had two separate personalities, one in his presence and the other in his absence,
- (3) Starting his ministry in Corinth, he had to confront the corruption, and the church problems with a gentle spirit; but in his epistles he could afford to show firmness against the young leader who committed evil with his father’s wife; and against the false teachers, and the heretics who caused dissensions,.

The apostle repeats the same words of his critics, to respond to their accusations.

“ I ask when I am present I need not show boldness by daring to oppose those who think we are acting

according to human standards” (2)

He was accused of acting according to human standards, when, in his presence among them he acted with humility, and used firmness in his
Absence.

As an apostle, he has the right to practice his spiritual authority to keep the sanctity of the church, its faith, and dogmas; as well as the observation of the befitting behavior in the church worship. Now he begs them not to give him the reason to use this authority while present among them, the way he did in his absence when he wrote his first epistle, in which he had to be firm against the one who committed evil with his father’s wife, and against those who corrupted the faith some way or another.

“Indeed we live as human beings, but we do not wage war according to human standards” (3)

By that he means that, although he lives as a human being, yet, seeking the pleasure of God, he acts in a spiritual way.

+ Although we are surrounded by the world, yet we do not deliver ourselves to it.

(Theodoret, Bishop of Cyrus)

Against the vain accusations he confirms that he is not carnal, nor uses carnal nor temporal weapons, but the strong and non-corruptive spiritual weapons of God; As his battle is for the sake of the salvation of the world, and the edification of the church,

“For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds” (4)

Whether in his gentleness while present, or his firmness while absent, he does not act according to human standards as man with flesh, but according to the Spirit. As a spiritual leader he bears the spirit of power, acts with the spirit to the account of the kingdom of God. He flatters no one, fears no one, and bears grudge against no one personally. His battle is against the hosts of darkness, and not against any man.

- + He does not say: “We do not live according to human standards”, but says: “*we do not wage war according to human standards*”. Although we wage war and fight a battle, yet we do not use carnal weapons, nor any human support. What are the weapons according to human standards? Wealth, glory, eloquence, craftiness, deception, flattering, hypocrisy, etc. All those are not for us; We are mighty by God!

He does not say: “We are not carnal”, but: “*The weapons of our warfare are not carnal*”, For he is talking about preaching, and referring to the might of God. He does not say “spiritual weapons”, although that would be the contrary to “human”, but says: “*mighty in God*”, namely, “spiritually applied”; referring to that the weapons of the false teachers are weak and without strength.

Notice the absence of boasting in his words; he does not say “We are mighty”, but “our weapons are mighty in God”, It is not that we make them as such, but it is God who does.

Although they were scourged and persecuted, something that imply weakness, yet, intending to show the power of God, he says: “they are mighty in God”; As by this he shows his own strength, and acquires the conquest; It is God who wars with these weapons.

(St. John Chrysostom)

The apostle Paul often uses the analogy to 'war' or 'battle' as far as the ministry of salvation is concerned (Ephesians 6: 10-17; 1 Timothy 18; 2 Timothy 2: 2-5).

"We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle raised up against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ"(5)

The weapons of our war are not carnal like those used by the false apostles; but are spiritual set upon the true evangelic truth; by which we enter into the hearts, destroying the strongholds of vanity, and the spiritual hosts of the enemy.

- + Lest the word 'strongholds' may sound as though material, he says: "*we destroy arguments*" (5). He first gives a confirmation by a symbol, then follows by this additional expression to proclaim the spiritual nature of the war; as these strongholds take the souls captives and not the bodies. That is why the need is for more capable weapons. Probably meaning by the strongholds the Greek boasting and the power of philosophy and logic, he says: For "*we destroy arguments and every obstacle raised against the knowledge of God*". Continuing to use the symbol to present a greater confirmation, he says: And if there are strongholds or anything of the sort, they will surrender and collapse before our weapons.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + The growth increase gradually from infancy until maturation and perfection in Christ; as faith increases and grows through the work of the divine Holy Spirit, and consequently the strongholds of the evil thoughts are gradually destroyed until they are wiped out completely.

(St. Maccar the Great)

The war, the weapons, and conquests are all spiritual, as the apostle enjoys the following:

- (1) **Destruction of the wrong arguments** (logismous), views, and thoughts. Some of the Greek philosophers assumed that their views are definitely sound, and without diversion; Yet, once the Evangelic Truth prevailed, the corruption of those views was revealed, and many bowed before the Lord of Glory Jesus Christ, accepted His cross, the source of their salvation, and believed in the resurrection from the dead, which they previously considered as a kind of hallucination.
- (2) **Destruction of every haughtiness**; As some Greek philosophers, like Plato, Aristotle, and their follower, have shown haughtiness; Yet their haughtiness collapsed before the humility of the apostles, followers of the crucified Christ, and the simplicity of the gospel they preach. The commitment of sin, and the disobedience of the divine commandment, are haughtiness on God.

+ Every sin is an expression of disregard of the divine law, and is considered as 'haughtiness' against the knowledge of God.

(St. Basil the Great)

- (3) It does not stop at the negative aspect, namely the destruction of evil, in the form of arguments and views, or of haughtiness against truth, the divine knowledge, or the divine commandment; but it extends to the positive aspect, which is drawing every mind to covet the obedience of the Lord Christ. All would become members in the body of Christ, moved by the Head Himself (the Lord Christ), and respond to Him; as expressed by the apostle, saying: "*take every thought captive to obey Christ*"
- (5).

+ The word 'captive' may sound bad, bearing the meaning of the destruction of liberty; So why does he use it?

'Captivity' presents two sides: the loss of liberty, and the use of violence to bring down someone completely. The apostle used it

bearing the second meaning... As the war did not end by a kind of tie between the two parties, but the apostle had victory in a very simple way ...

Saying "*take every thought captive to obey Christ*", as the word 'captive' is painful, he followed it by saying "*to obey Christ*". The

spiritual war ends by taking the thought captive; from bondage to liberty, from death to life, and from perdition to salvation.

We came, not to destroy, but to bring our opponents to the truth.

+ Is this not the secret of power of his epistles, that benefited, not only the contemporary believers, but all believers as well, from his time until now, and even to the coming of Christ. As his epistles are like a wall of rocks established to surround all the churches of the world.

As a courageous hero, he captivates every mind to the obedience of Christ, casting away the fantasies, and every haughtiness raised against the knowledge of God (5). All that is realized through the epistles he left for us, filled with the divine wisdom, and are of benefit to us to prove the vanity of the corrupt views, to establish the right faith, and to reach a better life.

(St. John Chrysostom.

+ The mind that is not slothful in searching itself, nor in seeking what is for God, would be able to acquire itself; And the soul that was

in the perdition of lusts, is acquired through presenting himself as a captive of the love of the Lord, with every zeal and strength, and by the attachment to God alone.

(St. Maccar the Great)

“and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled” (6)

How could the apostle punish all disobedience? It is not by violence and cruelty, but by drawing the disobedient souls to the Lord Christ, destroying the disobedience by obedience, and drawing the opponents to faith; namely, condemning non-faith by the same persons who were opponents to faith, then believed.

The apostle confirms his apostolic authority concerning the chastisement of the opponents of the Truth, and the disobedient to the Lord Christ, not for the sake of revenge, but to draw all to the experience of the obedience of the Lord Christ. He does not bear a personal animosity against any man, yet he is committed to chasten when this is for the edification of the kingdom of God.

Being full of love toward his people, the apostle feared that his meekness and gentleness would lead to slothfulness in the evangelic truth.

The expressions in verses 5 and 6 came like military to suit an army confronting an enemy who come against the city, and would not be slothful in defending it; The apostle, as a leader of the salvation army, is always ready to confront, by the weapons of God, the opponents of the truth.

When he chastens, he does it with wisdom; anticipating the consummation of the obedience of believers as a whole, before he would chasten the disobedient among

them; lest while gathering up the tares, you may also uproot the wheat with them (see Mathew 13: 29).

+ Paul explains why he is patient. He intends to draw a greater multitude to reform their ways, before punishing those who persist upon opposing the truth.

(Theodoret, Bishop of Cyrus)

+ Here, as well, he bring forth fear to the Corinthians, as though he says to them: We anticipate that you, through our counsel and threats, would walk uprightly, and would consent together on taking away your fellowship with the false apostles; Then, when we see that you have truly forsaken, and separated yourselves from those inflected with such serious impairments, we would then punish them. Seeing so far that you are obedient, yet not in a complete way, If we go forth now to punish the disobedient opponents, you may probably be disturbed. But be assured that they will eventually be punished, and you will be spared The words of the apostle Paul have driven demons out, made the sorcerers burn their books, worth 5000 in silver (Acts 19: 19), and blinded Simon the sorcerer (Acts 13: 8-11).

(St. John Chrysostom)

“Do you look at things according to the outward appearances? If anyone is convinced in himself that he is

Christ’s, let him again consider this in himself, that just as he is Christ’s, even so we are Christ’s” (7)

He seeks from them not to be diverted by the outer appearances; and to set for themselves sound measures in comparing him to the false apostles. As, according to the outer appearances, some of the later may seem better and greater than him; but,

according to true spiritual measures, there would be no point of comparison between the apostle Paul and the false apostles.

By saying: "*If anyone is convinced in himself that he is Christ's*", he refers to the false apostles who caused disturbances and confusions in the church through claiming that they are Christ's apostles, and working to His account. Let them who vainly claim that, know that Paul is His true apostle, working to the account of His kingdom, and called personally by Him.

+ Paul criticizes those who are puffed up by pride, who look down on him, and say that they are in no need of his teachings.

+ Those who commend themselves, are those who seek authority. He who is sent on a mission would get authority, not to his own account, but to that of the one who sent him. Here the apostle Paul says that, being chosen as the steward of the Lord, he does not claim for himself anything that would surpass what he was given; Hence, he does not compare himself with those who preach without a mission from God.

(Father Ambrosiaster)

+ The charge against him is not a simple matter, but very serious? It is easy indeed to deceive man!

What does "*looking at things according to outer appearances*" mean? ... It is when someone is rich; puffed-up; surrounded by a multitude of flatterers; claims great things or vain glory for himself; Or if he hypocritically considers himself virtuous for no true basis.

(St. John Chrysostom)

2- HIS AUTHORITY IS FOR EDIFICATION AND NOT FOR DESTRUCTION:

“For even if I should boast somewhat more about our authority, which the Lord gave us for edification and not for destruction, I shall not be ashamed” (8)

Although the apostle had an authority greater than what appears to them, whether in teaching or in chastisement; yet he only put that authority in use within limits needed for their spiritual edification and their growth in the righteousness of Christ, and not for their destruction. That is the goal of the apostolic or the church authority; It is not in the deadly letter, but in a spiritual work for the edification of the souls.

- + Paul used his authority only within the measure by which he would be glorified in the progress of believers, leading to their salvation, and not in self-esteem; He was never puffed-up surpassing the authority given to him, and never claimed an authority in issues that do not concern his preaching.

(Ambrosiaster)

3- HIS AUTHORITY IS BOTH IN HIS PRESENCE AND ABSENCE:

“Lest I seem to terrify you by letters” (9)

He never had in mind to terrify them by the epistles he wrote to them, in which he expressed his wrath on them.

“For his letters, they say, are weighty and powerful, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible” (10)

He was accused that he was hostile in his epistle, showing an authority that he has no right to have; whereas his presence was weak, both in body and speech, contemptible by philosophers and the learned wise.

In 'Nicephorus', it came that he was little in body stature, bowed-backed, pale-faced, bald, with wildly stirring eyes, and a dense black beard with some gray streaks. According to a Greek writer he was short, and yet he could touch heaven.

"Let such people understand that what we say by letter when absent, we will also do when present" (11)

Here he warns and threatens the false apostles by his epistles, and by his apostolic authority, because of the corruption of their teachings; which he will also do when his is present.

- + The apostle did not hesitate to confirm his knowledge, without which he would not be the teacher of the Gentiles, as is clear in his eloquent epistles, which, as even his adversaries confessed, were so weighty and powerful, when his bodily presence was weak and his speech contemptible.

(St. Augustine)

4- HIS AUTHORITY IS WITH NO BOASTING:

"We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves. But when they measure themselves by one another, and compare themselves with one another, they do not show good sense" (12)

The apostle refuses to compare himself with the false apostles; for he does not classify himself according to comparison with men, but seeks to reach the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Ephesus 4: 13). Whereas, they find pleasure in comparing themselves with one another, they have their measures on a human standard, causing much envy, jealousy, and pride, instead of thanksgiving to God, and of seeking the riches of the exalt and growing grace in the Lord.

On another aspect, trusting in the truth of his apostolic calling, and believing in the possibility of the Holy Spirit, working in him, he refuses to have any fellowship with the false apostles, not even to be compared to them. Whereas they, not being called by God, and the Holy Spirit not working in them, they deceive themselves by comparing themselves with one another, as though there is no better perfect measure before them; and they do not comprehend the true wisdom that would guide them to the divine work.

+ It is clear that exaggerated boasting was a feature of the false apostles.

(St. John Chrysostom)

*“We however will not boast without limits, but will keep within the sphere that God has assigned to us –
a field which especially includes you” (13)*

He does not go without a law that governs him, or without a limit to which he is committed; his measure is divine; he works through what he is given from God of graces, gifts, and talents, seeking from the Holy Spirit to inflame them in him, to help him preach among the Gentiles; not to stop as far as Asia Minor, nor at other countries in Greece, but to reach them in Corinth,

This is a sportive term concerning the Olympic (Isthmian games). It is as though the whole world for him is like an arena, which he will not stop before he crosses it over, and bear all into the divine bosom, to enjoy the crown of conquest.

The “sphere”, originally was a measuring rod, by which symbolically to measure anything in ethics, art, language, or in literature; and could also mean a measure of the Christian faith, through the church law and a group of well recognized holy writings. To understand what the apostle Paul means, we have to put in mind that he considered his apostolic ministry as being within the “sphere” of the Gentiles; and used to refuse to work or be in some location where another apostle has preached. Whereas those concerned with Judaism in Corinth have forced themselves on the “sphere” of his ministry, assigned to him by God.

- + He did well by designating his sphere of activity as a ‘province’, as an inheritance; and showed that the whole work is that of God ... He referred everything to God.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + He presented this statement to confirm to the Corinthians that it is God who sent him to them; and that it is befitting of them to heed his warnings, lest they appear as opponents to God who sent him to them.

(Ambrosiaster)

“For we are not extending ourselves beyond our sphere, for it was to you that we came with the gospel of Christ” (14)

Having reached them in Corinth and preached to them the gospel of Christ, he does not count himself as having surpassed his sphere or the authority given to him by God. He came according to a divine call, and used the authority given to him to preach and to chasten, not by men but by God.

“We do not boast beyond limits, that is in the labors of others; but our hope is that, as your faith increases, our sphere of action among you may be greatly enlarged” (15)

What preoccupies the heart of the apostle Paul, and those of his co-workers, is not to boast their works compared to those of others, but to boast their success in increasing the faith of the people by the work of the Holy Spirit; by which their race would be canonical; and they would be commended as true apostles of God, who have managed to realize God’s goal among them.

- + Here he accuses the false teachers, not only of boasting beyond limits, but also of claiming achievements through the labors of others.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + He who trusts in the power of the gospel, trusts in the power of God who makes it possible. He who did not receive a strength from God, would not be able to boast what is of the Lord; and would be considered as seeking his own glory.

(Ambrosiaster)

“So that we may proclaim the good news in lands beyond you, without boasting of work already done in someone else’s sphere of action” (16)

The success of his ministry in Corinth is not the subject of boasting of the apostle, but is looking at it as a tool in God's hand to extend the preaching of the gospel to other heathen provinces. Paul's mind is only preoccupied with the enjoyment of the whole world of salvation, his work does not stop at certain limits; except not to preach where others have already labored; but to go to other nations where the word of God was not yet being preached.

5- HIS BOASTING IS ONLY OF THE LORD:

"Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord"

(17)

There is no point in comparison, nor in being preoccupied even with success; but what truly preoccupy the mind of the apostle is preaching the gospel to the whole world. What he cherishes is the work of God whether through him or through others.

"For it is not those who commend themselves that are approved, but those whom the Lord commends" (18).

Preaching the Lord Christ, and not himself, his glory and boasting are in testifying to his Savior. As to being commended, it is to be from the Lord Savior, not from men, and not even from himself. Those, on the other hand, not sent by God, are not commended by Him.

+ Paul did not claim this to himself, but it is the Lord who commends him. He was truly a humble man, yet not to the extent to disregard the proclamation of the truth concerning himself. As it is possible for someone to be harmed by an uncontrolled

humility; there was a true danger, if the disciples had a bad view of Paul through his humility. Here, he did not seek human commendation, but is defending himself.

(St. John Chrysostom)

AN INSPIRATION FROM 2 CORINTHIANS 10

BY LOVE I ACCEPT HUMILIATION TO ENTER TOGETHER WITH THEM INTO CONQUEST

- + They accused Paul of being lowly in his presence;
He whose words drove out demons;
Made the sorcerers burn their books;
Drew the rebels to obedience; and the opponents of the truth to the living faith.

- + Grant me, O Lord, spiritual weapons;
To enter into the spiritual battle by Your strength.
I know that, by You I would become a hero;
I would enjoy Your conquest on the enemy;
And would support many by Your grace.

- + By love, I would accept humiliation;
By Your grace, I would destroy all the knowledge of the enemy;
I would destroy all his strongholds;
To proclaim Your amazing conquest.
In the presence, I may be lowly and weak;
Possess nothing, and without authority or honor.
But by You, I would conquer the hosts of darkness.

+ The apostle was longsuffering upon the fallen;
And did not haste to chasten, in anticipation that many would return;
Grant me, as well, gentleness and compassion toward the fallen
Together with weeping with tears on every soul that persists on disobedience.

+ Grant me, O Lord, the spirit of humility;
To boast of every success You grant me;
And to anticipate Your commendation, and not that of men.

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CHAPTER 11

THE APOSTLE PAUL CHERISHES HIS STRIFE

In the previous chapter, the apostle Paul refused to compare Himself with others, especially with the false apostles; counting his call as divine, and his measures as not according to human mind. Now, however, he counts himself as a fool; having been committed to reveal his strife, and to compare himself, not only with the false apostles, but even with the apostles and disciples of Christ. All that was not for the sake of boasting -- as he has previously confirmed that he who boasts should only boast in the Lord – But to confirm the authenticity of his apostleship, to work in the vineyard that extends among many nations.

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1- AN ENFLAMED GODLY JEALOUSY:

“Oh, that you would bear with me a little folly – and indeed you do bear with me” (1)

There is nothing more difficult upon the soul of a humble man, especially someone like the apostle Paul, to be committed to defend himself, to reveal his strife, labor, and success; and to compare himself with his brethren the apostles of Jesus Christ. HBy so doing, he counted himself speaking as a fool.

He asked them to bear with his talk to follow for the sake of the edification of the church; although he knows that they will do bear with it.

- + Starting to talk about himself, he called himself a fool; yet he is committed to do that for the sake of those who resorted to unbefitting thoughts; and should have thought better of him.

(Ambrosiaster)

The apostle Paul probably called himself as a fool, to defend himself, and to demonstrate that the false apostles, puffed-up, are the real fools.

“For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ” (2).

Before having to enter into the subject of his boasting in the flesh as a Hebrew, Israelite, and a son of Abraham; and before enumerating the troubles he gets from outside, or by his own free choice, or from within the church; he intends to confirm the clarity of the goal before him.

He is preoccupied, not with the multitude of troubles, but with walking along the true way, namely, to bear godly jealousy toward the church, to present it a bride to Christ the heavenly Groom. He is only preoccupied with presenting the church everywhere, as a chaste virgin,

blameless, and without wrinkles, caused by the vain thoughts and teachings of the false apostles, corruptive to the souls.

Bearing such a non-human jealousy, whose source is God, he bears in his depths a unique love, together with firmness and faithfulness. He fears for the church in Corinth to lose the godly blessings it has received from him.

The apostle Paul demonstrates his jealousy upon his children; the way a father whose daughter is called to become a bride for the heavenly Groom. And as a father, he is keen on presenting her a holy, and blameless bride; and would never bear to see her dishonored by anyone.

The way he cares for the congregation as a father, It would be befitting of them to pay back this holy jealousy, with a holy jealousy, and would not allow anyone to say wrong things about him as their father. What dishonor them, dishonors their father; and what dishonor their father, dishonors them.

Like a father, he is jealous as well on the virgin daughters of his land; caring for them to get a high education, to behave with reverence, and to get prepared for marriage as is befitting.

In the Old Covenant, the High priest was committed to have only a pure chaste girl in marriage (Leviticus 21: 7). That was a shadow of what is befitting of the heavenly High Priest, the Bishop of our souls, the Lord Jesus Christ; Who, by His precious blood, makes out of the whole church in both the Old and the New Covenants, one chaste, blameless and pure virgin bride.

+ The apostle Paul uses here a term stronger than bare "love". The jealous souls enflame with enthusiasm toward their beloved. Jealousy, being a strong emotion,

that is why, lest they would wrongly assume that he seeks authority, riches, or honor, Paul adds that his jealousy is “godly”. It is written that God is a jealous God, not in a human way, but in order that everyone would know his own right of authority on those he loves, and that what he does is for the sake of their increasing benefit.

The human jealousy is basically set upon selfishness; whereas the divine jealousy is strong and pure.

There is a difference between the human bride and the church. In the world a virgin woman loses her virginity through marriage, whereas in the church, those who were virgins (to a certain extent) before their turn to Christ, will perpetually enjoy virginity in Him; That is why the whole church is a virgin.

- + When it is said that God is jealous; no one should assume that Deity is emotional, but all should know that He does everything only for the sake of those on whom He is jealous; to acquire nothing but to save them.
- + What the prophet David admires in the angels, saying: “*Who makes the angels spirits (winds), His minister flames of fire*” (Psalm 104: 4); is also seen in the apostle Paul, who, like fire and wind (spirit), crossed over the whole earth to purify it.
- + The present time is that of betrothal ... The apostle takes upon himself the role of a match-maker, and puts the church in the position of a bride.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + When the apostle says: “*I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ*”, he is as though puts a “ring” on the church’s

finger (see Luke 15: 22), as a sign of honor, of liberty, of faith, and the (dowry) of the heavenly matrimony.

- + He refers to the church as the bride of Christ ... She is indeed a bride, who, through a virgin birth, grants life to the new infancy of Christ.

(Father Peter Christologos)

- + He, who is "*fairer than the sons of men*", the son of St. Mary, the Groom of the holy church; set her in the likeness of His mother; presented her to become a mother to us, and kept her a virgin to Him.
- + Listen to the apostle say, not only to the religious women, but the whole church: "*I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ*". And on account of that the devil is the corruptor of virginity, he adds: "*But I fear lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ*" (3). Few are they who have the virginity of the body, and are committed to it in the heart.
- + Why does Paul address his talk to such a diversity of people, and yet calls them all "*a chaste virgin*", unless he refers to their faith, hope, and love?
- + The church, like the Virgin Mary, has an incorruptible perfection and fertility; What St. Mary is worthy of in flesh, has been adopted spiritually by the church; with one exception, that St. Mary gave birth to one Child; whereas the church has a multitude of children, designated to gather together as one body of the One Christ.
- + Do you wish to know how could the church be a mother and a virgin? Listen to the apostle Paul, to the jealous friend of the Groom, not for himself, but for the Groom, ... Listen to him addressing the church; ... What church? ... To everyone who may receive his message ... He says: "*I fear lest somehow, as the serpent deceived*

Eve by his craftiness"; ... How did he do that? By destroying the virginity of her heart.

If you wonder how could the church, described as a virgin, give birth to children? ... I will respond, saying that St. Mary has also been a virgin, yet she gave birth to the Lord; ... and remained a virgin! ... So is the church, she gives birth to children while a virgin; namely, she gives birth to Christ, as those baptized are members of His body.

(St. Augustine)

- + The souls of all men and women are designated as "the bride of Christ", in case they intend to keep the purity of the flesh and the virginity of the heart; It is to be understood that Christ is the Groom of their souls, and not of their human bodies.

(Caesareus, Bishop of Arl)

"But I fear lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ" (3)

The apostle Paul takes them back to the beginning of human life, when the serpent crawled and corrupted the simplicity of Eve, and deprived her and her children of the unity with God. Now, with a holy jealousy, the apostle Paul intends not to allow the false teachers, who bear the poison of the old serpent, to spit the poison of their teachings in the church, and corrupt her simplicity and her fellowship with Christ Jesus her eternal Groom.

- + He indeed applies the same words to himself as well, when he says: "... lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified" (1 Corinthians 9: 27).

(St. John Chrysostom)

“For if he who comes teaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you may well put up with it” (4)

As there is only One Jesus, the Savior of the whole world; One Holy Spirit, who leads and sanctifies the church; and One gospel that proclaims the good news of salvation; Why then would they listen to the false teachers who attack the one who preached among them, and established the church in Corinth?

Do they preach another Jesus, another Spirit, or another gospel? ... Would they be able to present them in a better way than what Paul did?

... What have they presented to them?... Have they got a fellowship with Jesus, better than the one they enjoyed through the preaching of Paul? ... Have they got better spiritual gifts? ...

+ Those persons boasted, as though the preaching of the apostle Paul was not perfect; and that they came with more than what the true apostles did. Having most probably, by their meaningless talks, come with inconceivable nonsense, by which they covered the earth, the apostle likened them to the serpent that deceived Eve to anticipate more knowledge.

He means to say, that if those people have come with something more, preached a different Christ who should be preached, and whom we have disregarded, you could well put up with them. But if they repeated what we said, or if they said what they should not have, contrary to what we have preached, Why should you so split from us, with such an admiration of their persons?!

If they said something that should have been said, and which we have disregarded; We could not forbid you from listening to them; But if everything was perfectly consummated by us, and you lack nothing; Why should they then take you away from us?

(St. John Chrysostom)

2- HIS EXALTED KNOWLEDGE:

“For I consider that I am not at all inferior to the most eminent apostles” (5)

The most eminent apostles have not been more effective than the apostle Paul, in preaching Jesus Christ the Savior, in the ministry by the Spirit, or in the distribution of the gospel of salvation.

“May be I am untrained in speech, yet I am not in knowledge. Certainly in every way and in all things, we have made this evident to you” (6)

If he spoke to them with simplicity, and without eloquence; yet he was not without experience in the knowledge of God, in the heavenly spiritual issues, in the knowledge of the nature of human soul, or in the evangelic truth.

They are witnesses to his experience and knowledge in all those aspects. The apostle Paul was only preoccupied with how to present the truth, and not with the eloquence of speech. He only cared for the kind of language by which he could reach the hearts of his listeners, namely, the language of love, together with simplicity and wisdom.

St. John Chrysostom believes that by “*the most eminent apostles*” he meant Peter, James, and John.

- + It is obvious that the false apostles enjoyed the gift of eloquence that Paul might have lacked; Yet that meant nothing, as long as the essence of preaching was there, shedding its shadow on the glory of the cross; That eloquence is nothing more than an attractive appearance!

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + Although Paul mastered the Hebrew literature, having been brought up at the feet of Gamaliel (Acts 22: 3), yet he did not care much for the Greek eloquence, or has, at least, taken the position of silence concerning it, because of his humility; so that his preaching would not be set upon the conviction of his words, as much as the strength of his signs.

(St. Jerome)

- + Without the Lord Jesus and the work of His divine strength, no one could know the secrets and the wisdom of God ... The philosophers of God are those who are led by the divine strength, fed and controlled by it in their inner man. Compared with the Greek philosophers who were well trained in the eloquence of Speech; everyone else was considered as “common” in this concern.

(St. Maccar the Great)

3- REFUSING TO USE HIS RIGHT TO TAKE HELP FROM THEM:

“Did I commit sin in abasing myself that you might be exalted; because I preached the gospel of God to you free of charge?” (7)

The false teachers misinterpreted the apostle Paul's love, having proclaimed in his previous epistle waiving one of his apostolic rights, namely, to live on the gospel which he preaches. They wondered why should he work with his own hands for a living, when the other apostles are sustained by their preaching, and the churches were committed to their expenses? They considered his working for sustaining his daily needs as something unbecoming to the dedication by the true apostle to the apostolic work, and that it indicates that he was inferior to the other apostles. To this he responded by saying: "*I abased myself that you might be exalted*".

His only motive in this concern was to give the Corinthians the chance to receive the word without any material hindrance, or to burden them with any commitments.

Ambrosiaster believes that the apostle Paul so did, to counter the care of the false apostles to preach, not for the sake of the glory of God, but for their own benefit, And he probably did it for fear that he would lose his authority to watch the sinners, based upon their sustenance of him.

"I robbed other churches, taking wages from them, to minister to you. And when I was present with you, and in need, I was burden to no one" (8)

By saying: "*I robbed other churches*", the apostle Paul shows that those churches have not only encouraged him to minister to the Corinthians, but have provided him with a substantial material help to the account of that ministry. He probably also intends to hint to the fact that he accepted the contribution of the Macedonians after their reform; and is rejecting any contributions from the Corinthians, not until they

realize their own reform, after which he would then readily accept their help.

The word “*wages*” here is a military term referring to what the soldier gets of money and daily ration to be dedicated to his military job. It is as though he says to them: I committed you to nothing, but got my daily expenses and my necessities of life of food and clothing from other churches, for the sake of your salvation. Do you count this a crime, or a dishonor to the apostolic work?!

Some may wonder why does the apostle Paul sometimes rejects sustenance from preaching, and sometimes accepts it? Here is the response of St. John Chrysostom:

- + Paul was a man of diverse aspects and several sides. I do not mean to say that he was not a straight forward man! Far from it. But, as he once said, he became everything to all men, according to the required needs of the gospel, and to the salvation of humanity; following by that the lead of his Lord Jesus Christ.

God, Himself, appeared as man when it was required to be; and in the old Covenant He also appeared as fire, in the attire of a ready warrior, as a needy old man, in the breath of wind, and as a traveler passing by. In short, He appeared as a genuine man, and in such a capacity, he did not refuse to die!

I have to repeat the phrase “when it was required”, lest someone may assume that God is committed to do that; But He did all that out of His love for man. He sometimes appeared sitting on a throne, and some other times sitting on the cherubim; according to what was required at that particular time.

When Paul imitates His Lord, we should not blame him. We see him sometimes as a Jew, and sometimes as a Gentile; ... defending the law or against it; ... holding fast to life, or not caring for it; ... seeking help for his necessities, or rejecting gifts;

... offering ritual sacrifices and having his head shaved, or counting him who does as accursed; ... allowing circumcision, or forbidding it. ... His actions might seem apparently as contradictory; but the goal and wisdom behind them are utterly convincing as the situation required.

(St. John Chrysostom)

The false apostles might look good on the surface; yet they were actually soul-robbers; or, according to St. John Chrysostom: [They actually collected money, although they were keen on denying it].

“for what was lacking to me the brethren who came from Macedonia supplied. And in everything I kept myself from being burdensome to you, and so I will keep myself” (9)

When he was present in Corinth preaching, he preferred not to ask anyone there for the necessities of life, to be a burden on no one; but sought them from the brethren who came from Macedonia. ... Whom should be blamed for this: the apostle or the Corinthians?

He probably refers here to the contributions sent by the church in Philippi of Macedonia; As when he was in Thessalonica, he sent to the Philippians saying that they provided his necessities once and again (Philippians 4: 15-16).

“As the truth of Christ is in me, no one shall stop me from this boasting in the regions of Achaia” (10)

Some believe that, by this kind of vow, he utters the truth of Christ which is in him. While others believe that it is an expression of his abundance

in the truth which is not outside him, but dwells in him. Here, the apostle confirms that his preaching is for free, not even for the necessities; not only in Corinth, but all over the region of Achaia.

“Why? Because I do not love you? God knows”

(11)

For fear lest the false teachers might claim that his reluctance of asking the Corinthians for his life necessities, while being present among them, and getting them from others, is because of a lack of love toward them, or of confidence in them; he confirms here his love for them, presenting God Himself a Witness for what he says.

“But what I do, I will also continue to do, that I may cut off the opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the things in which they boast” (12)

He justifies his resorting to others to get his necessities of life, by not wishing to give the opportunity to the false teachers in Corinth to boast of not seeking wages, while he – Paul – does; and so accusing him of being material and greedy.

4- THE DECEPTION OF THE PHALSE APOSTLES:

“For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ” (13)

The false teachers use every opportunity to corrupt the ministry, to distort the truth, and to raise doubt around the apostleship of Paul. They pretend not to seek wages for preaching, as being spiritual, to appear as apostles of the Lord Christ, and not deceptive. Yet, they will definitely appear as they actually are, deceitful workers; calling the name of Christ, and working diligently, while their teachings and their life is full of deception.

“And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light” (14)

No wonder that those liars practice the works of their father the liar and the deceitful, the devil, who transforms himself into an angel of light. He appeared to the first mother, Eve, as though to offer her a good counsel, and to enlighten her mind to know some knowledge new to her; leading her to disobedience.

The devil uses all kinds of deception: talks sometimes through a crafty serpent; and appears sometimes as a roaring lion, or as an angel of light, etc. All that to corrupt the spiritual life of the believer, and to deprive him of the blessings of salvation.

- + He invented all kinds of heresy and dissensions, to corrupt faith and truth, and to destroy unity; and in case he fails to keep us in such darkness, he draws us to a new maze of deception. He takes people away from the church; and when they think that they have approached the light, and got away from the night of this world, he covers them deep in a new darkness, of which they are unaware.

Although these false teachers do not abide to the gospel, or to the system and law of Christ, they claim to be in the light through the the deceptive schemes of the enemy, about whom the apostle says that he transforms himself to an angel of light, and adorns his ministers as ministers of righteousness.

They call the night day, death salvation, despair hope, treason faithfulness, antichrist Christ, and show the truth in a deceptive way.

This is how it happens, O brethren, when we do not go back to the fountain of the Truth; when we do not look up to the Head, and do not follow the teaching that comes from heaven,

(St. Cyprian)

St. Jerome gives us an interpretation of why the devil transforms himself as an angel of light. ... He says that, as the bride seeks her heavenly Groom “*at noon*” (Songs 1: 7), in the light of the perfect knowledge, and of the good works. ... the enemy transforms himself as heretics and false teachers, who appear as though shining with the light of knowledge, and who, through their false teachings, promise the kingdom of heaven, while presenting the deceptive light of the devil, and not the heavenly light of Christ.

- + Do you wish to find me? You will find me at noon, in the perfection of knowledge, in the good works, In the splendor of light. ... And as the noon is ours, the devil transforms himself as an angel of light, and pretends to have the light and the noon. ... When the heretics promise what they claim to be secrets, promise the kingdom of heaven, promise chastity, fasts, sanctity, and denial of the world, They are promising the “noon”; Yet as their “noon” is not the light of Christ, it is not Christ’s “noon”, but that of the devil.

(St. Jerome)

- + The angel of light, being close to God, talks freely; That is how the devil pretends to be an angel of light.

(St. John Chrysostom)

“Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their work” (15)

If the ministers of the devil, like him, transform themselves as ministers of righteousness, Yet that will not be for long, but only temporarily, and they will end up in vanity, just as their works are.

- + In his attempts to imitate the things concerning God; the devil sets false apostles to oppose the true ones; and transforms himself as an angel of light, to deceive men.

(Theodoret, Bishop of Cyrus)

- + He, who commends the virtue, yet at the same time, hides his shortcomings to give men a good impression about himself, is a liar, because he talks about virtue as though he has acquired it, or to condemn others. So are the evil heretics; Like the devil, they deceive the others, as the virtue in them is false and not genuine. It is written that the devil transforms himself as an angel of light; So no wonder that his ministers transform themselves in the likeness of the apostles of righteousness.

(St. Dorotheos)

- + There is nothing but the mercy of God that could save man from his wrong assumption, that the wicked angels are good angels; and that the false friends are true friends; and could save him from suffering the complete, deadly, and inexpressible destruction through the deception of the devil.

(St. Augustine)

5- PUTTING UP WITH THE FOOLISHNESS OF HIS BOASTING:

“I say again, let no one think me a fool, If otherwise, at least receive me as a fool, that I also may boast a little” (16)

Starting to talk in some detail about his own qualifications, attributes, and strife in ministry, he feared of being accused as a fool, or someone seeking his own glory.

“What I am saying in regard to this boastful confidence, I am saying, not with the Lord’s authority, but as a fool” (17)

What he is going to utter is not according to the Lord, who does not wish for us to boast what we do. Lest everyone might find in his words the motive to boast what he has accomplished, or the sufferings he endured for the sake of ministry; the apostle says to them that he does it as a fool, in an absolutely exceptional way to confirm his apostleship.

- + Do not tell me about what he wrote in his epistles; as what he kept inside him is more than what he said. He was reluctant to reveal everything inside him, for fear that he would be accused of boasting. Yet, at the same time, he did not keep silent about everything, lest that would encourage the tongues of the false apostles against himself.

He did nothing haphazardly; but everything with order and good planning. All his works with their diverse aspects were worthy of (worldly) commendation from all.

Let me say more about this. It is better indeed to refrain from self-commendation; Yet Paul did it in a way that he was commended for what he said more than if he chose to keep silent; ... For if he did, he would be worthy of criticism more than those who shamefully commend themselves.. If he chose not to boast of his works, he would have lost everything, and his enemies would have got stronger. He knew how to benefit from every opportunity; In a befitting way, he admitted his mistakes, and gained the glory of obeying the commandment.

Although he talked about himself, yet he did within the proper limits. He did not talk much about his good works, so as not to fall into self-esteem; yet he knew when and where to stop.

Paul gained glory by his boasting more than any other who hid his good works. He did not do that to satisfy himself; but called himself a fool, to keep the others from plunging in self-commendation for its own sake; having so did, only in the situations that warranted it.

(St. John Chrysostom)

“Seeing that many boast according to the flesh, I also will boast” (18)

By saying *“boast according to the flesh”*, he refers to the believers of Jewish origin who, according to the flesh, used to boast of being the children of Abraham. If many boast of temporal things, he could boast like them, but he prefers not to.

+ What are those temporal things of which Paul boasts? His birth, wisdom, and popularity; Yet, knowing well that nothing of them is of any true value, he called himself a fool.

(St. John Chrysostom)

“For you put up with fools gladly, since you yourselves are wise” (19)

Paul probably counted those false teachers who called for the necessity of practicing circumcision. Keeping the Sabbath, etc. as fools; having walked according to the flesh; those, whom the Corinthians have gladly put up with.

Here, he probably talked with sarcasm; as the Corinthians, claiming to be wise, saw Paul as a fool.... If they count themselves as wise; and the wise should put up with the foolishness and the weakness of others; Why have they not put up with the apostle Paul, whom they counted as a fool?!

“For you put up with it if one brings you into bondage, if one devours you, if one takes from you, if one exalts himself, if one strikes you on the face” (20)

Counting themselves as wise, and capable of putting up with the weak, they kept silent before the false teachers who brought them into bondage by their wrong teachings, despised them, corrupted their life, stroke them on the face, and disgraced them. Some believe that those false teachers were Jews who called for the necessity of literally keeping the law, concerning circumcision, keeping the Sabbath, the statutes of cleansing, etc. So they brought them into the bondage of the deadly letter, and devoured them; boasting of being the children of Abraham, the chosen people of God, who got the promises and the covenants, more exalted than all the other Christians of Gentile origin, whom they considered as dogs, not worthy of reaching the exalted level of the children of Israel.

6- HIS BOASTING ACCORDING TO THE FLESH:

*“To my shame, I must say, that we were too weak for that! But whatever anyone dares to boast of
– I am speaking as a fool -- I also dare to boast of that” (21)*

To rebuke, and not to boast, Paul had to proclaim that whatever those Jews boasted of, he, as well, could also boast; counting all those things not worthwhile to boast of, but

are actually objects of weakness, of which he has liberated himself to live with the spirit of strength.

+ That is a new kind of deception; As those who deceive usually give and flatter; while those false teachers deceive, take, and dishonor. You have no excuse; as on one aspect, you dishonor those who humiliate themselves for your sake, to let you boast; and on another aspect, you admire those who dishonor you. Although we could do likewise, Yet we do not intend to do, as we seek your benefit.

+ By that, Paul means that he could do all those things referred to, yet he does not. While the false teachers publicly boast of the Corinthians, and rob them in secret; It so seems that the people were not aware of that, being deceived.

(St. Chrysostom)

“Are they Hebrews? so am I. Are they Israelites? So am I! Are they the seed of Abraham? So am I!” (22)

Here the apostle Paul, to justify his talk, he says that he lacks nothing of what those false teachers who boast according to the flesh claim to have; By that he confirms that their accusations are all vain.

Concerning his birth, he is also **a Hebrew** like them; but he cherishes becoming a preacher in the church that does not discriminate according to race, as all have become the body of the One Christ. If they could talk Hebrew, and could read the Old Covenant in the language with which it was written, It is actually his own language, Yet he now talks the language of heaven.

If they are **Israelites**, counting themselves as the chosen people of God; He is, as well, an Israeli, of the seed of Jacob, and not of Esau, of the tribe of Benjamin, through his

father and his mother; Yet he now sees the new Israel, the true bride of Christ, that embraces all the nations, tongues, and peoples.

They may boast being **the seed of Abraham**, the children of circumcision, and the owners of the covenant. So be it! The apostle, as well, is of the seed of Abraham, has been circumcised on the eighth day after birth; and lived anticipating the enjoyment of the divine promises. But now, he is a son of God, practicing the works of his heavenly Father.

7- THE APOSTLE'S OUTER LABORS:

“Are they ministers of Christ? – I speak as a fool – I am more: In labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prison more frequently, in deaths often” (23)

After parading what they boasted of, concerning their birth, race, as Hebrews who have the right of the divine promises and the covenants; and had to proclaim the same merits like theirs; yet he sees them, not the object of strength and boasting, but they are rather objects of weaknesses. But, when they boast that they are ministers of Christ, he, being foolish, says that he is better; He is not a regular minister of Christ, as God, counting him faithful, called him to ministry.

- + Here, he most probably speaks, not about the false apostles, but about the true ones, who partook of the same dangers he went through; Comparing himself to them he says: *“Are the ministers of Christ? I am more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prison more frequently, in deaths often” (23).*

(St. John Chrysostom)

He surpasses them in the labors of apostleship; He cherishes the grace of God that guided him, and supported him to endure labors in his apostleship, more than them.

As a minister to the Gentiles, the Jews immensely hated him, and caused him troubles and persecutions, more than what the other apostles endured. Whenever there was a chance to oppose him, they did their best to torture him, and even tried to kill him.

Concerning **labors**, he was a frequent traveler from one country to another, and from a province to another; and had to set forth to preach in other countries under the pressure of the Jews, who were persistent on killing him. Yet he felt the hand of God turning those troubles to a more extension of the preaching, and to establish the kingdom of light, instead of the darkness in several places.

Concerning **stripes**, he had more from the heathens who, being governed by no law in punishment, struck him mercilessly beyond the limits recognized by civilized nations.

Concerning **prisons**, his history had plenty of them; he was imprisoned more than two years in Rome (Acts 28); But nobody heard of a false apostle who was ever put in prison!

In **deaths** often; He expected death every day because the persecutions he encountered.

+ Nobody else has been granted such a great love of the Lord like that blessed spirit. He seemed as though liberated of the body; His longing and flaming love for God, has lifted his mind up from material things to spiritual ones; from the present to the future; and from the things seen to the things unseen. That is what faith brings forth; love for God above anything else.

Although he was continuously chased, persecuted, and under punishment and sufferings without limits; Yet he rejoiced, being convinced that the labors of the present life is nothing but a chance to gain a greater reward; and that risks are the sources of crowns.

If Jacob, motivated by his immense love for Rachel, counted seven years of hard work as few days; How much more would the blessed Paul, count all his labors as nothing; and endure everything for the sake of his love for the Lord Christ?!

I beg you, O brethren. Care for loving Christ, who asks you for nothing, but to love Him from all your hearts, and to keep his commandments, as He said in the Holy Book.

- + In the Holy Book, we find an admiration for Jacob the son of Isaac (Genesis 32); But, who among men, could have a stronger endurance than Paul, who endured bondage, not for 14 years like Jacob (Genesis 29: 18, 27), but all his life long for the sake of the church, the bride of Christ. He endured, not just the heat of the day and the bitter cold of the night, but storms of temptations, scourging, stoning, confrontation of fierce beasts, dangers in the sea, fasting, nakedness, and dangers everywhere (2 Corinthians 11: 23); to be able to snatch the lambs from the fangs of the devil.

“From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one” (24)

The Jews were governed by the law that allows only for forty stripes (Deuteronomy 25: 3). And lest they might break the law by miscounting, they usually struck the condemned 39 stripes. And according to the ‘Meshnah’, if someone is in no physical condition to endure the 40 stripes, he only gets 18 stripes, and is counted as having fulfilled the full load of punishment. The one to be scourged, had his hands are tied to a pillar; his clothes taken off or torn off his chest and back by an officer of the synagogue, who holds a whip of leather of three branches; and strikes with all his might: one third of the stripes on the back, one third on the right shoulder, and one third on the chest. It was not

allowed to use such punishment on the same person more than once in his lifetime; except for the worst kinds of criminals.

- + See how he does not boast anywhere of performing signs and wonders, but of his persecutions and temptations.... Everywhere we find him disturbed by what dwelt upon him from his own and from strangers. This is an apostolic personality; And by his like the gospel is woven.

(St. John Chrysostom)

*“Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day
I have been in the deep” (25)*

In Philippi he was beaten with rods according to the Roman law (Acts 16: 22); which was repeated twice in other regions. He was stoned in Lystra (Acts 14: 19). He was shipwrecked (Acts 27). He has been in the deep, namely in a dungeon in the inner prison, where he spent days and nights.

- + We admire Isaac for many things, particularly for his perseverance: He dug wells (Genesis 26:18); and allowed his enemies to fill them with dirt; and when he was deprived of his possessions, he did not fight back. He was moving along all the time; and did not gather his men against his enemies, but departed leaving his possessions behind him, for his enemies.

Paul, on the other hand, when he saw, not his wells filled with dirt, but his body stoned, he did not depart from his place like Isaac, but chased his tormentors and strove to bring them over to heaven. The more sufferings he encountered, the more enduring he became.

“In Journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren” (26)

“In journeys often”, Here he refers to his journeys for the sake of preaching, and care for the churches.

“In perils of waters”, which came in Greek (potamoon), namely rivers. According to Ambrosiaster, the apostle was always in perils of pouring rain in winter, and of flooding rivers.

“In perils of robbers”, He was often attacked by robbers on the highways, and being poor and having no worthwhile possessions to rob, he was not harmed; Yet he was always in serious danger.

In perils of my own countrymen”, The Jews, considering him as an apostate of the Jewish faith, and an opponent of the Mosaic law; plotted to have him killed (Acts 23: 12).

“In perils of the Gentiles”, to whom he set forth to preach.

“In perils in the city”, He confronted several riots against him in several cities, particularly in Jerusalem, Ephesus, and Damascus.

‘In perils in the wilderness’, through which he had to pass during his journeys from one city to another; confronting robbers, wild beasts, beside the severe weather during the day and the night; and probably hunger and thirst as well.

“In perils in the sea”, confronting pirates, fierce storms; shipwreck, when the soldiers intended to kill all the prisoners on board, including him, lest they might escape if allowed to swim to safety (Acts 27: 42-44).

“In perils among false brethren”, Those who pretended to believe in Christ, and joined the church to destroy it from within; and to find an excuse to stir the congregation against the apostle Paul, as it happened in Corinth. He suffered as well from the apostates.

- + Everyone admires the righteous ‘Job’, and he is worthy of admiration; having fought a great battle, and might be compared to Paul in his perseverance, purity of life, testimony to God, courageous struggle against the devil, and his final conquest. Yet, as far as Paul is concerned, his struggle went on, not for a few months, but for several years. He persisted on casting himself into the mouth of the lion, and on wrestling temptations without limit, proving that he is more solid than a rock. He was cursed, not just by three or four of his close friends, but by a multitude of false brethren; was slandered, reviled, and spat on.

- + His immense zeal kept him from feeling the pains accompanying his life in virtue; and had no ulterior hidden motives behind seeking it. We may fail to endure sufferings for the sake of virtue, even if we are shown the reward beforehand; But Paul embraced the sufferings free and with love, and endured with joy all the difficulties and obstacles along the way to virtue. He never complained because of the weakness of the body, the pressures of responsibility, the heavy hand of popular customs, or anything else.

Although his responsibilities surpassed those of rulers and kings, yet his virtue grew day after day; The more dangers he confronted, the more his zeal got enflamed; He says: *“One thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forward to those things which are ahead”* (Philippians 3: 13).

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + Some acquire the responsibilities of shepherding, to have the honor and blessing of taking care of the flock of Christ; But others occupy this position to enjoy the temporal honors and worldly benefits that come with it. Both kinds of shepherds are there by the nature of things, in the catholic church, and will continue to be until the end of time, and the great day of judgment of the Lord.

Although many such persons were there at the apostolic era, by whose behavior the apostle Paul suffered, and whom he counted among the temptations that dwelt upon him; Yet, he never treated them with arrogance or haughtiness, but endured them with longsuffering. How much more will we find in our time, which is closer to the ultimate end, about which the Lord Christ says: *“Because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold”* (Matthew 24: 12-13). Yet we are comforted by the words to follow: *“But he who endures to the end shall be saved”*.

- + Despite the multitude of complaints that the apostle proclaimed against the false apostles, he was never defiled by their physical company, but separated himself from them through the purity of his heart.

(St. Augustine)

According to St. Augustine, the apostle Paul, in dealing with the false apostles, used wisdom together with eloquence; although he says: *“I speak foolishly”* (17); Wisdom was his guide, while eloquence was his companion; he followed the former, and was followed by the later.

8- HIS LABORS BY HIS OWN CHOICE:

“In weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fasting often, in cold and nakedness” (27)

Troubles were his persistent companion wherever he went. The apostle spent several sleepless nights, whether by choice, praying for the sake of the ministry, preaching and teaching; or against his will while persecuted.

It was not easy for someone of the caliber of the apostle Paul, who used to be highly esteemed as a zealous Jewish leader, with authority, capabilities, culture, and knowledge, which he cherished; and being of a family of high social position; It was not easy for such a man to suffer so much trouble toil, sleeplessness, hunger, thirst, cold, and nakedness.

- + You may say that John the Baptist fed on locusts and wild honey (Matthew 3: 4). Yet Paul, although he lived in the world, not in the wilderness, and did not eat locusts and wild honey, yet he was content with a simple, ascetic kind of table, disregarding the necessities for the sake of his zeal for preaching.

(St. John Chrysostom)

9- HIS DEEP CONCERN FOR ALL THE CHURCHES:

“besides the other things, what comes upon me daily, my deep concern for all the churches” (28)

Beside his suffering on the outside, he put upon himself to share with his Christ, His cross, by being concerned for all the churches he preached; whether for the spiritual, behavioral, dogmatic, and the management aspects; beside the material problems and the afflictions he had to confront. As a father, he had to endure all what dwell upon his children.

- + You probably say that 'Job' suffered acute unbearable pain caused by the worms and the wounds that inflicted his body. That is true, But we have to take into consideration the impact of the multitude of stripes endured by Paul along the years, of the continuous fasting, nakedness, chains, imprisonment, risks and dangers on a daily basis; beside the plots planned against him by his own countrymen, and the tyrants on the outside, all over the world.

We may add to all that his bitter experience; namely, his sufferings for the sake of the fallen; his concerns for all the churches; and the slanders he endured with courage and solidity, that surpassed that of iron and unbreakable rock; If we add all that up, we shall find that Paul has endured, spiritually, what "Job" endured physically. Yes, he endured grief more bitter and painful than any worms, for the sake of the fallen.

Fountains of tears were flowing from his eyes day and night for the sake of every soul, more painful than the pangs of a woman in labor; that made him say: "*My little children, for whom I labor in birth*" (Galatians 4: 19).

(St. John Chrysostom)

10- HIS FELLOWSHIP WITH THOSE WHO SUFFER:

"Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation" (29)

He finds pleasure to partake of the labors of his children; commiserates with every persecuted church; moans together with the moans of every believer; and feel bitterness with the weakness of everyone in sin. Who becomes weak in his faith, and the apostle does not feel as though he himself is the weak party? And who is made to stumble, and the apostle's heart does not burn by the fire of love; and hold him fast

in a living and practical faith?

- + How could we compare Paul, who moans on a daily basis, for the sake of every man in this world; for the sake of every race and city; for the sake of every soul? He whose will was more solid than iron, and harder than steel? Where can we find the words to describe such a blessed spirit?!

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + We should count the captivity of our brethren as our own captivity; and the sorrows of those in danger as our own sorrows. We have to believe that there is one body for our unity. Not only our love, but also our religion, should motivate and encourage us to save the members of our own family.

(St. Cyprian)

- + Paul does not pretend to bear their weaknesses, but he actually commiserates with them.

(St. Augustine)

- + What an amazing feeling in such a shepherd! When someone falls he says: 'I am immensely grieved'. And when someone is made to stumble, he says: 'The fires of my sufferings are torturing me'!

I wish all those entrusted with shepherding a reasonable flock, follow his example; I wish they show that they are not less caring than the shepherd who cares for an unreasonable flock. In case of the unreasonable flock, not much harm would be caused by probable slothfulness; Whereas in our case, as shepherds of a reasonable flock, the harm done by the perdition of a single lamb, would be very serious indeed; and the punishment would be horrible and unutterable, As for the

sake of this single lamb, the Lord shed His precious blood; So what would be our excuse for allowing ourselves to be slothful in caring for the one for whom the Lord Himself cared?!

(St. John Chrysostom)

“If I must boast, I will boast in the things which concern my weaknesses” (30)

The apostle does not boast in his natural abilities, nor in the gifts given to him by God, as all these would not justify him or grant him a crown on the great day of the Lord, but he boasts in what God granted him of endurance of the persecutions and afflictions for the sake of preaching the gospel, and faith in Christ.

By the weaknesses here he does not mean falling into some sin, as that would not be a subject of boasting, but he means the afflictions and labors.

11- HIS ESCAPE FROM DAMASCUS:

“The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying” (31)

The apostle confirms what he says here by the testimony of God the Father, that he is not lying, particularly in his fellowship with the weak and the suffering; things to which no one except the One who searches the hearts and mind, could testify. The apostle Paul had previously used the same vow or divine testimony in 2 Corinthians 11: 10; Romans 9: 5; Galatians 1: 2. Here, he does not use God’s name in vain,

but resort to His testimony for the sake of the salvation of his brethren and the peace of the church. He seeks, not what is for his own, but what is for the others in the Lord. St Augustine dealt with this issue of 'Not vowing' in his work 'The sermon on the Mount'.

“In Damascus, the governor, under Aretas the king, was guarding the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desiring to apprehend me” (32)

At the start of the ministry of the apostle Paul, the governor of Damascus, having seen that the Jews have planned to kill Paul, intended to arrest him, on one aspect to please the Jews, and on another aspect to show off that he practices his work in a perfect way.

+ One may ask: Where was the divine power accompanying the apostle during that event?

Everything happens according to the will of God; In certain situations, the apostles were allowed to perform signs and miracles; And in other situations they looked helpless; which caused some to stumble; So as to demonstrate the difference between the believers and the unbelievers; and to test the free will. If the apostles were allowed to do whatever they desired in all things, they would have brought men to God by force; and the matter would not be then, an issue of faith or non-faith. But Christianity, as it is written, is *“a stumbling stone, and a rock of offense”* (Romans 9: 33).

“But I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and escaped from his hands” (33)

Although the apostle Paul escaped from the hands of the governor of Damascus by human hands, let down in a basket through a window in

the city wall, yet, having put his life in God's hands, he counted what happened to be through the care of God. Leaning upon God does not mean the rejection of human help, but the rejection of leaning upon human hand.

The apostle Paul was not ashamed to mention that he was let down in a basket; having been a way to save him, not out of fear of death, but to resume his preaching mission.

In the last two verses, the apostle Paul referred to that particular episode, as though he forgot to mention it when he made a list of his sufferings; probably because the work of God is very obvious in saving him from the hands of King 'Aretas', or because that was the first persecution he encountered.

Some wonder how could Damascus be reigned by an Arab king! The apostle refers here to king 'Aretas', the father-in-law of 'Herod Antipas'. When 'Aretas' made war against 'Herod' who divorced his daughter to marry 'Herodea', his brother's wife', Herod resorted to Emperor 'Tibrius', who sent 'Vitellius' the great commander to bring 'Aretas' dead or alive to Rome. For some reason or another, because 'Vitellius' was late in coming, and in the meantime 'Tibrius' died, 'Aretas' got away and seized Damascus.

It so seem that Paul's enemies sought from the king to put him under arrest, claiming that he is a spy working to the account of the Romans. And counted his escape as an escape from the cross.

+ Having been let down in a basket, to escape from Aretas' hands, the apostle Paul has not forsaken the church in Damascus, but to have the chance to resume his mission somewhere else. He acted that way heading the counsel of his congregation, particularly because he was the only one wanted by the persecutors.

I wish the minister of Christ, of the Word, and the sacraments, does according to what God commands or allows. I wish he, by all possible means, escape from the city, in case he is the only one sought by the persecutors, and the rest of the congregation are not. ... But in case the danger is on all, namely, on the shepherds, as well as on the congregation; either all of them resort to a secure refuge; or, if they choose rather to stay put, the leaders should never forsake their herds, whom they provide with their spiritual needs. ... So all would equally live or die according to the will of the Lord.

(St. Augustine)

AN INSPIRATION FROM 2 CORINTHIANS 11

YOUR CHURCH IS OUR PRODUCTIVE MOTHER A CHASTE VIRGIN FOR YOU, O HEAVENLY GROOM

- + Grant my soul to be a chaste virgin for You;
You set a secret place for her heavenly wedding;
Make her an icon of You;
To be qualified for the fellowship of Your glory;
Lift her up to Your heaven;
To draw many others together with her.
She will never have rest until she, if possible, sees all humanity for You.
Grant Your church, our New mother, to exult every day by unceasing new births.
Protect her against the tricks of the ancient serpent;
Who corrupted the virginity of the heart of our early mother Eve.

- + Grant me, together with the apostle Paul, to testify to Your gospel;

That You delivered to Your bride, to prepare her for Yourself;
Yes, to renew humanity along the generations.

It is the book of every era;

The book of every man;

It is the new resurrected life;

It bears all generations to beyond the time.

+ Grant me to testify to Your gospel together with the apostle Paul.
Not by eloquence and shining words;
But by the spirit of true love and power

+ Grant me, together with the apostle Paul, to seek nothing;
In preaching Your gospel;
As there is no reward greater than the salvation of my brethren;
My reward is to see You transfigure in every heart.
My reward is for all to enjoy the knowledge of Your divine secrets.

+ Protect me together with them against the devil;
That deceiver who persist on deception;
He who transforms himself as an angel of light;
When he is the ruler of the hosts of darkness;
In every generation he sends his false apostles and teachers;
Who bear the appearance of piety, righteousness, and knowledge;
To deceive the simple, like their evil father;

What can I say, about the strife of the great among the apostles?

He, who lived to endure death on a daily basis.

He, who, unceasing persecutions gave him pleasure;

He, who lived, as though without a body;

Yes indeed, Who could be like him?!

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CHAPTER 12

THE DIVINE REVELATIONS AND THE MINISTRY

To establish his apostleship, Paul speaks about the divine revelations that he enjoyed; of which he confirms that it is not profitable for him to boast; as God allowed for him to have a temptation in his body, lest he should be exalted above measure by the abundance of revelations. What he truly boasts is the possibility granted to him by God to endure the temptations and the afflictions for the sake of the Lord; beside his exalted love for his people as his own children. Finally, he seeks from them to get prepared by the holy life, so that he would rejoice when he comes to them.

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1- THE DIVINE VISIONS AND REVELATIONS:

“It is doubtless not profitable for me to boast. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord” (1)

The divine revelations were among the blessings granted to the apostle Paul. He was caught up to the third heaven. But, although by the spirit of humility, he considers it unprofitable to speak about God's revelations to him, yet he was committed to do it for the sake of the edification of the ministry.

“I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago – whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows – such a one was caught to the third heaven” (2)

Speaking about himself, the apostle says: *“I know a man in Christ”*, who enjoyed a special vision fourteen years ago. Some believe that that vision was realized as he fell down to the ground, and remained blind for three days (See Acts 9); Whereas others believe that it was realized when he was stoned in Lystra; And still others believe that, as this epistle was written in the year 57 AD, this vision has to be in about the year 42 or 43 AD, when Barnabas brought Paul along from Tarsus to Antioch (Acts 11: 25-26); then they were both dispatched by the church of Antioch, carrying the gifts to the poor of Jerusalem (Acts 24: 18); Or he could have seen that vision while in Jerusalem to support him amid the troubles that dwelt upon him. Anyway, the apostle kept silent about this vision for as long as 14 years, and never revealed it to anyone; and could have stayed that way among other visions that were not revealed by him.

+ The apostle reveals that he saw that vision 14 years ago, and he would have not revealed it, if they did not commit him to do. Yet, we notice that there were things in it that were unknown. He knows for sure that he was caught up to the third heaven; but whether in the body or out of the body; he does not know.

Why did God allow it to happen to him? Most probably, to let him know that he is not less than the other apostles who were all with Christ when He was in the body on earth.

(St. John Chrysostom)

“Whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows”. The apostle was in a state of confusion; He could not comprehend the condition he was in; and was not preoccupied by that.

“Such a one was caught up to the third heaven” He knew that he was caught up to the third heaven, but how, or in what way, he does not know. By the *“third heaven”* he probably means what is beyond the first heaven where birds fly, and the second heaven, where the celestial bodies are.

The Jews used to believe in the existence of seven heavens. And in the Old Testament we read about *“the heaven of heavens”*, which is most probably *“the third heaven”*, where the divine throne is, and the dwelling place of the saints together with the heavenly creatures in the eternal life. While some, like Ambrosiaster believe that St. Paul was caught up twice: once to the third heaven, and a second time to paradise, to which the right hand robber was taken after confessing the Lordship of Christ.

- + Although God allows for some of those who faithfully pray, to get out of themselves, then restores them to their natures, after enriching them by heaven in a secret way; Yet, even in such cases, through meditating in the depths of their souls and bodies, God would grant them things which are exalted over nature, secret, and incomprehensible to the most wise in this world.

(Father Gregory Palamas)

“And I know such a man – whether in the body or out of the body, I do not know, God knows” (3)

- + If we put those miracles aside, and deal with the life of this blessed saint, and enjoy his angelic talk; we shall find this hero victoriously shining in his behavior much more than in his miracles.

+ Let us meditate in what Paul enjoyed of graces and gifts: He was caught up to paradise, to the third heaven, and enjoyed the fellowship of inexpressible secrets; of which he was worthy.

He wandered all over the earth, as though accompanied by angels; and despite the traps of his mortal body, it was angelic in its purity; and despite the weakness of his human nature, he strived to be as angelic as the high hosts. His behavior in the world was as though flying on the wings of a bird, and like an incorruptible being.

He despised all difficulties and dangers. He despised everything on this earth, as though he possessed heaven; as someone who experienced an eternal vision, and lived among angels in heaven.

The task of the angels is to guard and to minister to humans; but none of them could cover all the needs of every single one of them, like what Paul did on earth.

+ Yet, the apostle who could raise the dead, was not able to heal his own disciple (1 Timothy 5: 23), left him to get purified in the crucible of disease, and to get enriched through pain by new guarantees to gain heaven; he taught his disciple what he, himself, heard and learned from his divine Teacher.

As to Paul himself, although he was not inflicted with a chronic disease, yet the multitude of perpetual afflictions he confronted were not less painful than any disease. For a thorn in his flesh, he pleaded with the Lord several times that it might depart from him (8), and when he saw that his pleas were not well received; and realized that in his sufferings there were much benefits to him, he settled down, got peace in heart, and joy for having pains.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + When could you say for sure: "This is God?". Even in the days to come, when you will have the great privilege to behold Him face to face, You will not be able to describe Him. According to the apostle, "*he was caught up into the third heaven and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter*". If the words are inexpressible, how about Him who uttered such words?

(St. Augustine)

"How he was caught up into paradise and heard inexpressible words which is not lawful for a man to utter" (4)

The Jews believe that there are at least four paradises beside the seven heavens. Is paradise the same as the third heaven, or are they different? ... Does the apostle talk about two "catching-ups?", one to paradise, and another to the third heaven? Or are they one vision, and a catching-up to one and the same place?

The Garden of Eden was called 'paradise' in Revelation 2: 7; Now, 'the third heaven', the place where the departed saints will wait for the great day of the Lord, is called 'paradise'; a place where the Lord Christ will bring us back, not on this earth but up there in the third heaven, where an inexpressible language is heard, , and it is unlawful for man with his mortal body to utter. There, the apostle heard heavenly talks, that he could not utter in any human language, nor by a human tongue.

- + That revelation is indeed great ... Were the mind and the soul caught up, while the body remained like dead on earth? Or was the body caught up as well? It is impossible to tell. ... If the apostle Paul who was himself caught up, and who experienced such amazing things, does not know, What about us?.... He was for sure in paradise, that he well knows; and he was in the third heaven, that he knows as well; Yet how was it realized, that he does not know!

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + The apostle, who was chosen, not by men, but by the Lord Christ Himself, to become a teacher of the Gentiles, to explain the secrets of the divine ordinances, as much as he could manage by the human language; He, who was caught up into the third heaven, and heard inexpressible and unutterable word; admits that there are things he did not understand when he heard them, and that the human weakness needs time to refer them to the mind to contemplate and try to decipher, a process much longer than hearing by the ears. Here, there is the need of the help of God to proclaim the true meaning to those who seek, a gift that is given as a reward for faith. Through faith the weakness of the sense is rewarded by the gift of revelation.

(St. Hilary, Bishop of Poitiers)

- + Every knowledge concerning the ineffable nature of God, even if it reveals the best and most exalted concept possible, would be like gold, yet not gold itself; as that is actually something that surpasses the range of ability of the human brain to understand. Even though someone like St. Paul might have got the chance to see the secrets of paradise, and to hear inexpressible word (4); yet any further knowledge of God remains unutterable. According to him, such concepts are immeasurable. And those who present to us any good thoughts about these secrets, have all proclaimed that they are, in truth, unable to describe the divine nature.

(St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa)

- + All the words he heard , he heard from the King Himself. ... Did he hear them in the divine secret place, or just outside it? I believe that those words were intended to encourage him to proclaim them later on; Or to prepare him, in case

he perseveres till the end, to become eligible to enter into the secret place of the King, according to His promise on the tongue of the prophet, saying: "*I will give you the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, that you may know that I am the Lord, who call you by the name, Am the God of Israel*" (Isaiah 45: 3).

(The scholar Origen)

- + Let us take away from ourselves the vain pride, and enjoy learning knowledge from anyone; ... And I wish that he who teaches others, would present what he was taught without haughtiness or arrogance. ... I wish we do not tempt Him, in whom we believe; lest we may fall into the nets of the enemy! ... I wish we would not foolishly refrain from going to the church to listen to the gospel; from reading a book, or listening to the reading or preaching of someone; in the vain hope that we would be eventually caught up to the third heaven like Paul; or that he would listen to the gospel from the divine lips, and not from human lips!

Let us beware of such temptations brought forth by vain pride; and Let us realize that the blessed Paul himself, who, even though fell down to the ground, and heard the divine voice from heaven; was sent to another man to receive the holy sacraments, and to join the church (see Acts 9: 10). And Cornelius the centurion, even though got the good news by an angel, that his prayers and alms were well received; yet he was delivered to the apostle Peter to give him the holy sacraments, and to learn from him the things befitting of faith, hope, and love (see Acts 10).

All these things could have been delivered by angels; yet, it would be an insult to our race as humans, if men are not used by God as tools to minister to His word to their fellow men.... How could what is written, that: "*The temple of God is sacred, that is you*" be true, if God does not present His teachings through His

human temple; and if He presents everything He intends to tell men by voices from heaven and through angels?!

(St. Augustine)

- + I believe that Paul was not as happy when he was caught up into paradise, as he was when he was cast into an underground prison cell. Or when he heard inexpressible words, as he was put in chains; Or when he was caught up into the third heaven, as he was bound in those shackles. He, himself testified to that when he did not say: 'I Paul who heard unutterable words, I seek from you ...', But said: "*I, Paul, the prisoner of the Lord*", seek from you ..." (Ephesians 4: 1).

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + We also notice how Paul, who entered into the secrets of paradise, who saw the wonders beyond heavens, and things that are unutterable by man; did not tell us what he saw with simple and direct understandable terms. Having crossed over to that exalted angelic world, he refrained from revealing it, or from bringing that exalted world down to the level of the world creation.

(St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa)

- + He enjoyed seeing the beautiful dances of the saints, and hearing their harmonious voice of praise.

(Theodor, Bishop of Messissa)

- + If even the angels with their simple and spiritual nature, are said to have tongues by which they praise their God and Creator, and by which they unceasingly give Him thanks, how much more would the glorified spiritual bodies of men, after the resurrection, utter divine praise flowing of words of their love and joy?

(St. Augustine)

2- NOT BOASTING OF THE VISIONS HE ENJOYED:

“Of such a one I will boast, yet of myself I will not boast, except in my weaknesses” (5)

In his humility the apostle Paul does not refer to himself as the one who enjoyed that vision, although what he mentioned could not apply to anyone else. ... Who could enjoy such revelations, would not boast of them, and keep silent for as long as fourteen years?!

- + It is obvious that Paul was speaking about himself, but he means to say that he is not preoccupied by them, and would rather not reveal them altogether.

(St. John Chrysostom)

“But if I wish to boast, I will not be a fool, for I will be speaking the truth. But I refrain from it, lest anyone should think of me above what he sees me to be or hears from me” (6)

Although it is his right to boast of what he got from God, and would not be counted as fool, for he would be speaking the truth; yet he kept silent all those years, lest anyone would honor him or think of him above what he really is. Enjoying the spirit of discernment, the apostle knows when to speak and when to keep silent. He kept silent all those years, so as not to be honored; and he spoke so that his apostolic work would not be destroyed.

- + Someone who tells about things that truly happened to him, would not be counted as a fool; Although, if he chooses to keep silent

about them, he would be counted as wise.

(Ambrosiaster)

- + What draws attention here, is that he did not mention everything when the situation required him to speak, but managed to conceal the greatest part of them: "*When I come to visions and revelations of the Lord, I refrain ... lest anyone should think of me above what he sees me to be or hears from me*" (1, 6). These words teach us not to reveal everything about ourselves, even if we have to talk, but only what would edify our listener. ... Talking too much would rather reveal vain pride

His apostleship being denied; the situation required from the apostle Paul to present proofs of the authenticity of his apostleship, and of his true stature. Yet his talk did not reveal any vain pride or boasting:

- 1- It is obvious that he did it when the situation required.
- 2- He called himself a fool and many similar things.
- 3- He did not reveal everything, but concealed the greater part.
- 4- He concealed his person, saying "*I know a man ...*"
- 5- He did not show all his virtues, but just what the situation required.

(St. John Chrysostom)

3- A THORN IN THE FLESH:

"And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given in me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure" (7)

If the apostle was keen on keeping his humility, and did not refer to his vision for fourteen years, God was keen as well on keeping his minister humble, by allowing for him to have a thorn in the flesh, which made him always feel the weakness of his body.

What was the nature of that thorn in the flesh?

According to the scholar Tertullian, it was pain in the ear; To St. John Chrysostom, a headache; To Cyprian the martyr, many serious body ailments; And still to others, it was the insults directed against him concerning his ability to talk; interpreting "*the messenger of Satan*", as a 'false messenger or apostle'. The way the Lord Christ sent Paul as an apostle of the truth; Satan, as well, sent an apostle adversary to the truth, to provoke the spirit of lying, and to transform the church of Christ into an assembly of Satan.

+ Some believe that it could not be some kind of ailment inflicted by Satan, as Paul's body would never be delivered to Satan, who, on the contrary submitted to Paul.

Saying "*a messenger of Satan*", he means all the adversaries of the Word who wrestled and warred against Paul, who cast him in prison, and have beaten him to death ... they practiced the work of Satan ... ;That is why he says: "*a thorn in the flesh was given in me, lest I be exalted above measure*"; Not that God put weapons in the hands of those people; Nor that it was meant as a kind of chastisement or punishment by God, when he allowed them to do what they did.

+ Although he suffered pain when he was beaten, yet he despised the pain like angels who feel no pain; That we clearly see in his words that could be applied to our own nature: saying: "*by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world*" (Galatians 6: 14); and: "*It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me*" (Galatians 2: 20); and: "*A thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure*" (2 Corinthians 12: 7); which is a proof that pain is only inflicted on the body.

It does not mean that it does not touch the inside, but is rejected by the more exalted power of the will. And when he utters such magnificent words, like finding pleasure in being beaten and scourged, and glory in his chains, he then adds: “*I discipline my body and bring it into submission, lest when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified*” (1 Corinthians 9: 27); in which he talks about the weakness of nature, yet the exaltation of will, in the way previously mentioned.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + Some claim that it was a kind of headache that inflicted the apostle, but I believe he actually refers to the persecutions he endured by the Satanic hosts.

(Severian, Bishop of Gebalah)

- + By saying “*a messenger of Satan*”, Paul refers to the reviles, slanders, and the riots he endured.

(Theodoret, Bishop of Cyrus)

If the true believers profit even from the temptations provoked by Satan against them,
Will Satan be credited for it?

- + On the contrary, Satan is nothing but evil; But the good and Almighty God draws good things out of his craftiness. As for Satan himself, he may be credited for what is according to his will, by which he attempts to do evil; and not what is according to the care of God that draws good from it.

(St. Augustine)

“Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me” (8)

It is obvious from this by pleading with the Lord to take this temptation away from him, that the apostle Paul believes in the deity of Christ, and in praying to Him.

Pleading three times with the Lord, he followed the lead of the lord Christ who pleaded with the Father three times to let the cup of passion pass from Him (Matthew 16: 39-44); and gives us an example of resorting to prayers at the times of affliction, even if it is intended for the sake of our own spiritual good and edification; then leave the whole thing in the hands of God, who cares for our salvation.

- + In such temptations in which we are either blessed or perish, “we do not know what we pray for”; Yet, being painful and cruel, and challenging our human weakness, we, by a human will, pray to God to take them away from us. But that needs a complete dedication to our lord God; namely, if He choose not to take those temptations away, we should not assume that He deserted us, but rather by enduring evil with love, we hope for a greater good, and the *“strength is made perfect in weakness”*. As to those who lack perseverance, God, in his anger, would probably grant them their request; when He, on another aspect, with His mercy, denied the apostle Paul his.

(St. Augustine)

- + When we are attacked by weakness, sickness, and grief, then our strength will be made perfect; and our faith will be crowned if we confront the temptation with steadfastness ... Finally, this is the difference between us and the others who, because they do not know God, they keep on complaining and grumbling during

temptations, while we, on the other hand, temptations would never move us away from virtue and faith, but would rather justify us amid our sufferings.

(St. Cyprian)

- + If his supplications were granted, what would warrant being given a reward? Would it be preaching without labor, living smoothly, and having everything he asks for? Would it be for just opening his mouth and moving his tongue, while at ease in his own home? Anyone can do that while sitting comfortably at his desk, and living smoothly and slothfully. ... What would warrant and guarantee the great rewards and the splendid crowns are what he enumerated in that long list of labors, deaths, travels on land and in seas, horrors, tears, and sorrows; of which we quote him saying: *“For three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears”* (Acts 20: 31).

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + It is also a sign of humility, that he did not hide his inability to endure those terrible plots, for which he was in such state of discouragement and disturbance, to plead with the Lord that it might depart from him.

(St. John Chrysostom)

“And he said to me: ‘My strength is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness’. Therefore

most gladly I will rather boast in my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me” (9)

- + The apostle realized that what dwelt upon his body of weaknesses, was not something natural, nor without a goal; but God allowed it for a more exalted goal.

(Theodoret, Bishop of Cyrus)

- + Such a kind of humility would certainly take weakness away.

(St. Ambrose)

It is God who allowed for him to go through temptations, Yet, together with them he gives him grace that supports him, and his enemies would not be able to destroy him. The more violent the temptation is, the more the strength of Christ would transfigure in him, and the more God would be glorified in him.

“That the power of Christ may rest upon me”. Rest upon me (Episkeenoosee), namely, may shadow me like a tent, like the tabernacle of meeting, where I may enjoy the dwelling of Christ with me, and find protection and rest in Him; the same expression we read in John 1: 14, saying: *“And dwelt among us ... full of grace and truth”*.

The Lord Christ promised to dwell in him, to grant him strength, and to give him grace and truth; By which he would feel sufficiency, would be granted protection, honor, and glory, and would not lack anything. He did not promise to take the temptation away from him, but to grant him His grace that would bring him rest, security, and glory; when he enjoys a holy will in harmony with the will of Christ; that would bring him forth into the enlightenment, and the realization of God's plan for him; and would grant him, as well, divine possibilities working in him, to reach perfection in Christ Jesus.

- + God informed Paul that it is sufficient for him to be able to raise the dead, heal the blind,, purify the leper, and perform more wonders. He is in not in need to be

exempted of danger and fears; nor to consummate the preaching without confronting any kind of obstacles. Indeed, once those troubles dwelt, the power of God for salvation appeared, and the gospel conquered, despite the persecutions. The more troubles increased, the more grace abounded.

- + Writing: "*Most gladly, I would rather boast in my weaknesses*" (9) ... is in itself, a proof of the greatness of those chains in his own sight.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + Endurance is something, and pleasure is a completely different thing. Man may endure the attacks of temptations, yet in pain and anguish; But he who loudly proclaim his pleasure in them, would be like the blessed Paul, the greatest interpreter of the holy eloquence, who says: "*I take pleasure in weaknesses, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake*" (10). He does not say: "I bear, or I endure", but says "*I take pleasure*", which refers to the greatness of his gladness. And he also says in another situation: "*I rejoice in my sufferings for the sake of Christ*".

(Theodoret, Bishop of Cyrus)

4- BOASTING OF HIS WEAKNESSES:

"Therefore I take pleasure in weaknesses, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distress, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (10)

If the Lord Christ on His side, does not take away the temptation, but grants the apostle His grace that supports him, God would be glorified in him, and he would be brought forth to the way of perfection; The apostle, on his side, takes pleasure in all the afflictions that dwell upon him, as long as they are for the sake of Christ. He might not

be a strong man, yet *when he is weak, then by the Lord Christ he is strong*", He does not only endure the temptations with perseverance, but with pleasure and the gladness of heart.

- + Unless the body dies, the spirit could not live ...
Applying this to every man, he would truly realize how, whenever he becomes weak and frail through fasting, his soul would be filled with zeal, and his thoughts would be completely absorbed in God; to be able to say once and several times: "How lovely is Your tabernacle, O Lord of hosts!" (Psalm 84:1).
- + The apostle Paul was not glorified in his strength, but in his weakness, saying: "*For when I am weak, then I am strong*" (10).

(St. Jerome)

- + When he got close to death, he called everyone to partake of his joy, saying: "*For the same reason you also be glad and rejoice with me*" (Philippians 2: 18). Exulted in every anguish suffering, and humiliation, he says to the Corinthians: "*Therefore I take pleasure in weaknesses, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distress, for Christ's sake*" (10). Calling them 'the arms of justice', he says that they are a fruitful source for his benefit, by which he became indestructible before his enemies.

Despite the beatings, the persecutions, and the slanders, he was as though in a joyful wedding; correcting many concepts of conquest; exulted, joyful, and thanking God, saying: "*Thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ*" (2 Corinthians 2: 14).

In preaching, his honor increased through his acceptance of insults and persecutions; he looked at death, the same way we look at life; received poverty, the same way we receive riches; enjoyed labors, the same way we seek comfort;

preferred anguish to pleasure; and prayed for the sake of his enemies more than those who pray against them. He overturned the concepts of things, Or let us rather say, that we are the ones who have overturned them; As he simply kept the statutes of God, as what he sought conform with the human nature, while what we seek is against it.

Having only one fear, namely, of breaking the statutes of God, he sought only one pleasure, to become the subject of God's gladness; not only the gladness in the present, but the one to come as well.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + Conquest would not be realized by having an abundance of wealth, nor by cherishing power or glory; but God grants free help to those who seek it through dense sorrows. So has been the apostle Paul, who bore his sorrows, as the subject of his boasting, and became able to say: "*When I am weak, then I am strong*" ...Now do you see where sorrows may lead you? They lead you "*To hope that does not disappoint*" (Romans 5: 3).

(St. Basil the Great)

5- MINISTERING TO THEM FOR FREE:

"I have made a fool of myself in boasting, but You drove me to it. I ought to be commended by you, for I am not in the least inferior to these super apostles, even though I am nothing" (11)

He says that he should not have boasted in the afflictions he has gone through for Christ's sake, but he was committed to do; For it was befitting of them to defend his apostleship before the opponents, not being in the least inferior to those 'super apostles', and his ministry was not less than theirs. But because their silence could

have corrupted his achievements, they committed him to commend himself and his ministry.

Saying “*even though I am nothing*”, refers to what the false apostles claimed against him, and was believed by some of the congregation, who counted the apostle Paul as nothing, as though his ministry was not befitting of Christ. Beside that was how the apostle himself felt, that he is nothing without the grace of Christ and His strength.

- + What is amazing is not that he talked about himself, but that he did in just the right and convenient quantity; he did not overdo it in describing his good achievements, lest he would fall into self-esteem; but knew when and where to stop. He did not boast to satisfy himself, but, on the contrary, he even went so far as to describe himself as a fool, to keep others from plunging into self-commendation for its own sake. He only did it in the situations that required it.

There are many who intended to follow his lead, yet without discernment; Something that frequently happens in matters of medicine; when what a physician prescribes with care, and after much investigation, for a certain patient, would sometimes be slothfully used by others, with bad consequences.

We should notice how the apostle Paul surrounded his practices and works with great limits, laying aside his commendation of himself, not once, or twice, but many times, saying: “*I wish you would bear with me in a little foolishness*” (2 Corinthians 11: 1); and: “*What I speak, I speak, not according to the Lord, but as it were, foolishly, in this confidence of boasting*” (2 Corinthians 11: 17, 21) “*I also dare to boast of that*”.

Finding it inconvenient, and in his rejection of the tendency to boast, he conceals his identity by saying: “*I know a man in Christ*”; and, “*Therefore, most gladly, I would rather boast in my weaknesses*”. Then he adds: “*I made a fool of myself in boasting; but you drove me to it*” (11).

Seeing how such a saintly man is reluctant and hesitant to boast himself, even in situations that require it; how he perpetually reins his talk, like a wild horse coming down from uphill; and how he uses the least possible number of words; Who could then foolishly dare to plunge into commending himself, instead of confining that boasting to the most necessary situation required?!

(St. John Chrysostom)

“Truly the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds” (12)

+ Notice how Paul says that all those things were accomplished with great perseverance; as enduring them is a sign of apostleship.

(St. John Chrsostom)

+ In truth, the apostle puts perseverance before all signs and wonders, because taking positions are more important than possibilities.

(Theodoret, Bishop of Cyrus)

The grace of God gave the following proofs of the authenticity of the apostleship of Paul, and his divine call:

(1) “***With all perseverance***” What the apostle Paul endured, no human energy could endure, without the divine grace working in it, granting

the person the possibility of perseverance.

(2) “***In signs and wonders and mighty deeds***”

“For what is it in which you were inferior to other churches, except that I myself was not burdensome to you?

Forgive me this wrong” (13)

As a faithful minister he presented all possibilities to the church in Corinth, and did not let it be inferior to all other churches. And at the same time he was not burdensome to them concerning any material commitment of his necessities of life.

He apologizes for doing them wrong by not allowing them to contribute to the expenses of the ministry and the minister, like he did with the other churches; which is a privilege to be enjoyed by the believers.

“Now for the third time I am ready to come to you. And I will not be burdensome to you; for I do not seek yours,

but you. For the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children” (14)

If he wronged them before, he is telling them that, for the third time he is ready to come to them, and still he is not asking them to contribute to his expenses; for he seeks their persons. As a father he labors and strives to lay up for his children, and does not expect anything back from them. His pleasure is not to seek what is theirs, but to acquire them as children, as a bride for Christ, and seeks their eternal salvation.

He previously told them that they might have many instructors, yet not many fathers. He is not just a constructor, but he is a father and nobody finds pleasure in ministering to them like him.

+ Paul added this in order to scatter any more doubt concerning his positions and intentions. He will continue not to be burdensome, when he comes to them. On the contrary, he will give more than take from them.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + I know for sure that you love your children; *“For the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children”*. Yes, By such an excuse, many among you justify themselves; But I say: Let your love grow and stretch forward beyond that; as loving your wives and children, is not the garment for the heavenly wedding!

Believe in God; and love the children of God; Stretch your love toward God, and draw as many as possible to God.

If you have an enemy, draw him to God; for by drawing him, he will no more be an enemy.

If you have a wife, and a child, draw them to God.

Let love grow and flourish; For by flourishing it will be consummate, and put on the garment of a bride.

(St. Augustine)

“And I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls, though the more abundantly I love you, the less I am loved” (15)

He will continue practicing his compassionate fatherhood, spending and be spent for their sake, presenting all what he has of possibilities, as well as his heart, mind, feelings, and senses, to their account; whatever their reactions are; For, though the more abundantly he loves them, the less he expects to be loved by them.

His pleasure will be to present his possessions, time, strength, and all what preoccupy him to the account of his children; and to suffer and even to die for their sake. He will be like a candle, consumed to give light to others.

- + The only thing he considers wrong is to care for anything more than their salvation; That is why he left no stone unturned, Nor spared anything, for the sake of the salvation of men, whether by sermons, by work, and even by giving his own life. He says to them: *“I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls”* (15); as he previously told the Ephesians: *“Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me”* (Acts 20: 34).

- + Although it was Paul’s right to take, yet he chose not to do. We, as well, are committed to follow suit.

(St. John Chrysostom)

“But be that as it may, I did not burden you. Nevertheless being crafty, I caught you with guile” (16)

Some believe that these are not the words of the apostle Paul, but of those who slandered him, to whom he responded in the following two verses:

“Did I take advantage of you by any of those I sent to you?” (17)

He asks them if any whom he sent to them to preach the gospel, or to help them manage the church affairs, have in any way, sought something from them to the account of the apostle Paul? And asks them to provide the proof of any claim of this sort.

7- TITUS MINISTRY FOR FREE:

“I urged Titus, and sent our brother with him. Did Titus take advantage of you? Did we not walk in the same spirit? Did we not walk in the same steps” (18)

The apostle Paul sent to them Titus, together with another brother (2 Corinthians 8: 6, 18). They know exactly that they did not seek anything for themselves or for the apostle Paul; and that they all walked in the same spirit and in the same steps.

8- HIS PLEASURE IS IN THEIR SPIRITUAL EDIFICATION:

“Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves before you? We are speaking in Christ before God. We do all things, beloved, for your edification” (19)

What the apostle seeks in all his dealings with them is their edification. His goal is to set a sound foundation and an exalted establishment for the church of God in Corinth. He wonders, if he is expected to apologize to them for sending Titus and the other brother instead of coming himself to them! As he did that for their own good; That is what he utters in Christ before God:

“For I fear lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I wish, and that I shall be found by you such as you do not wish; lest there be contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, backbiting, whispering, conceits, tumults” (20)

The apostle tells them about the reason why he did not come to them, and sent Titus and the other brother instead; that he did not want to come and find them, not such as he wishes; namely, concerning repentance and reformation of the wrong and diverted situations. He, as well, did not wish to come, and be found by them such as they do not

wish; firm and sorrowful for how they are; seen carrying the rod of chastisement, not the spirit of meekness and gentleness. He cannot endure seeing contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, backbiting, whispering, conceits, and tumults.

- + Paul does not say that he fears to find them in sin, but rather not to find them completely such as he wishes. That is why he made a balance between how he could find them, and how they could find him.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + Do you want to know how compassionate he has been with the sinners? Just listen to what he says to the Corinthians: *“For I fear lest, when I come, I shall not find you as I wish, and that I shall be found by you such as you do not wish”* (20); Then he says:

“And lest, when I come again, my God may humble me among you, and I may have to mourn over many who have previously sinned and have not repented of the impurity, sexual immorality that they have practiced” (21).

And to the Galatians he wrote, saying: *“My little children, for whom I Labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you”* (Galatians 4: 19).

(St. John Chrysostom)

Some fathers use the verse that came in 2 Corinthians 12: 21, to respond to the followers of Novatian who claimed that there is no repentance, nor an enjoyment of the divine sacraments for the sexually immoral. On the contrary, the apostle Paul opens the door of hope before the sexually immoral if they repent.

After working so hard to establish the church of Corinth, and to reform their shortcomings, he fears lest, when he comes, God may allow for him to mourn over what have dwelt upon them of evil and corruption, instead of to rejoice in encountering them, and to exult in their spiritual growth.

- + Although he comes to them as a judge and a prosecutor, yet he humbles himself before God, he is not puffed up; and has no intention to do anything of the sort.

(St. John Chrysostom)

AN INSPIRATION FROM 2 CORINTHIANS 12

REVEAL YOURSELF TO ME IN THE TRANQUILITY OF YOUR LOVE

- + You carried Your apostle to the third heaven;
Where he tasted the sweetness of the eternal life;
Where his soul got drunk by Your love;
Yet he remained so many years not telling anyone about it.
- + Carry my heart and mind to you.
Reveal Yourself in my depths;
Enlighten my eyes to recognize Your secrets;
To make me live in the tranquility of the exalted love.
- + My body is in Your hands;

And my life is a grant by You;
Who loves me the way You do?
Who is as Almighty and wise as You are?
I fear the afflictions no more;
Nor fear the temptations;
As my life is in Your faithful hands;
Lead me to the narrow road;
But do not forsake me, even for moments;
For You are my life, stronghold, and happiness.

+ You turn my weaknesses into strength;
Out of the eater, You bring forth something to eat;
You turn everything for the sake of my edification;
I shall find pleasure in weaknesses and labors;
For you turn them into a crown for me.

+ O my God, You are amazing in Your longsuffering;
You grant perseverance as a sign of apostleship;
You alone can grant me the strength to endure;
Grant me to spend everything You gave me to the account of Your kingdom;
Grant to be to deliver my whole life, imitating You, O so amazing in Your
deliverance.

+ Let Your grace work inside me;
Do not let me cease to work with and by You;
Let me feel sorrow for every fallen soul;
Let my depths exult in the repentance of many.

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DIVISION 6

(Chapter 13)

CHAPTER 13

CONCLUSION

After showing the Corinthians every love and compassion, confirming that he will spend everything he has, and will give even himself for their sake; He proclaims his apostolic authority, which he will not use except for their edification and for the glory of God. Now, as a conclusion, he threatens those persisting on opposition and non-repentance; prays for the sake of the church, and presents an apostolic benediction for all.

- 1- Threatening the wicked
- 2- A prayer for their sake
- 3- A farewell and a benediction

1- THREATENING THE WICKED:

Having sent them two epistles, he counted them as two witnesses against those who persist on their evil and opposition to the evangelic truth, and on corrupting the church of God.

“This will be the third time I am coming to you. ‘By the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established” (1)

Who are those two or three witnesses? Some believe the two witnesses to be two times he visited Corinth. According to ‘Calmet’, the first visit was in the year 52 AD, to establish the church there, when he stayed a year and a half (Acts 18: 1). Then he came to them again in the year 55 AD, for a brief time, after which he had to depart to Ephesus (1 Corinthians 16: 7); hence St. Luke did not refer to it in the book of acts. And finally, he intends to visit them a third time, which took place in the year 57 AD. Yet, some believe that the apostle did not visit Corinth until the writing of this epistle except once. And still others believe that the two witnesses are the two persons he added to

his name in the two epistles, namely, 'Sothsenes' (1 Corinthians 1: 1), and 'Timothy' (2 Corinthians 1: 1).

+ Paul felt great pain in writing to them about his intention to come to visit them; having hoped that everything would be in good order in the church before his arrival; so that what he threatens to do would be unnecessary.

(St. John Chrysostom)

"I warned those who sinned previously and all the others, and I warn them now while absent, as I did when present on my second visit, that if I come again, I will not be lenient" (2)

+ It so seems that the second visit has already taken place, according to his words: *"as I did when present on my second visit"*.

What he says is: I spoke once and again when I was present with you; and now I write to you. If you heed what I say, I shall do what I intend to do; But if you disobey, I shall necessarily stop talking to punish.

+ Putting his neck on his hand, Paul says that those who heard his threats, and still persist on their disobedience, when he comes, he will drive them away; an action he will take humbly and only in a defensive way.

(St. John Chrysostom)

"Since you seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, who is not weak toward you, but mighty in you" (3)

In case they seek a proof of his apostolic authority in Jesus Christ, it will be their own transformation to faith in Jesus Christ; a strong proof that Christ speaks through him,

and that His power has worked in them -- not a weak but a mighty power. By this same authority and power, the apostle has the right to chasten the false teachers.

- + *“Behold our shield, O God; Look at the face of Your anointed”* (Psalm 84: 9). Notice that he says *“Look at the face of Your anointed”*. When someone prays with zeal, the Father looks at the face of the Son; Now, what does this mean? The apostle asks: *“Do you seek the proof of Christ speaking in me?”*; to which the Lord Savior Himself answers: *“He who receives you, receives Me”* (Matthew 10: 40). Hence the Psalmist says to the Father: *“Looking at us, You will see the face of Your anointed dwelling in us”*. What Paul says, is uttered by Christ Himself; for *“He who receives you, receives Me”*. That is how our Lord and Savior speaks to us in the writings of His princes.

(St. Jerome)

- + The apostle Paul will not punish the Corinthians, just to prove that he has the authority. His perseverance with them is not out of weakness, but of love and longsuffering.
- + *“Christ ... is not weak toward you, but mighty in you”*. Why did he add *“in you”*, when He is mighty everywhere? Because, intending to punish the unbelievers, the demons, or any other being, he is capable of doing it. This expression is either to put them to shame, having already got the proof; Or to proclaim that He reveals His might in them, who ought to reform themselves. He also says somewhere else: *“For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside?”* (1 Corinthians 5: 12); Namely, that those from outside, He will judge on the day of judgment; While concerning you, it is to save you of this judgment.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + Since the apostle Paul became a “chosen vessel” (Acts 9: 15), he did not live his own life, but revealed Christ living in his life; and presented Christ speaking in him (2 Corinthians 12: 3). Hence he became a dwelling place for the infinite Nature.
- + In case someone followed the example of Paul in his life, and became a chosen vessel carrying the name of God (Acts 9: 15), and his head unified all the members of the body of the church in harmony; Such a person when he speaks, he would not be speaking on his own, but would be speaking in the name of the Head; namely, according to Paul, it is Christ who speaks in him (3). That is why the trachea and the larynx bind the word of truth to the sweet and delicious voice of the Holy Spirit. The trachea will be loaded with the holy words, and will feed all the members of the body with these lovely teachings; the whole body parts will work in harmony by the bond of peace and love.
- + He in whom God dwells, is like a (sofa) on which God sits. Such a person will no longer live for himself, but Christ lives in him, and gives a proof that Christ speaks through him, according to St. Paul (3).

(St. Gregory. Bishop of Nyssa)

- + Christ did not speak contrary to His apostle, as He, Himself, also spoke in him: *“Do you seek a proof of Christ speaking in me?”* Christ, being in the gospel, and in the apostle, He speaks by the two, sometimes by His own mouth, and other times through His ambassador, who when he proclaims something, it is not written in the records that the ambassador said so and so, but it is as though Christ Himself has said it, having commanded His ambassador to say it.
- + Christ Himself utters in His saints; as according to the apostle: *“Do not you seek the proof of Christ speaking in me?”*

- + Have not the martyrs testified to Christ? Have they not borne the testimony of the truth? To think more carefully, we shall find that those martyrs bear a testimony, He Himself testifies to Himself; as He dwells in the martyrs to let them bear the testimony of the truth. Listen to one of the martyrs – the apostle Paul, saying: *“Do not you seek the proof of Christ speaking in me?”*

(St. Augustine)

- + If not for God’s care, the human effort would be set on weak foundation, and most certainly, faith would be in danger, if not supported by the care of God. On our side, we desire reform, and Christ on His side realizes it.

(Father Valerian)

- + *“Do not you seek the proof of Christ speaking in me?”* Christ is in all His saints; And therefore from the One Christ, many Christs will come, many will conform themselves according to him who is in the image of God; hence the prophet says: *“Do not touch My anointed ones”* (Psalm 105: 15).

- + We can more fittingly say that the Savior was not (in) His disciples, but (with) them, as long as they have not yet reached by their mind the end of time. But once they see the world, crucified for them, within their hands, as far as they could; then, Jesus will not any more be (with) them, but (in) them; and they could say together with Paul: *“It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me”* (Galatians 2: 20).; and: *“since you seek a proof of Christ speaking in me”* (3).

(The scholar Origen)

“For though He was crucified in weakness, yet He lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in Him, but we shall live with Him by the power of God toward you” (4)

If the apostle was accused of being weak and without authority, Christ speaking in Him was so accused as well. By being crucified, Christ appeared as weak; yet He was not, as He has delivered Himself to death through His own free will. It would never happen without His allowance; as He could provide more than twelve legions of angels to support Him against the mobs led by the Jewish high priests (Matthew 26: 53), But, how could the prophecies written about Him be fulfilled? By His death He revealed the divine power, that of the blood, the salvation, and the work of grace that drew the world to the Lord Christ, and many have been transformed to faith in Him.

As though the apostle says to the Corinthians: As we are for Christ, we take His side; and as the Jews accused Him of weakness, when He was crucified, So you also accuse us of weakness, when we suffer for your sake. We partake of His crucified life, we partake of His love, so as to carry His strength in us, while being accused by you of weakness.

- + There are three meanings of the term “weakness”: the physical weakness, the wavering faith, and the persecution. Here, the apostle uses the third meaning of weakness. What he means is: in persecutions, in dangers, in plots, in deaths, in weaknesses, in reproaches, in needs, in distresses, for Christ’s sake ... (2 Corinthians 12: 10). If he chose to endure anything that appears as weakness, yet this would not hinder the power of God.

The apostle Paul presents an expression of unbelief, to consider the cross as foolishness and weakness. But he does not say that because Christ was weak when crucified, as It was in His authority not to be crucified... Why then he says: “*in weakness*”? If He was crucified, enduring treason, tribulations, and dishonor (which apparently are counted as weaknesses), Yet He was not harmed in the least. We as well, we would never be harmed when persecuted.

- + What is the meaning of “*We are weak in Him?*” We are persecuted, dragged here and there, endure to the extreme. But what does “*in*” mean? It means for the sake of preaching and of faith in Him. Yet, if it is for His sake that we endure what is sad, disturbing, and difficult, It is utterly obvious that we shall also gain what is joyful and rejoicing; Therefore he adds: “*We shall live with Him by the power of God*”.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + You know for sure, saintly brethren, as well as we do, that, because our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is the Physician of our eternal health, He took over Himself our human weakness, that it would not endure forever. He took over our mortal body; and in it He kills death. And as the apostle says: “*For though He was crucified in weakness, yet He lives by the power of God*” (4).

(St. Augustine)

“Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Prove yourselves, Do you know yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you? – unless indeed you are disqualified” (5)

To confirm his authority in Jesus Christ, he asks them not to seek a proof outside themselves; but to examine themselves to see how the Lord Christ has done in them through the preaching and care of the apostle Paul; how He dwells in them. The apostle has given birth to them in Jesus Christ, and became a father to them.

The Greek word (heautous) translated as “*examine*”, is used in examining gold or silver coins to see if they are forfeit or genuine. It is befitting of them to examine themselves, whether they are truly in Christ, and Christ is in them; Or they just carry His name.

Examine yourselves, whether Christ dwells in you, to carry His Spirit, strength, and mind, and enjoy the sonhood to God, as genuine coins, or you are forfeit and disqualified by God.

+ Look into yourselves; If you find out that Christ is in you, How much more would He be in your teacher?

+ It so seems to me that he is speaking about their life; As faith is not enough to draw the gift of the Spirit. He says: "If you are in faith, Christ is in you". However it so happens that many may have faith, yet they are denied that gift. To solve this problem he adds: "*unless indeed you are disqualified*", namely, (unless your life is corrupt).

+ So as not to hurt their feelings, he hinted vaguely, and did not confirm, that they are "*disqualified*"; then added: "*But I trust that you will know that we are not disqualified*" (6). Here again, is a serious warning ... He says: "*I pray to God that you may not do anything wrong -- not that we may appear that we have met the test, but that you may do what is right, though we may seem disqualified*" (7).

He says: I pray to God, and ask that I do not find any of you not reforming his life, not repentant, or even not doing anything wrong ... But in case you persist on doing evil and not repenting, we would then be committed to chasten and punish, as it happened in the case of Sapphira and Magus. We still pray to God that this will not happen, but the contrary; ... we do not want to appear approved in this way; ... we do not want to prove our authority by chastening you... We pray that you will always live in virtue, always reforming yourselves; that is how we want to appear approved, not by using our authority for chastisement.

(St. John Chrysostom)

“But I trust that you will know that we are not disqualified” (6)

After presenting “the dwelling of Christ in them” as the thermometer by which they would examine themselves, and as a strong proof of the authenticity and non-forgery of their faith, and not their non-forgery; he confirmed to them that what they enjoy, is enjoyed as well by him and his partners in ministry. It is as though he say: In case by examining yourselves you find that you are genuine and non-forged coins of God, you are then not disqualified; And consequently, it would be befitting of you, as well, to realize that we, who preached the gospel of truth to you, are not forgers nor disqualified.

2- A PRAYER FOR THEIR SAKE:

“Now I pray to God that you may not do anything wrong – not that we may appear approved, but that you may do what is right, though we may seem disqualified” (7)

In his prayer the apostle does not seek to justify himself, but to justify his people, to be approved by the Lord, and to have Him dwell in them. He is preoccupied by his children in the spirit.

The apostle does not want to use his apostolic authority in chastisement, being approved by God, but seeks the salvation of the people, even though he may seem disqualified and with no authority. The apostolic authority in itself is not what preoccupies him, but the salvation of his brethren in the Lord... He does not want to come to them with the apostolic rod of chastisement, but with the apostolic meekness and compassion, as long as they are sanctified in the Lord.

The task of the priest is to pray to God to keep him and his congregation from sin, from doing anything wrong, to come to be, in grace, kept in Him. ... As far as his personal honor and reputation are concerned, they does not preoccupy his mind.

“For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth” (8)

The ministers of Christ could not present vain teachings against the evangelic truth, but what they could do is the presentation and the abidance of the truth. The Truth is “*Christ Himself*”; and testifying to Him is drawing souls to His Person. It is as though the apostle confirms that, whether he is giving love, compassion, and gentleness, or holding the rod of chastisement, nothing preoccupies him except the gospel of Christ.

In case they hold fast to evil, and are opposed to the truth, the apostle could not be slothful just to gain them; nor to act contrary to the truth to avoid doing harm to his reputation.

“For we are glad when we are weak and you are strong. And this also we pray that you may be made complete” (9)

What make the heart of the apostle glad is to appear weak, and not to hold the rod of chastisement, as long as they are strong by the righteousness of Christ.. What would bring joy to him as a father is to see his children strong in righteousness and spiritual gifts, and walking along the way of perfection.

Some believe that the apostle here, proclaims that his pleasure, together with his fellow ministers, would be to appear weak, namely, to endure persecutions, and bitter afflictions, if the people are strong and complete in the holy life and doing righteousness.

- + Who could match Paul, who was despised, dishonored, scoffed, and accused of arrogance? And although he finds it necessary to use his apostolic authority to chastise, yet he disregards it, and prays to God that there would be no need to use it. On the contrary, he intends to clarify the matter beforehand, to avoid the need to use it.

(St. John Chrysostom)

“Therefore I write these things while I am away from you, so that when I come, I may not have to be severe in using the authority that the lord has given me for building up and not for tearing down” (10)

- + The apostle Paul would rather show his authority in his words, and not in his actions. He left it to the Corinthians to deduce that in case they do not manage to correct themselves, he would certainly come and do it for them.

(St. John Chrysostom)

3- A FAREWELL AND A BENEDICTION:

“Finally brethren, farewell, Become complete, Be of good comfort, Be of one mind, live in peace; And the God of love and peace will be with you” (11)

As he did when he started his epistle with words of encouragement and of compassion, So he ends it with joyful commandments, together with showing his love for all, and giving benediction to all.

- + We certainly admire the teachings of Christ, putting in His parables the rewards of strife in such great perfection: *“to behold”*, *“to inherit the kingdom of heaven”*,

“to become the sons of God”, “to become like God”, “to obtain mercy”, “to be comforted”, etc.. And if it is necessary to refer to sorrowful things, He does it in a mild way.

(St. John Chrysostom)

+ “**Finally**” (loipon): All what is left for him is to end his epistle, wishing for everyone to enjoy the true happiness.

“**Farewell**” (chairete): meaning great joy together with happiness. He wrote, not to bring them the spirit of sorrow, but seeking their gladness and the exultation of their hearts.

“**Become complete**” (katartizesthe); namely, have a bond of love and harmony, as in this will be the edification and perfection of the church,

“**Be of good comfort**” (Parakalesthe): In case they accept his counsel, they will be filled with inner comfort, even if they face persecutions, afflictions, or troubles, whatever are their sources.

“**Be of one mind**”; Do not allow any dissensions or divisions among you. Have one faith, and one goal; for this unity in Jesus Christ will bring to you joy, perfection, and heavenly comfort.

“**Live in peace**” (eiexeeneuete): namely, dedicate your life for the sake of peace for all. Do not let those who have different thoughts, draw your hearts away from your goal, and deprive you of peace.

“**And the God of love and peace will be with you**”: God is the God of love and peace, the Source of unity; He loves us and wishes for us to enjoy peace with Him, among ourselves, and with our brethren.

God is with those who walk with love and peace, dwells in their midst, He loves those who love peace, abides in them and they abide in Him. Love would never be among those who love dissension and reject peace, they will not enjoy the divine presence.

+ That is why the apostle counsels them to rejoice, saying: "If you follow my lead, there would be nothing to keep you from having joy" ... I want you to "*become complete*", Complete what is missing.

"*Be of good comfort*", everyone by the other and by us, and by changing to what is better.

"*Be of one mind; Live in peace*" Some people could be of one faith, yet in their dealings with one another they are wide apart. Paul seeks both.

+ How could Paul expect them to rejoice after telling them all those words? Yet, it is because of this, that he told them these words; For if they head his counsel, there would be nothing to keep them from rejoicing. There is nothing more comforting than the pure conscience.

(St. John Chrysostom)

+ He encourages her (the bride of the Song -- the church), and provokes her not to sit idly, but to go forth to Him outside, and try to see Him; no more through windows, or in a mirror in darkness, but to go forth outside to see Him face to face. Now, being unable to see Him, He stands, not before her but behind her, behind a wall.

(The scholar Origen)

+ The joy referred to here, will dwell on the Corinthians, once they reform their ways, after which they could reach maturity in faith. But before that, there is comfort that would support and encourage them to forsake the present pleasures for the sake of hope in the things to come.

Peace of God is different from that of the world. People in the world may have peace, yet it is peace that could work to their destruction. The peace of Christ,

being a liberation from sins, will bring gladness to God. He who has peace will also have love, and the God of both will forever protect him.

(Ambrosister)

*“Greet one another with a holy
kiss” (12)*

He asks them to bear the spirit of true friendship, and that their kisses should be holy, not bearing deception nor corruption.

- + What is the holy kiss? It is that in which there is no hypocrisy, like that of Judas. A kiss is given to incite love, and to plant in our souls the sound tendency toward one another. Returning after a long absence, we kiss one another, as our souls hasten to re-unite together. Yet there is something to be said in this concern: Being the temple of Christ, When we kiss one another, we are as though, kissing the entrance and passageway to the temple.

(St. John Chrysostom)

“All the saints greet you” (13)

By the saints here he means the believers in Macedonia or in Philippi, where he wrote the epistle. In the early church, the word “a Christian” was analogous to “a saint”; as all walked in holiness, and were keen on growing in it.

“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy spirit be with you all. Amen” (14)

God, the Holy Trinity, is the Source of every grace, love, and fellowship. The apostle starts by the grace of Christ, the Grantor of Salvation;

then follows it by the love of God the Father, who delivered His only begotten Son for our sake, then by the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, the Grantor of unity.

Starting by the Lord Christ, he confirms the equality between the three Persons of the Holy Trinity.

- + As there are one grace, one peace, one love, and one fellowship, on the side of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, There would certainly be one process; And where there is one process, there would be no possibility for the power to divide, nor for the essence to separate.

(St. Ambrose)

- + The apostle Paul ends his epistle by a prayer, keen for them all to unite with God. To those who claim that the Holy Spirit is not God, on account that He was not included together with the Father and the Son at the beginning of the epistles of Paul, this verse is an enough response by the apostle. Everything that concern the Holy Trinity is non-divisible. Where there is the fellowship of the Spirit, it is the fellowship of the Son as well; And where there is the grace of the Son, it is the grace of the father and the spirit, as well. I say these things, without any mixing, nor discernment between the Persons; But we recognize every Person alone, and the mutual unity in their essence.

(St. John Chrysostom)

AN INSPIRATION FROM 2 CORINTHIANS 13

A THREAT OR A BENEDICTION?

- + Amazing are You, O Lord in Your dealings;
When You threat, You grant an unceasing love;
And when You love, You grant us a committing maturation.

- + Your amazing apostle, imitated You, when he threatened the Corinthians.
And in his threat, he was moaning and compassionate.
He wished that he would be weak, and they would be strong.
He wished his threats would not be realized.
He wished not to have to use his apostolic authority.
But to see all enjoying You.
He would then rejoice and exult.

- + He carried Your power, as You are in him, and he in you.
The conquering power of love.
The power of the truth that builds up and not tears down.
He lifted his heart to You to pray for the sake of his beloved.
To seek Your glorified joy, Your heavenly comforts, and Your exalted love.
To seek Your eternal peace, and Your grace, the grantor of holiness.

- + I wonder if You could grant me, together with him, that committing love.
So as not to cease praying like that for the sake of the whole world!

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