

**THE EPISTLE OF
ST. PAUL
TO
*THE EPHESIANS***

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The Epistle of St. Paul to the Ephesians

From the prison in Rome, in his last days, St. Paul presented to us this epistle. Although it is a short epistle, yet it has transmitted to us the heavenly and ecumenical apostolic thought toward the church. This epistle is unique in its importance; it is an epistle for a liturgical church, which carries important doctrines with liturgical praises from the apostolic age. In the same time, it is considered a fervent calling to glorify God.

It is a divine church epistle, which reflects joy on the believers and makes them enter the mystery of the church on a deep, spiritual, and factual level. Some critics claimed that this epistle was written after the apostolic age, although many have rejected that idea.

May our Good Lord grant us His Holy Spirit so we may enjoy this living and apostolic thought until we truly experience it.

Father Tadros Malaty

Introduction

EPHESUS

- ❖ Ephesus is a Greek word, which means "desired".
- ❖ It is the capital of the Roman colony on the left side of the Kayster River, west of Asia Minor, about three miles from the sea. It is almost in the middle between the city of Smyrna from the left, Miletus from the south, and it is where all the commercial roads meet, especially the main road between Rome and the East. An industrial port was built there, which gave it some great importance in the Middle Ages.

It was known for its great temple Artamis, which is a goddess representing a mother who has many breasts, most probably of a Hattian origin. To the Greeks, it is considered the goddess of moon, like Diana to the Romans. It appears as a virgin, tall and beautiful, sister of Apollo. They think that her statue descended from heaven, and often it is drawn in the shape of a fisherman.

- ❖ The Ionians, who are of Greek origin, occupied the city of Ephesus at 11 B.C., and it became one of the twelve cities in their union, and became the capital of Ionia.

In the year 555 B.C., the city fell under the reign of Croesus, the king of Lydia, (its capital is Sardes). After a short while, it became under the Persian rule. During the reign of Alexander the Great, it was under the Greek Macedonian rule. In the year 133 B.C., it became under the Roman rule and became the capital of Asia.

- ❖ In the year 29 B.C., an earthquake demolished the city, and Emperor Augustus ordered its reconstruction.

ESTABLISHING THE CHURCH OF EPHESUS

In Ephesus, there were many Jews with Roman citizenship (Acts 18:19 & 19:17). At the end of St. Paul's second missionary trip (about 54 A.D.), on his return to Jerusalem, he visited Ephesus where he preached in their synagogue. There he left Aquila and Priscilla to continue his work (Acts 18: 18-21), and promised the Jews that he will return to them very soon.

During his absence, Apollos came from Alexandria, and he was one of St. John the Baptist's disciples. He preached in the synagogue only about what he had known about the Lord Christ, but Aquila and Priscilla taught him the way of the Lord more accurately. (Acts 18: 24-26).

According to his promise, St. Paul returned on 54 A.D., on his third missionary trip, where he found some disciples who had not accepted except the baptism of John the Baptist, so he preached them about the Lord Jesus and baptized them. Putting his hand on them and the Holy Spirit descended on them and they started talking with different languages and prophecy. (Acts 19: 3-9)

St. Paul preached in the synagogue of the Jews for three months. When the unbelieving Jews attacked him, he left them and preached in a school of Tyrannus for two years, until all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks. (Acts 19: 8-12)

The results of St. Paul's preaching in Ephesus, as St. Luke wrote in the book of Acts were as follows:

1. Many of the Jews and Gentiles accepted the faith of the Lord Jesus. (Acts 19:10)
2. The word of God reached all over Asia, through its capital, Ephesus. (Acts 19:10)
3. Since God worked unusual miracles by the hands of Paul (Acts 19:11), some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists called the name of the Lord Jesus, whom Paul preaches, over those

who had evil spirits (Acts 19: 13), while many of those who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted up the value of them and it totaled fifty thousand pieces of silver. (Acts 19:19)

4. The worship of Artamis was abolished, which made the craftsmen mad and they rioted, attacking the preaching of St. Paul and considering it an insult to the great temple. (Acts 19: 24-29)

5. The establishment of a great church in Ephesus, with many priests, was mentioned in Acts chapter 20. In Miletus, (south of Ephesus), after preaching in Macedonia and Achaia, St. Paul called all the priests of Ephesus and told them about the false prophets who are like savage wolves who do not spare the flock. (Acts 20:29)

When St. Paul left Ephesus, his disciple Timothy went to serve there, so that they may teach no other doctrine (1 Tim. 1: 3). Tychicus was sent to Ephesus, with this epistle (Eph. 6: 21 & 2 Tim. 4:12). Probably, he gave some copies to other churches in Asia, as well as he sent a special epistle to the Colossians.

The church of Ephesus was one of the seven churches in Asia mentioned in the book of Revelation (Rev. 1:11 & 2: 1-7). According to church tradition, St. John spent his last days in Ephesus, and later departed on the island of Patmos, which is across from Ephesus.

On the year 431 A.D., the third ecumenical council was held there to attack the heresy of Nestor, who was the patriarch of Constantinople who said that the Lord Jesus had two natures, considering that the divinity came upon Him on His baptism.

Now the saying that Ephesus left her first love has been fulfilled in her, and that He is about to move her lampstand (Rev. 2:4), for it was transformed to the village of "Ephis", where no Christians live anymore.

The Writer of the Epistle:

Up till the nineteenth century, there was no doubt that St. Paul is the writer of the epistle, and that he directed it to the church of Ephesus. However, some critics doubted who the writer was, saying that someone similar to St. Paul wrote this epistle, after the apostolic age, copying many of the writings of St. Paul from other epistles. Even if St. Paul had written it, it was not directed to the church of Ephesus. They put four proofs, which can be summarized in four kinds³. We are going to mention the four proofs and refute them. We will ascertain that this epistle was written by St. Paul and that it was directed to the Ephesians (with other churches like the church of Laodicia). This is the traditional opinion, which the church in the East and the West had adhered to throughout the nineteen centuries.

Proofs that the epistle was written by St. Paul:

First: The inner witness:

D. Guthrie attested that the fingerprints of St. Paul are so obvious in this epistle. For the divine inspiration works in the writer to guide him and keep him from erring, without losing his personality, honoring his individuality, which the Holy Spirit uses and interacts with.

St. Paul' personality is apparent in the following points⁴:

1. The epistle instills the spirit of hope in the souls of the believers, plus encouraging them and thanking God for the news of the one who writes to them: "Therefore, I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers..." (Eph. 1:15,16)

2. He calls himself "...prisoner of Christ Jesus..." (Eph. 3:1), "I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord..." (Eph. 4:1). He writes as a prisoner, imprisoned on behalf of faith.

3. He writes about the "mystery of Christ", declared to him personally, for he says, "how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery... of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power." (Eph. 3:3,7)

4. As usual, the apostle points his practical love to whom he writes, for he considers his afflictions for them, asking them not to be occupied with his afflictions, but to look above to the eternal glory, considering his afflictions glory not for himself, but for them also, for he says, "Therefore, I ask that you do not lose heart at my tribulations for you, which is your glory." (Eph. 3:13)

5. He practices his practical love toward all the human race, not only through his preaching and enduring afflictions for them, but also through prayers and interceding for them, in the spirit of humility. "For this reason, I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ... that He would grant you according to the riches of His glory to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith..." (Eph. 3:14-21)

6. He was a preacher to the Gentiles, always calling them to the new life and the new thought, and forsaking the gentile life with its futile mind: "This I say, therefore, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind,... be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness." (Eph. 4: 17-24)

7. In the spirit of humility, he prays for them and for all the church, for he says, "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel." (Eph. 6: 18,19)

8. As usual, he concludes the epistle by the apostolic blessing. (Eph. 6: 23,24)

9. His introduction corresponded to the introduction of his second epistle to the Corinthians and his epistle to the Colossians.

10. His fingerprints are very apparent in the general skeleton of this epistle, which is very unique of his character, for the epistle started with the introduction, thanksgiving, talking about the dogma, instilling good conduct, conclusion and the apostolic blessing.

Second: The outer Proofs:

In spite of the inner proofs that this epistle was written by St. Paul, yet there are outer proofs, which confirm that. This epistle had wide acceptance in the middle of the second century in the Orthodox Church, and even between the heretics. St. Clement the Roman, St. Agnatus the bishop of Antioch⁵, Policarp the bishop of Smyrna⁶, Hermas in his book "The Shepherd"⁷, the "Didache" which is the Lord's teachings to the twelve apostles, and the heretic Merkion mentioned it among the canonical books (around year 140 A.D.) under the name of "The Epistle to the Laodicians". It was also mentioned under the Muratorian Canon⁸ about the year 180 A.D. among the epistles of St. Paul.

Objections about the writer of the epistle and how to refute them:

First: Objections regarding the linguistic and stylistic arguments:

Some of the scholars and critics like Goodspeed⁹ object that the epistle contains many of the Greek words, which was never used in any of St. Paul's other epistles, hapaz legomena (36 words. Moreover, they were never used in the whole New Testament (42 words). St. Paul used to

use the word "Satanas (Satan), but here he uses the word diabolos (devil)" (Eph. 4:27) (as well as in the pastoral epistles).

On the other hand, its style and language is close to the first epistle of St. Clement the Roman (in the era following St. Paul's), more than to St. Paul's epistles.

The scholars refute these objections by the following:

1. The different vocabulary goes back to the different nature, for this epistle is unique as a "liturgical epistle", which contained some of the liturgical praises, for its main topic is "the church". Some of the vocabulary was derived from the liturgical church.

Some explain that the different vocabulary goes back to the one whom St. Paul was dictating to, in prison, for he used many writers.

2. This epistle is very related to the first epistle of St. Clement the Roman, because the latter derived a lot of its vocabulary from the first.

3. In spite of the fact that this type of epistle is liturgical, different than all the other epistles, yet it is very close to St. Paul's writings. In its essence, it carries the type and fingerprints of St. Paul, which is very difficult to say that it is not his. It is very obvious that it is St. Paul's type.

Second: Litrary Arguments:

Some critics say that these objections are major. The most important one is the great similarity between this epistle and the epistle to the Colossians. More than a fourth of the words used in the epistle to the Ephesians were derived from the epistle to the Colossians, while more than a third of the words used in the epistle to the Colossians were repeated in the epistle to the Ephesians. (There are 83 words common in both epistles). The critics say that it is impossible for such a scholar, with renewed thought like St. Paul, to repeat the same words in two epistles, especially that sometimes he uses the same word with two different meanings. The word "mystery" in the epistle to the Colossians refers to Christ, while in the epistle to the Ephesians; it refers to the unity of the Jews with the Gentiles.

Goodspeed concluded that the epistle to the Ephesians was not written by St. Paul, but by someone else who adopted parts from St. Paul's letters, especially from the epistle to the Colossians.

To refute that, the following is mentioned:

1. The epistle to the Ephesians, as some scholars perceive it, is a periodic epistle to all the churches of Asia Minor, especially the Laodiceans (Col. 4:16). The epistle to the Ephesians was recorded as the capital of Asia Minor. Laodicea and Colosse are two cities close to each other, that is why St. Paul asked to exchange the epistles (Col. 4:16), especially that the time in which they were written were close to each other, and were carried by the same person "Tychicus" (Eph. 6:21 & Col. 4:7). Also, both epistles discussed two topics, which compliment one another. The epistle to the Ephesians discussed the church as the body of Christ, while the epistle to the Colossians discussed the topic of "Christ the Head of the church". That is why they are very similar. This similarity does not make us doubt that the writer is one, but on the contrary, confirms that. What the critics considered as an objecting proof is a proof against them.

2. If another writer had adopted words from St. Paul's epistles, he would have adopted complete expressions. However, we say that common words in the two epistles confirm that the epistle was written by St. Paul.

3. Using common words in the two epistles (Ephesians and Colossians) with two different meanings, does not mean that the epistle was not written by St. Paul. On the contrary, it

confirms that it belongs to St. Paul with the wide thought who can give more than one meaning to the expression. When he talks to the Colossians about "Christ the Head of the church", he talks about the "mystery" being "the mystery of Christ". In the epistle to the Ephesians, when he talks about "the church as the Body of Christ", he talks about the mystery as the union of the church with Christ, whether those of Gentile origin or Jewish origin. Although the two meanings are different, yet we find them complimenting one another and not conflicting.

Third: Historical Arguments:

Some critics relate that there is a difference between these epistles and the rest of St. Paul's epistles from the historical aspect. In this epistle, we see that the conflict between the Jews and the Gentiles has settled, while in the other epistles, we still see the conflict very apparent. That is why critics considered that this epistle was written at a later era than the era of St. Paul.

To refute that, we mention the following:

1. Writing about the reconciliation between the Jews and the Gentiles through the cross in one body "Putting to death the enmity ..." (Eph. 2:14-16), he wrote in a language which characterize St. Paul's writings, the minister of the Gentiles who concentrated his writings on "breaking down the middle wall of separation", before breaking down the walls of Jerusalem to be opened for everyone.

2. If the epistle were written after St. Paul's era, there would not have been silence regarding the fall of Jerusalem when the middle wall of separation between the Jews and Gentiles was broken...This confirms that it was written in St. Paul's era.

3. Not mentioning the persecution refers that it was written at an earlier time before the church history that is in the apostolic age.

Fourth: Doctrinal Arguments:

Some critics denied the authorship of St. Paul because of the differences in doctrines mentioned here than in the other epistles, which pertain to "the church, Christ, social doctrines". We do not want to go into details regarding these doctrines; however, we clarify that there is no contradiction between what was mentioned here and what was mentioned in the other epistles. But there are differences, which give the epistle vitality instead of repetition, and reveals the depth of the divine thought of St. Paul, without rigidity. This epistle is unique in its topic, which is to reveal the "universality of the church", and its uniqueness in adopting the church liturgical praises.

Some of the differences, which the critics mentioned, are as follows:

1. Regarding the special teaching of the church, in the other epistles, St. Paul emphasized the local churches and was concerned about the practical and dogmatic problems, and presented special greetings to beloved ministers working in the Lord's vine. However, in this epistle, we do not find any of that, because the theme of the epistle is "the universality of the church". (Eph. 4:1-16) Talking about this matter, he elevates us above the conditions of the church of Ephesus, its events, its problems and those working in it to declare the oneness of the church, the Body of Christ and His bride. (Eph. 2:8,9 & 4:14 & 5:6) This is the main theme of the epistle, all in harmony with the apostolic thought.

2. Talking about the apostles and the prophets, St. Paul presents them as saints (Eph. 3:5), and as a foundation for the church where Christ is the cornerstone (Eph. 2:20). Some thought that this thought which carries great veneration to the apostles and the prophets, represent the era after the apostolic age, where all the apostles have departed and where the church is honoring them. This conflict is not logic, for sometimes St. Paul called the believers saints (Rom. 1:7). His

writing about the apostles and the prophets as foundation to the church is definitely St. Paul's thought. He recorded it here when mentioning the universal church.

3. Writing about marriage (Eph. 5:21-33) gives it special holiness, which correlates it to the concept of the unity of the church with Christ. We do not find this in his mentioning of marriage in his epistle to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 7:1-9), the reason for that is that in this epistle, he presents a general picture of the understanding of the sacrament of holy matrimony, while in First Corinthians chapter seven, he presents an answer to a specific question.

To whom was it sent?

In some of the old Greek manuscripts, the word "Ephesus" was not mentioned at all. That is why some of the scholars thought that it was a periodical message written for all the churches in Asia Minor, especially the church of Laodicia, and that it was referred to Ephesus because it was the capital of Asia Minor at that time.

The scholars rejected this theory of being a "periodical message", but every group has their own point of view and their proofs.

The first group emphasizes that this epistle was a general periodic message. Their proof was that St. Paul never mentioned special greetings to any of the ministers in Ephesus, although he had many memories there, since he is the one who had established it. Also, there was no handling to any of the specific problems as the rest of the epistles.

They also say that referring to the book of Revelation, (Rev. 3:16), where we find that the Lord Jesus who is risen from the dead, declares that the name Laodicia will be removed from His mouth. And truly, Laodicia was replaced by Ephesus.

In the second century, Marcion started with an idea that this epistle was sent to Laodicia. Some of the church fathers objected saying that it was originally sent to Ephesus. Among the fathers who proclaimed that idea were Tertullian the scholar¹⁰, St. Clement of Alexandria¹¹, St. Irenaeus¹², Origen, and St. Moratory.

The other group objecting to the theory of "the periodic message" believes that this epistle was recorded during the last days of St. Paul while he was in prison at Rome. They believe that St. Paul is directing it not to the church at Ephesus as a whole, but to the members who were of Gentile origin, to people whom he did not know, who had accepted the faith and baptism after his departure from that city. He knows the church of Ephesus, which he had established, but here he talks to the Gentiles about the concept of "the universal church". He did not want to mention names to elevate them above the personal relationships. However, in the other epistles, he addresses certain local problems, so he emphasized individual relationships. These are two complimenting concepts, which are apparent in St. Paul's life. As a true shepherd, he wanted to know each one in the flock, on a personal level in Christ Jesus, but in the mean time, he wanted to lift his eyes above the events to see the church of Christ as one and universal, without being partial to any person.

When was it written?

St. Paul does not show when he wrote this epistle nor where, but he made it clear that he is the prisoner of the Lord Jesus. He said, "I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles..." (Eph. 3:1) "I ask that you do not lose heart at my tribulation for you, which is your glory." (Eph. 3:13) "I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord..." (Eph. 4:1) "For which I am an ambassador in chains..." (Eph. 6:20)

The correct opinion is that it was written in the year 63 A.D., when he was in house arrest in Rome for two years and he received all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and

teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ. (Acts 28:30) During those two years, he wrote the epistles of Colossians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Philemon.

Some researchers like Reuss and Mayer believe that St. Paul wrote the epistles to the Ephesians, to the Colossians, and to Philemon from his prison in Caesarea. (Acts 23: 35 & 24:27), between the years of 58 A.D. and 60 A.D. Mayer presented four proofs, which we refute as follows¹³:

1. Onesimus could have gone to Caesaria and not have gone on this long trip to Rome. We refute that by saying that it is more acceptable that Onesimus, the robber slave, would have gone first to Rome because it is far from Philemon, his master, lest he find him and kill him. Second, Rome is vast and he can hide there without anyone noticing where he was, not like Caesaria, the small city where anyone could find him easily.

2. If these epistles were written in Rome, Onesimus and Tychicus would have carried the epistles to Ephesus before reaching Colosse. It would have been natural that St. Paul refers to them in his epistle to the Ephesians, as he did in his epistle to the Colossians (4:9), but never mentioning both of them in his epistle to the Ephesians was due to his coming from Caesaria to Colosse, where Onesimus settled there and did not go with Tychicus to Ephesus. That is why there was no need to mention the name Tychicus. To refute that, we say that the epistle to the Ephesians was a periodic epistle to all the churches in Asia Minor, so there is no need to mention Onesimus too.

3. His saying, "But that you also may know my affairs and how I am doing..." (Eph. 6:21) refers to Tychicus crossing first to Colosse then to Ephesus. He did that by going from Caesaria and not through Rome. To refute that, the word "also" has many interpretations here. It means that the epistle to the Colossians was first written and carried its news to the entire region. Then this epistle was written to continue the news that Tychicus will inform them with new matters also.

4. St. Paul asked that Philemon prepare a place for him (Phil. 1:22). This means that St. Paul was near Caesaria. To refute that, St. Paul was not talking about hastily going to him.

Church tradition confirms that the epistles of captivity were written from Rome and not from Caesarea, especially what was mentioned in Ephesians 6:19,20 clarifies that St. Paul had some freedom which he used to preach the Gospel, and it is the same in Rome. (Acts 28: 16), and not in Caesarea (Acts 24:23)

The Subject of the Epistle:

This epistle is considered "church type" in its essence. Its main subject is "the church" and Christ's relationship with the church. To Christ, the church is the body in relation to the Head (Eph. 1:22-23) and the bride to the Bridegroom. (Eph. 5: 23-32)

The purpose of the epistle is to declare God's plan to create messianic people, a holy congregation united with the Head, Jesus Christ. This is the secret of God's love to humanity.

After St. Paul has confirmed, in the first three chapters, that salvation is for the Jews as well as the Gentiles, he emphasized, in the last three chapters, that unity of faith, holiness, social behavior, the spiritual weapons for the believer are practiced through the church and within it¹⁴. Many scholars called it the "crown of Paulinism".

Its Characteristics:

This epistle has been characterized by its concern for the apostolic church thought; hence it carried a special type and unique traits. We mention some:

First: This epistle represents a church song or praise, on which St. Paul meditates. He sees the veil obstructing the Jews and Gentiles has been demolished, and the cross has destroyed the enmity. Therefore, this epistle is liturgical and also hymnodic¹⁵, where St. Paul encourages everyone to talk with psalms and spiritual songs. (Eph. 5: 19)

Second: This epistle contained some praises, which were used in his age. Some excerpts are: Eph. 1:3 –14, 20 – 23 & 2: 4 – 7, 10, 14 – 18, 20 – 22 & 3: 5, 20-21 & 4: 4 – 6, 11 –13 & 5: 2, 14, 25 –27). All these excerpts had affected the language of the epistle and its style. We add the following:

1. Verbs exceeded the nouns; there were 231 verbs versus 158 nouns, while in Galatians, there were 139 verbs versus 202 nouns, and in Romans, there were 363 verbs versus 377 nouns.

2. Many pronouns were used like "for, therefore, that..." These were used at the beginning of the sentence or at its end.

3. Some expressions were used in the middle of sentences.

4. Often, the name of God was not mentioned but he said, "through Him or by Him..."

5. He mentioned those who benefited from God's blessings as in the first person in the plural form like "our Father, our Lord, blessed us, chose us..."

Third: He mentioned the church as the bride of Christ, united with the Father in His Son. He demonstrated God as the God of glory (Eph. 1:17), and God of might (Eph. 1:19), and God the merciful (Eph. 2:4). He talked about the church as "in Christ", for in Him we receive heavenly blessings (Eph. 1:3), and in Him He has chosen us (Eph. 1:4), and in Him we have redemption (Eph. 1:7), etc...¹⁶ He declared the power of His cross in the reconciliation (Eph. 2), and demonstrated the work of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 2:18, 3:5, 4:1-3, 5:18), in other words, the church is the work of the love of the Father, the Lover of mankind, and the work of the Son who gathered her through the cross through the work of the Holy Spirit the doner of fellowship.

Fourth: Since St. Paul declared the universal church in her hidden union with her Heavenly Bridegroom; he emphasized her heavenly nature, lifting our hearts up to heaven. In the introduction, he said, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ." (Eph. 1:3) We can say that he means by "heavenly places", the church life as being a deposit of heaven!

When mentioning the work of the Father in Christ the Head of the church, he said, "He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places." (Eph. 1:20) Through Him, we rise from the death of sin and we sit in the heavenly places, that is, we practice the church life as "life in the Heavenly Christ."

Then, he repeated, "And raised us up together and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus." (Eph. 2:6)

In the third chapter, he declares, "To the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places." (Eph. 3:10)

Even our struggle against the devil is achieved for the sake of heaven. "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places." (Eph. 6:12)

Hence, we see the heavenly path very clear, for the church is a heavenly life, and our Father is Heavenly and our Christ sits at the right hand of heavens, and the enemy fights us every day to deprive us of heaven.

Fifth: This epistle had demonstrated the holiness of the church as life with Christ, a heavenly life yet factual and livable. **St. John Chrysostom** said, in his sermon about the fall of

Eutrochios, "Nothing is settled like the church, she is your salvation and refuge! She is above the heavens and close to the earth; she does not get old. Many names cannot describe her, for she is the bride, the daughter, the virgin, the mother, and also the queen¹⁷."

Sixth: Many researchers noticed that this epistle emphasized the glorified Lord Jesus not the suffering Christ, for this is the epistle of the hidden church, though she participated in the suffering of Christ, yet she hopes to enjoy the fellowship of His heavenly glories.

This is the epistle of the Lord of glory, the glorified Father and the glorified Son. That is why in the first chapter, we find the words "the praise of His glory" repeated three times. (Eph. 1:6, 12,14) By practicing the church life, we present the song of "the praise of His glory", not only by our lips but also by all our life.

Seventh: Since 1835, F. C. Baur believed that this epistle carried Gnostic approaches, which appeared in the second half of the second century. The researchers were concerned about the relation of this epistle to the Gnostic writings, especially after the famous Nagah Hamadi Gnostic reprints. Some thought that this epistle had some Gnostic thoughts and meanwhile, anti-Gnostic ones¹⁸. The reason for that is that he used their expressions but in a completely different understanding, we have prementioned this¹⁹. For example, St. Paul often mentioned the word "knowledge", but he does not present "gnosis knowledge", according to the Gnostic thought, which means that the mind replaces the faith, but he mentioned knowledge as a heavenly gift declaring what is hidden and its purpose is salvation, which attaches the one who obtains it to God as the road of spiritual life, whose center is the Lord Christ.

The epistle is divided into parts:

Part One: The secret of God's plan "The Messianic God's people": ch. 1 – 3

1. The church and the mystery of knowledge: ch. 1
2. The church and the mystery of reconciliation: ch. 2
3. The universal church and the mystery of Christ: ch. 3

Part Two: The practical church life: ch. 4 - 6

1. Unity and the inflaming of the gifts: ch. 4
2. Worship and behavior: ch. 5
3. Practical life and spiritual strife: ch. 6

Part One

The secret of God's Plan Or The Messianic God's people

- 1. The church and the mystery of knowledge: ch. 1**
- 2. The church and the mystery of reconciliation: ch. 2**
- 3. The universal church and the mystery of Christ: ch. 3**

Chapter One

THE CHURCH AND THE MYSTERY OF KNOWLEDGE

In its essence, this epistle is "a praise of love", which the soul, who has experienced its identity as abiding in Christ, sings, not as an isolated individual but as a living member in the holy body through her unity with the Head. Through Him she enjoys the knowledge of "the mystery of Christ" according to the level of the heavenly experience and with a glorious eschatological outlook.

In other words, this chapter implies two lines of thought, which are: "in Christ" and "the knowledge of the mystery of God." We are the church of God, His holy people for we are in Christ. The goal of our faith is the divine knowledge, not to be argumentative, but according to the level of accepting God's manifestation of Himself and His mysteries.

The chapter can be divided into the following:

- 1. The apostolic blessing Eph. 1: 1**
- 2. The church praise: "in Christ" Eph. 1: 2 – 14**
- 3. The apostle interceding so they may receive the knowledge Eph. 1: 15 – 23**

1. The apostolic blessing:

"Paul an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints who are in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus; grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." (Eph. 1: 1, 2)

This introduction carries the spirit of the apostle and his thought. Often, St. Paul presents himself to the church to which he writes in simple words but is very deep and corresponds to the subject of the epistle and its goal. He starts by presenting the apostolic blessing, which is the gift of God Himself to the church. In this introduction, we notice the following:

First: The subject of the epistle is "the universal church". Establishing this church is from the work of God Himself who sent His Only Begotten Son incarnate to make the church His body, granting her His holy life. That is why he concentrated on the following points:

A. He is the apostle "by the will of God". He does not take credit in fulfilling the apostolic ministry, especially because he is the apostle to the Gentiles, calling them to be united with the Jews in one body. God chose him to be His apostle to fulfill His divine purpose in him. Truly, the statement "by the will of God", is not strange to be in the introduction of St. Paul's epistles, however, this statement was repeated six times. (Eph. 1:5, 5: 9,11, 17, 6:16). We do not find this in other epistles²⁰, or in other books except the Gospel of John. This epistle reveals "the mystery of Christ", being the mystery of the church made up of the Jews and the Gentiles. This mystery achieves God's eternal will and fulfils His joy with humans.

Some researchers prefer translating the words "by the will of God" to "by the decision of God²¹". They perceive that this statement does not declare the will of God but rather the wise, mighty and living act of God as Lover of mankind. He declared this eternal act, through history, by His divine plan.

B. He calls them "saints", although he writes to members of Gentile origin, who some of the Christians from Jewish origin, do not want to join them. St. Paul emphasized that God who has chosen the Jews to be His holy nation, yet He has opened the door of faith to the Gentiles without them losing their holiness. He repeated the word "saints" fourteen times in this epistle,

which we do not find except in the epistle to the Romans, which has more chapters. In other words, repeating this word "saints" is confirmation of the holiness of God's old people even after accepting the Gentiles, through Christ Jesus²².

St. John Chrysostom commented on the word "saints" by saying: "Notice that he calls men with their wives, children and servants as saints. He called them saints, for it is written at the end of the epistle, 'Wives, submit to your own husbands' (Eph. 5:22). Also, 'Children, obey your parents in the Lord' (Eph. 6:1), 'Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh.' (Eph. 6:5) Reflect now on how laziness have controlled us and how virtue became scarce, while at that time the virtuous people were numerous, so that even the lay people were called saints²³."

God's will or decision is not that God chooses only St. Paul, but that all the Gentiles, whether men or women or children, or elders or masters or bondservants, should enjoy the holy life through faith in Christ.

Briefly, the epistle of the Ephesians is like an article about the foundation of sanctification, its means, its mission, its extension, and its purpose²⁴.

Origen confirms that the believer is called a saint because he has received the capabilities of the holy life (through baptism and the work of the Holy Spirit). He has to continue to grow lest he loses the sanctity of life.

C. Often, St. Paul connects grace with peace in the apostolic blessing, being God's great gifts to His church. The word "peace" was repeated seven times in a unique manner, except in the epistle to the Romans. He declared the foundation of the epistle and the possibility of all people living in harmony, whether Jews or Gentiles, and that is in Christ²⁵.

Notice that St. Paul refers "the grace and peace" to the Father as well as to the Son, being their two gifts, without any partiality between the two hypostasis. They are the gifts of the Father as well as the Son.

Introducing this apostolic blessing does not mean that the believers of Ephesus did not have this grace and peace before sending that epistle, but rather they were eager to receive more of them. Grace and peace are two dynamic gifts, which the believer receives and rejoices with, and asks for more that through this abundant grace, he may resemble the Lord Jesus and His traits. And through peace, he may reconcile with God and people, on a deeper level. Thus this beatitude is fulfilled in him: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be filled." (Matt. 5: 6) And he is not rebuked like that: "Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing' - and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked." (Rev. 3:17)

Second: We have previously confirmed²⁶ that St. Paul wanted to treat some Gnostic ideas, which had penetrated into the minds of the Christians like considering the God of the Old Testament as a just and severe God, but the God of the New Testament as a merciful and redeeming God. That is why he credits the divine grace and the heavenly peace to the Father and calls Him "our Father", declaring His fatherhood and compassion, and to the Lord Jesus, declaring that He is one with the Father in essence, carrying His own will.

2. The church praise: "In Christ"

St. Paul excerpted a part from a praise, which the church most probably used to sing in the apostolic age. This was a heavenly praise befitting the nature of the church as a heavenly life "in the Heavenly Christ". He said, "**Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.**" (Eph. 1: 3)

Many of the researchers see that this praise has specific characteristics pertaining to baptism. Probably, it was used in the liturgy of baptism, for it refers to the blessings and effect of baptism, like the adoption to the Father by Jesus Christ (Eph. 6: 5), and forgiveness of sins (Eph. 1: 7), and enjoying the inheritance (Eph. 1: 14), and the seal of the Holy Spirit. (Eph. 1: 13)

He started the praise by the word "blessed", which was used by the Semitics, declaring that every gift or heavenly blessing is from God's mercies and His mighty deeds.

The blessings of the New Testament were called "spiritual blessing in the heavenly places", to distinguish them from the temporal blessings of the Old Testament. **St. John Chrysostom** said:

"Here, he points to the blessings of the Jews, for these were blessings but not spiritual blessings. How? 'He will also bless the fruit of your womb...' (Deut. 7:13) 'Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out.' (Deut. 28: 6) The situation differs here. How? 'With every spiritual blessing.'"

What else do you need? You became eternal, free, a son, justified, brother, partaker of the inheritance. You reign with the Lord Jesus and are glorified with Christ; you are freely granted everything.

He said, "...How shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32) The Cherubim and the Seraphim love your first fruits. What else do you need? "With every spiritual blessing"! Not with physical blessings; thus he eliminated the previous blessings, for He said, "In the world, you will have tribulation..." (John 16:33) Those who received the physical blessings were not able to listen of the spiritual blessings; in the same manner, those who seek the spiritual blessings cannot receive them unless they forsake the physical ones.

Also, what is the spiritual blessing in the heavenly places? This means that it is not on earth, like the case with the Jews: "...You shall eat the good of the land." (Is. 1:19) "... To a land flowing with milk and honey..." (Ex. 3:8) "... He will also bless the fruit of your land..." (Deut. 7:13)

Now, we do not see any of that. What do we see? "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him." (John 14:23) "Therefore, whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock; and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock." (Matt. 7:24,25) This rock is the heavenly matters. The Lord Jesus said, "Whoever confesses My name ..." (Matt 10:32) "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God." (Matt. 5:8). "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. 5:3) Also, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. 5:11). Notice how, in every verse, he mentions the heaven and not the earth. Also, "Our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ." (Phil. 3:20) Also, "Set your minds on things above, not on things on the earth." (Col. 3:2) 28.

He also called it "spiritual blessing", for we receive the gifts of the Father through our union with the Son, and that is through the work of the Holy Spirit. In other words, the Holy Spirit is the spirit of fellowship who attaches us to the Son, so we may abundantly receive what is for the Son. When the Lord Jesus ascended to the heaven, He sent His Holy Spirit on the church, so we may enjoy the divine gifts.

Since God the Father grants every spiritual blessing in the heavens, He grants it **in Christ**. (Eph. 1: 3) Seeing us as His children by abiding in the Only Begotten Son "the Beloved"

(Eph. 1: 6), He overflows with His divine blessings on us, as members of His beloved body... so we become beloved in Christ, as He is Beloved.

St. Paul relates that the secret of our membership in the church and the secret of our life with God and our enjoying of every blessing is that we are "In Christ". This idea has absorbed all his thinking to the extent that the researchers said that all St. Paul's thoughts could be summarized in two words, "in Christ". When he addresses issues such as divine, church, behavioral, family or social relationships, it is through this outlook "in Christ." We carry the thought and life of Christ in us. No wonder if we notice St. Paul repeating this short phrase and its synonyms like "in the Beloved", or "in Him", more than thirty times. Repeating it here is to emphasize that uniting the holy community of the Gentiles is fulfilled in Him and under His leadership.

"In Christ" not only we have received every spiritual blessing, but also we have enjoyed the Father choosing us as His children. He knew us as members in the body of His Beloved Son. He confirmed this by stating, **"Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love."** (Eph. 1: 4)

What did St. Paul mean by this choice, which occupied all his thoughts, heart, feelings, to the point that he addressed it in various ways in more than one place in his epistles?

No doubt that he does not mean to ignore "the personal freedom" in accepting the faith or rejecting it, but God in His dealing with man, does not deal with him as a machine or as pieces of chess which He can move with His fingers, but He deals with Him as a free individual, who can accept God's call and love or reject Him. God, who wants all to be saved and who calls everyone to receive His free grace, in His foreknowledge, chose us in His Son, without us having any credit. He chose us without obliging us to accept His call. "For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be confirmed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover, whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified." (Rom. 8:29,30) St. Paul wanted to confirm a very important fact that we take no credit in God's calling, for this is a free gift given to us based on the worthiness of the Son of God sacrificing Himself for us. All the credit goes back to God's plan in salvation and His grace, as St. Paul said, "Who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began, but has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ." (2 Tim. 1:9,10)

St. Clement of Alexandria felt that when he talked about faith and individual freedom, confirming that the individual freedom and the mind are divine gifts, which can not be offered to man without the divine help. Though faith is from the free will, yet it is a divine gift²⁹. This resembles a ball player who has the freedom to hold the ball or reject it, but he cannot hold it unless it is thrown to him³⁰. In the same manner, we may hold on to faith or reject it, but we need that God offers it to us. St. Origen, St. Clement's disciple, talked abundantly about God's free gift saying, "None of God's gifts are offered as repaying a debt, but they are all granted from His love and grace³¹." In the mean time, he continued, "The will is very essential to obtain virtue; if there is no will, then virtue is destroyed³²."

St. Paul confirmed that choosing us was fulfilled "in Him", for this did not happen haphazardly but according to God's plan, before the foundation of the world. (Eph. 1:4) **St. John Chrysostom** said: [What does he mean by "He chose us in Him?" He means that this was fulfilled by faith in Him, that is, in Christ. He joyfully planned this for us before we are born, moreover "before the foundation of the world". How beautiful is the word 'foundation', as if he

is referring to the world as if it is falling from a great height. Truly, God's splendor is very high, surpassing all understanding and very far, not only regarding the place, but also regarding His nature³³.]

What is the purpose of that choice?

St. Paul answers, "...That we should be holy and without blame before Him in love." (Eph. 1: 4) From this statement, we can realize God's purpose toward us, by the following:

First: He wants two things concerning us, that the Father sees us in His Son carrying His traits, so we may become saints, as He is holy. He commanded us, "For I am the Lord your God. You shall consecrate yourselves, and you shall be holy; for I am holy." (Lev. 11:44) St. Peter said, "Because it is written, be holy for I am holy." (1 Pet. 1:16) Also, that we should be "without blame", this trait was essential in the sacrifices of the Old Testament (Lev. 1: 3,10) He wants us to offer ourselves living sacrifices, without blame, through the High Priest and the great Sacrifice, our Lord Jesus Christ. He wants us before Him "without blame in love", that is, a sacrifice of love carrying the sweet aroma of Christ. This is God's purpose in us, to see us carrying His traits (holiness) and to be united with Him, as a sacrifice of love that the Lord smells as a pleasing aroma. St. Paul said, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service." (Rom. 12:1)

St. John Chrysostom associates the life of holiness to the life without blame, which refers to the unity of faith with the practical life. Since holiness is the gift of the Holy God, therefore we have to lead a life without blame, that is, we translate His gift in our practical behavior. He said: "The saint is the one who shares the faith, and the one without blame is the one who lives a life without spot³⁴."

Second: St. Paul emphasizes that this holiness and the life without blame should be **before Him**, meaning that the holiness and the life without blame which the church carries are what God is concerned about, like the bridegroom who wants the beauty of his bride and her inner adornment for himself, as he offers her his deep love. How hard it is for a man to find that his wife is pleasant with others while being bitter with him. God wants us to be for Him as He is for us. This epistle confirms this fact, for it is written, "That He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish." (Eph. 5:27)

St. John Chrysostom said: "He does not require from us only holiness and being without blame, but He wants us to be before Him in this manner. There are some people who appear before people without blame, but they resemble white washed tombs and those who wear lamp's garments. You should not be like that, but as the prophet said, '...according to the cleanness of my hands in His sight.' (Ps. 18:24) What is that cleanness that should be before Him? It is the holiness on which God's eye looks³⁵."

Third: St. Paul emphasizes that we should be holy without blame before Him, in love (Eph. 1:4). He means that God's choice has been fulfilled through His sacrificing divine love (John 3:18), and that our holiness and our blameless behavior are achieved through His free grace, which pours on us from His everlasting love. **St. John Chrysostom** said: "Virtue alone can never save one's self without love. Tell me what would St. Paul have benefited, if he appeared the way he appeared to be, if it were not for God who called him and drew him to Himself³⁶!"

Probably, what he meant by love is that what God smells in us, when we appear before Him as saints without blemish is "love", which is the sign of our unity and cleaving with Him.

Moreover, it is the sign of our resembling Him "God is love" (1 John 4: 8) We stand before Him so all our past is erased, and only love, which never fails, remains. (1 Cor. 13:8)

Fourth: God's surpassing love towards us has been fulfilled, as well as our love to Him is fulfilled when we live a blameless holy life through the grace of adoption, which we receive in Christ Jesus "the Beloved". He said: "**Having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His good will, to the praise of the glory of His grace by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved.**" (Eph. 1: 5, 6)

"In the Beloved" is a strong liturgical expression pertaining to baptism (Mark 1: 11), as many of the western scholars relate. God has appointed His church so we may obtain the grace of adoption through baptism; hence the desire of the Father is fulfilled in accepting new members as children of God, not due to any good in them but due to the free grace of baptism. He declares "to the praise of the glory of His grace", then God's surpassing love is manifested.

In the Beloved, we have obtained the adoption, so we became children of God who have the right of inheritance. However, there is a great difference between the Only Begotten, the Beloved Son and between the children by adoption. **St. Augustine** said: "The Father has begotten children who are heirs with His Begotten Son, but they are not begotten like Him, from His essence, but He adopted them to become His household³⁷. We are the children of the One who raised us by His will; however, we are not born of His nature, but by adoption, through His grace³⁸."

Fifth: God's love is achieved by accepting us as His children, but through Jesus Christ (Eph. 1: 5). **St. John Chrysostom** said: "Is there anything achieved outside Jesus Christ or likewise outside the Father? One has appointed and One brings us to Him... Truly, the granted blessings are great and it has more abundant blessings because it is through Christ. He did not send a servant, though he is sent to ones, but sent His Only Begotten Son Himself³⁹."

Sixth: What has been achieved to us through the eternal love of the Father and the grace of His Begotten Son to obtain the adoption, is the subject of God's joy. He said, "...according to the good pleasure of His will" (Eph. 1: 5). Here, **St. John Chrysostom** distinguishes between God's former will in which He wants all to be saved and where He joyfully grants the adoption to all, and between the will when we insisted to do evil and as a result we fell and perished. In other words, God's desire is to grant us the adoption and the holiness revealed in love. However, He does not force us, so if we reject Him, we perish as a natural result to what we have chosen by our own will.

Seventh: Since God in His good will has offered us this free heavenly grace, it is also "to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He made us accepted in the Beloved." (Eph. 1:6) His free grace is manifested, which glorifies Him before all, especially the heavenly creation, which is overwhelmed by His rich love toward mankind.

St. John Chrysostom said: "Since God has revealed to us His grace for the praise of the glory of His praise, therefore, we have to abide in them. "The praise of His glory", who are these? Who are the ones who praise Him? Is it we or the angles or the archangels or all the creation? The divine nature does not need anything. Does He want us to praise Him or glorify Him? This is so that His love is inflamed inside us. He does not need anything from us, not our service, or our praise or anything of the sort. He wants nothing but our salvation. This is the purpose of all He does for us. The one who praises the grace is the one who increases in righteousness⁴⁰."

Now, he addresses the effect of His free grace, which we obtain in the Beloved by the following points:

First: Enjoying the redemption: "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence." (Eph. 1: 7,8) In the Old Testament, redemption meant the liberation of God's people from the bondage of Pharaoh to become His (Ex. 15:13 & Deut. 7:8). In the New Testament, we find redemption in Christ the Redeemer who liberates us from the bondage of sin, forgiving our sins, pouring unto us His surpassing grace, granting us the forgiveness of our sins with all the heavenly wisdom and discernment.

In other words, the Liberator is no more outside us, but inside us and we are in Him. He liberates us not from temporal bondage but, through His grace, He liberates us from the sin which enslaved us, and under which we fell by our own free will. He adorns us with all wisdom, for He dwells inside us and declares His heavenly beauty in our inner life.

His saying, "which He made to abound toward us" means His abundant free giving. **St. John Chrysostom** said about this divine gift: "This gift is rich and abundant, was poured on us with incomprehensible measure. Words cannot express the blessings, which we have experienced through this gift; truly this gift is rich and exceedingly rich."

Second: Enjoying the knowledge of the divine gifts: As he said, "Having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth, in Him." (Eph. 1: 9,10)

The Gnostics love knowledge (gnosis), it occupied their minds instead of faith, and they considered that they could enjoy salvation through their own minds alone. St. Paul corrects this situation that the true Christian is "knowledgeable", but on a high level, for God does not grant him only forgiveness of sins (redemption), but He raises him as a son of God to the heavenly matters to declare to him the mystery of His knowledge. He receives knowledge (gnosis) as a divine gift and as a heavenly revelation according to God's pleasure, which is fulfilled in the fullness of time.

Probably St. Paul meant that the mystery which God reveals to His believers is a fulfillment of God's plan, in the fullness of time, where He works with His full authority to create a universal group of believers, sanctified in Him.

In our study of the School of Alexandria, we saw many of the early fathers looking at the "divine knowledge" as the most precious gift, which Christ offers to the human soul. When she unites with Him, as the bride to her Bridegroom, He offers Himself, so she may realize His mysteries in the Heavenly chamber. Therefore St. Clement of Alexandria and his disciple Origen related that this knowledge is a divine gift to the perfect.

St. John Chrysostom said: "It is amazing! What kind of friendship is this? He reveals to us His secrets, for He says "the mystery of His will", as if we know what is inside His heart. Truly, here is the mystery full of wisdom and understanding. What kind of wisdom? He raises those who were nothing to be rich and abundant. What wise management is this? The one, who was an enemy, instantly, was raised to the highest level. This was done in the fullness of time. This was an act of wisdom, which was fulfilled on the cross!"

Third: He gathers all in Him saying: "That in the dispensation of the fullness of the times, He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth, in Him." (Eph. 1: 10)

The word "times" or "Kairos" does not carry a simple meaning to time like the word "Chronos", but it refers to a new era where God works with all His authority to gather everyone in Christ, as under one Head.

The believer rejoices not only because of the redemption, liberation of sins, enjoying the divine adoption, realizing the mystery of God's will, that is obtaining knowledge, but also by his outlook that everyone, whether the earthly or the heavenly creatures, are all gathered under the leadership of the Head, the Lord Jesus Christ. This is what rejoices the believer's heart, that is, God's will is fulfilled through the union of the believing rational creation, so all creatures may live together with one spirit to enjoy the divine presence. By abiding in Christ, the believer loses his selfishness and individualism to be widened with love to all the community, without losing his private relationship with Christ.

A true believer rejoices upon seeing His Christ embracing him, not only him but also all the chosen earthly creatures to make them a heavenly nation, sharing their heavenly life with the heavenly creatures.

St. John Chrysostom said: "The heavenly creatures suffered from the earthly creatures, and they had no more one head. Until that time, the creation was under one God, but when the Gentiles sinned and rebelt...now there rosed one Head above all, that is Christ in the flesh, above the angels and the humans. In other words, He made one kingdom for the angels and the humans; He gathered all under one Head, binding the union from above⁴¹."

In the same sermon, **St. John Chrysostom** gave another interpretation for the phrase: "He might gather together in one all things in Christ..." He said: "Since the fall of man until the incarnation, all the prophecies and promises were fulfilled by the coming of Christ."

Fourth: Since St. Paul declared God's grace, which gathered the heavenly creatures with the earthly as in one body to the One Heavenly Head, and in Him all the prophecies and promises were fulfilled. He wanted to stir the gentiles with jealousy so they may realize the riches of this grace, abiding with it as the deposit for the heavenly eternal inheritance. He confirms that as a Jew, he has obtained the appointed part, which the earlier Jews had hoped for. The gentiles received the same part, through the word of truth, the gospel of salvation. The gentiles were not deprived of all what the Jews had received, when they accepted the Gospel. This is what St. Paul meant when he said: "**In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the council of His will, that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory. In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.**" (Eph. 1: 11-14)

A. Notice that he mentioned here two specific words: "we" and "you". By "we" he means the Jews, and by "you", he means the Gentiles. He emphasized that since the Jews were the first to accept Christ the Savior, yet both the Jews and the Gentiles, share in enjoying the divine love, God's grace, and the membership in the One Body.

B. The word "inheritance" in Greek (Kleroo) means to cast a lot. ⁴² Obtaining the divine gifts was an inheritance fulfilled by casting a lot. St. Paul wanted the Jews to go back to the days when their fathers entered the Promised Land, and how each one conquered by obtaining a portion by casting a lot, without anyone taking credit in choosing. The same applies here, the one who enjoys the inheritance has no credit, but it is all due to God's rich grace.

What happens now is not done haphazardly without any specific planning. To emphasize this point, St. Paul mentioned that this inheritance is achieved "according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the council of His will." All that happens now is according to God's predestined plan and His wise will toward us.

St. John Chrysostom said: "Previously, he used the word '...He chose us...' (Eph. 1:4), but here he says, '...we have obtained an inheritance...' (Eph. 1:11) Since the lot is considered coincidence, notice how he said, '... being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the council of His will' (Eph. 1:11). He means that we were not just haphazardly chosen, or were chosen according to a lot, but this was according to 'the purpose of Him who works.' He said the same thing in the book of Romans: '... To those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.' (Rom. 8:28-30) He is saying that the lot was cast and that God has chosen us, so everything was fulfilled with a precise choice. He has previously appointed men whom He has chosen for Himself. He saw us, before we were even born, this is His marvelous predestination, for He knows everything, even before it happens⁴³."

C. He talks about the Gentiles who have accepted faith, by saying: "...In whom also having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise." (Eph. 1: 13) The Gentiles heard, then believed, then they were sealed. They accepted faith through hearing, for the Lord Jesus came to the Jews, His chosen people, and they rejected Him. However, the Gentiles did not see Him, but when they heard about Him, they believed, and when they believed, they received the gift of the Holy Spirit, the seal of the Spirit.

Fifth: Enjoying the seal of the Spirit, as a deposit for the eternal inheritance. He said: **"...You were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory." (Eph. 1: 13,14)**

The seal was a general sign for ownership. Some worshipers of idols used to put a sign on their bodies carrying the name of their god. Baptism by spirit is the visible sign (the seal) of the incorruption in Christ⁴⁴. Earlier, we have mentioned how baptism is like a seal ⁴⁵ as a sign of our admission to the kingdom of God, being under His protection, entering in a spiritual army, following the example of Christ, and as an eternal seal which can never be untied. In the Old Testament, circumcision was a sign of membership in God's people, and thus entering into His kingdom, as it is written: "For the Lord's portion is His people, Jacob is the place of His inheritance." (Deut. 32:9)

"During baptism, when coming to the presence of the bishops, priests, or deacons, look to the minister of baptism and do not think of his visible face, but remember the Holy Spirit, for He is present to seal you. He grants you the seal who will terrify the evil spirits, for He is a heavenly seal, as it is written: 'In whom also having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise.'" St. Cyril of Jerusalem ⁴⁶

"The owner prints a special sign on the things he owns to show that they belong to him. In the same manner, in baptism, the Holy Spirit puts a seal of the holy oil 'Myron' on those who are baptized to show that they belong to God." St. Mar Efraim the Syrian ⁴⁷

"How can the angels accept a soul, which is not enlightened with the grace of the new birth? Truly, they cannot accept her because she is not carrying the seal (Asphragiston), or any specific sign for her owner. Truly, she will be carried by the wind, wandering without any rest,

for she is without an owner. She seeks comfort and does not find it, she cries in vain and regrets without any benefit." St. Gregory of Nysse 48

"As the seal is printed on the soldiers, likewise, the Holy Spirit is printed on the believers." **St. John Chrysostom** 49

3. The intercession of St. Paul to obtain knowledge:

After St. Paul presented this church praise which carries "the mystery of Christ", which reveals the pouring of God's free grace to gather all, whether Jews or Gentiles, to achieve in them God's plan in Jesus Christ, and to become one holy people, and a body to the Head, and children to the Father in His Beloved Son, now St. Paul prays and offers his intercession for them to the Father so He may grant them a spiritual enlightenment, to open the minds of their hearts so they may realize the truth of "the mystery of Christ" and have the true knowledge.

No one should think that when he prays for their sake, it is due to their unbelief or their lack of knowledge. To confirm this, he said, **"Therefore, I also after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers."** (Eph. 1: 15,16)

We notice the following:

First: St. Paul points out the good things first; he does not ignore their faith and love, therefore he rejoices and thanks them. Moreover, he prays for them so they may abound in everything.

The church is in dire need for such shepherds as St. Paul who supports and stirs the spirit of hope with joy, without ceasing to pray for them, so they may continuously grow in grace and knowledge.

"Nothing can match St. Paul's compassion nor his kindness and emotions, which he offered for everyone, for all the gentiles and nations, for he wrote the same words to everyone: 'do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers.' (Eph. 1:16, Rom. 1:9, 1 Cor. 1:4, Phil. 1:3, 4, Col. 1:3, & 1 Thess. 1:2)

Remember how they were in his mind, for it requires effort to remember them all. How many were those whom he remembered in his prayers and for whom he thanked God."

St. John Chrysostom 50

Second: St. Paul associates between faith of the Lord Jesus and love toward all the saints. Our membership in Christ does not separate us from our membership in the church. Our faith in the Head has to be practically translated through love toward all the saints.

On the other side, associating faith with love is to confirm the working living faith so our faith is not dead.

"In all occasions, faith is linked with love as a true couple." **St. John Chrysostom** 51

What does he ask for them in his prayers?

First: "That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him." (Eph. 1: 17)

He asks for them "the spirit of wisdom", as well as "the revelation in the knowledge of Him..." He did not say "in the knowledge of His mysteries", but in the knowledge of Him, for He desires that they know Him personally and unite with Him.

We need God to grant us the spirit of wisdom and knowledge. He granted us the mind, but if we abide only by the mind, without seeking God, we deviate from the wisdom and the true knowledge.

Second: "The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the

saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power." (Eph. 1: 18, 19)

He asks for the enlightenment of their inner eyes, that is, to have the spiritual vision which is capable of seeing God by faith, to abide in His promises, and to realize the riches of the glory of His inheritance prepared for the saints, so that the soul may be filled with hope and be strengthened with divine power.

"The heart contains the eyes which see God. Now, the soul, being weak, is enlightened by faith, but later when the soul becomes strong, seeing God enlightens it. 'So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. For we walk by faith, not by sight.' (2 Cor. 5:6,7)" **St. Augustine 52**

Baptism is called "the mystery of enlightenment", as St. Paul said, "... for those who were once enlightened..." (Heb. 6:4) Through baptism, the light of the Holy Spirit opens our inner vision, so we may realize three matters:

A. We know what is the hope of His calling, for when we become members in the Body of Christ, through baptism, we realize that He called us to become children of the Father and heirs with Christ, so our hearts are filled with hope in Him.

B. The rich glory of His inheritance in the saints: through baptism, we are granted the deposit of the eternal inheritance prepared for the saints, and experience the unutterable eternal riches.

C. The exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power: for through baptism, He raises us from death and grants us the adoption to God, the author of life.

"Baptism, or enlightenment, is a helper to the weak, sharing the light and casting out darkness. Enlightenment is a ship directed toward God, walking with Christ and the perfection of the mind! Enlightenment is the key to the kingdom and restoring life. We call baptism a gift, a talent, an enlightenment, a garment for eternity and uncorruption, second birth, a seal, and everything honorable." St. Gregory 53

Through baptism, we have gained enlightenment, our hearts are filled with hope, we feel the riches of the glory of His inheritance, and we realize the greatness of His exceeding power toward us the believers. This enlightenment is not granted in baptism in a static way, but is granted so our minds are renewed daily so we may enter new depths every day through our faith working with love and our strife with His free surpassing grace. That is why St. Paul does not cease to pray for them, who have obtained the sacrament of baptism, so that this gift is continuously overflowing in them.

St. John Chrysostom, reflecting on this divine gift, finds it surpassing and unutterable. We keep asking God to continually work in us so we may be granted this gift, to reach its perfection.

Third: **"Which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come." (Eph. 1: 20, 21)**

He reveals to us the work of the Father in the Incarnate Son, for our sake, for He raised Him and seated Him and put all things under His feet. (Eph. 1:22) He still works in His body, which is the church. He raises us and seats us in the heavenly places and puts everything under our feet. Thus, the Lord Jesus confirms that, "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working." (John 5:17)

This work is continuous and no one can stop it until the body of Christ, which is the church, is fulfilled and the chosen are complete.

The believer looks at the Word of God, who through the incarnation, came down and became like one of us. He was raised from the dead, (in obedience to the Father, He died and rose, by the power of His divinity and not as a gift stemming from others). He sat at His right hand in the heavenly places far above all principality and power and might and dominion. This all happened for our sake, that is, for every believer, so that he may enjoy all these capabilities "In Christ", that is through abiding in Him as a member in His body.

This phrase "**...And gave Him to be head over all things to the church**" (Eph. 1:22) contains a true hope in the heart of the church, for God must fulfill His will. The work of Christ in the church must be achieved and be completed to declare Christ as the Head for the chosen. The early church has lived that hope amidst persecutions and obstacles. Many of the fathers have expressed that, especially St. Ercanus who said: "He has to draw everything to Himself in the appropriate time⁵⁴."

Saying "to the church" means that what was fulfilled to the Head was for the sake of the church. **St. John Chrysostom** said: "This is an amazing matter! Where is the church raised too? It is as if He raised her with an instrument and put her at the top of all works, and put her on the throne. Where the Head is, there is the body too. There is no separation between the Head and the body. He prepared every human being to follow Him, cleave to Him and accompany Him "in His body". Hearing about the Head, one should not think of who should be the boss, but one's main concern should be to abide in Him and aspire Him, not only as an honorable Leader, but as the Head to the body⁵⁵."

Chapter Two

THE CHURCH AND THE MYSTERY OF RECONCILIATION

Since the church, in its essence, is an enjoyment of abiding "In Christ", to enjoy His life working in us and obtain the knowledge of His divine mysteries on the level of practical living experience, then this life has two dimensions, one horizontal and the other vertical. On the vertical level, one enjoys the risen life in Christ, so we may sit with Him in the heavens and practice our union with God. On the horizontal level, one gets closer to the One Head, and the veil between the Jews and the Gentiles are destroyed, and between all nations, so we all may feel our membership to one another. These two dimensions are fulfilled through our abiding "in Christ". The more we are united with the Father in His Son, the more we are united with each other.

1. The resurrection and the mystery of reconciliation with God Eph. 2: 1 – 10

2. The mystery of reconciliation of all humanity Eph. 2: 11 – 22

1. The Resurrection and the mystery of reconciliation

St. Augustine relates that the cross is made of two pieces of wood, one horizontal and the other vertical. The vertical one represents the reconciliation of man with God and His heavenly creatures. The horizontal one represents man's reconciliation with his brother. This cross, with its complete work, is achieved in the church, as St. Paul declared in this chapter. He clarified the resurrection of the believer from his death and his rising to the heavens to sit in the bosom of the Father, and His wide heart to embrace everyone as members in the one body.

"And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)." (Eph 2:1 – 5)

To reveal the power of the grace and the reconciliation, which was accomplished between man and God, he, first, showed the condition of death, which we have reached, the captivity of Satan, and the extent of deterioration, which we have experienced in our bodies to fulfill all lusts. Then, he revealed God's rich mercy stemming from His love, so He offered us life by the death on the cross and granted us salvation through His grace.

We notice the following:

First: What was mentioned in this chapter corresponds to what was written in the Gospel of St. Luke chapter 15 about the prodigal son, as D. M. Stanley said.

Ephesians 2

v. 4. "...God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us"

Luke 15

v. 20. "...But when he was still a great way off, he saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him."

v. 1. ...You who were dead in trespasses..."

v. 13. "But now in Christ Jesus, you who were once far off..."

v. 19. "Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners..."

v. 16. "and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross..."

v. 24. "For this my son was dead and is made alive..."

v. 13 "And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country..."

v. 22 "But the father said to his servants, bring out the best robe and put it on him..."

v. 28 "but he was angry and would not go in. Therefore his father came out and pleaded with him."

Second: This chapter is full of contrast between man's severe weakness and the great effect of God's work and His amazing power.

- ❖ The first reaches death (Eph. 2:1) and the latter raises him from the dead. (Eph. 2:5)
- ❖ The first is lowered to the lusts of the flesh (Eph. 2:3) and the latter raises him to the heavens. (v6)
- ❖ The first flees to be estranged from God and from man his brother (Eph. 2:12) and the latter restores him to become a member of the household of God (Eph. 2:19) and become one with his brother. (Eph. 2:14)

Third: He started his talk by the effect of sin, which slays our human nature and destroys the image of God inside us. Father Dorteos, from Gazza, said: "Through sin, we destroy His image inside us, and we become under death, as St. Paul wrote: "And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1) God created us in His image. He is so compassionate toward His creation and became like one of us and accepted death instead of us, to guide us and restore us to life, which we have lost." The father has presented us this interpretation when he was interpreting the praise of the resurrection, which St. Gregory has put.

Fourth: Through sin, we fell to the level of losing life, by forsaking God, the source of life and by accepting the captivity to Satan, by obeying Satan and rejecting God. St. Paul called Satan, "the prince of the power of the air". And he called us "children of wrath".

The air is considered as a dwelling place for the devils. St. Paul wanted to confirm the victory of Christ on him by saying, "Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:17) Since the devils dwell in the air, then the Lord will conquer them in their place and will carry us to this same place as children of the inheritance instead of being children of wrath.

Here we note that the Jews, as well as many of the Gentiles, used to think that Satan and all his armies had a kingdom in three places: in the water, in the wilderness and in the air. Choosing these places was based on the impossibility of man settling on these places and having peace. In the sea, one feels scared of drowning, and in the wilderness, one is scared of drought and wild animals, and the air means the soul departing the flesh, through death to hold on in the air.

In the eyes of the Jews, these places were targets for the devil, but the Lord Jesus has declared His victory over him in these places. In the water, He was baptized conquering the devil under His feet, granting the believers victory, through baptism. Thus, renouncing the devil is a clear cut in the rite of baptism. St. Tertillian the scholar said: "In the church, under the leadership

of the bishop, we renounce the devil and all his armies. As for the wilderness, the Lord Jesus was tempted by the devil and He won him and angels came to minister to Him⁵⁷.] As for the air, the Lord Jesus was raised up on the cross in the air to declare the defeat of Satan and his kingdom.”

Fifth: St. Paul declared how sin degraded man to the level of death and crime, led man to the death of the soul which is more bitter than the death of the body, besides it is counted a crime that man falls into with his own free will, yet he wanted to encourage the hearers by declaring the role of Satan "the prince of the power of the air" as an instigator. **St. John Chrysostom** said: “You notice the gentleness of St. Paul, how he encourages the hearers at all occasions and does not burden them. In spite of reaching the worst level of evil (being dead in trespasses), he does not want them to be swallowed with too much sorrow (for people are ashamed when their evil deeds are exposed), so he clarified that there is another partner in the crime, a strong partner, who is Satan so they won't think that all they commit is from their own mind⁵⁸.”

Hence, St. Paul wanted to put the responsibility on Satan together with us, as a cruel enemy who provokes human race, but he did not enter our lives against our will but because of our disobedience to God, for he says, "...the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience." (Eph. 2:2) Though the enemy is a partner with us, yet we are responsible for all of our behavior and for the work of the enemy in us. Satan finds a place in "the sons of disobedience", but not in "the sons of obedience", where the Holy Spirit is manifested in them.

Sixth: St. Paul clarified that the Jew and the gentile are both equal, for both of them were under the dominion of sin. He said, "in which you once walked", then he said, "among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others." (Eph. 2:3) He is telling them that you conducted yourselves in the lusts of the flesh, but we also, fell under the dominion of sin and were considered as sons of disobedience, therefore, we cannot brag that we are better than you. (Rom. 3: 9-10)

Everyone was considered as "children of wrath". St. Befnotius said that you were in your old father's house that is Satan, who pulled you to the lowest levels. But you have to look upward to your new Father's house, that is, to the Heavenly Jerusalem, for he says: “Let us go out from our old father's house, for by nature, we were sons of disobedience, and guide our outlook toward the heavenly matters⁵⁹.”

By nature, we were children of wrath, therefore, we have to get out of this nature, the nature of the old man and put on the new man (in the baptismal font). Thus, we get out of the house of our old father, to whom we have submitted in bondage of slavery, to the house of our new Holy Father.

Seventh: The reason of our disobedience and death is not "the flesh", but "the desires of the flesh and of the mind". The flesh is holy made by the Holy God, however, when it deviates from its goal and forsakes its submission, it has conflicting desires and opposing thoughts to the work of the Holy Spirit. The flesh is not evil in itself, for "the Word became flesh..." (John 1:14), but it was defiled when it became an instrument of evil working for the lusts; however, if it is sanctified, it becomes an instrument of righteousness working for the kingdom of God.

“We can present our bodies living sacrifices for God (Rom. 12:1), if we no longer follow the desires of the flesh and our mind (Eph. 2:3), but we walk in the Spirit and do not fulfill the lusts of the flesh. (Gal. 5:16) “Father Dorotheos from Ghazza 60

Hence, St. Paul reveals the reasons of the spiritual death, which are the lust of the flesh and the desires of the mind. (Eph. 2:3). But this does not relieve us from responsibility, for the carnal man, when submitting to the lusts of the flesh, the mind and the soul become carnal too,

for man represents one unit. When man is carnal, he walks according to the lusts of the flesh, and when he is spiritual, he walks according to the spirit. The former, the soul submits to the flesh against its will, and the latter, the flesh submits to the soul against the will of the flesh. Father Serabion said: "The carnal sins work in fulfilling the lusts of the flesh, and these stir the mind to accept their desires against his will⁶¹."

Eighth: After addressing what the Jews and the Gentiles have reached because of their disobedience, St. Paul confirmed the surpassing love of God and His compassion toward man especially after the fall, for he said, "God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us" (Eph. 2: 4). He emphasized the richness in God's mercy, repeating that expression five times in this epistle.

St. John Chrysostom said: "God, is not only merciful, but He is rich in mercy, as it is written in another place, '...Turn to me according to the multitude of your tender mercies.' (Ps. 69: 16) Also, "Have mercy on me, O God, according to Your loving kindness, and according to Your tender mercies blot out my transgression." (Ps. 51:1)" ⁶²

Ninth: He clarified this mercy in a practical way by saying, "...He made us alive together with Christ, and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus." (Eph. 2: 5, 6) St. Paul strongly emphasizes the fellowship with Christ !

"Even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ." (Eph. 2:5)

Here, he mentions Christ and this matter is worth our faith, for since the first fruit is alive, we likewise are the same. The Father made Him alive and made us alive too. This was mentioned about the Incarnate Christ. Here we notice "...the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe..." (Eph. 1:19) He made them alive, those who were dead and children of wrath. Look at the hope of His call. (Eph. 1:18)

"And raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus." (Eph. 2: 6)

"Can you see the glory of His inheritance? It is obvious that He raised us up with Him. Truly, up till now, no one has risen except the Head who raises us up with Him. When Jacob bowed to Joseph, it is written that his wife also bowed to him (Gen. 37: 9,10). In the same manner, it is mentioned that He made us sit together". When the Head sits, the body sits too, that is why this part is added, 'in Christ Jesus.'" **St. John Chrysostom** ⁶³

"Through the body, which He has taken, which is the deposit of our salvation, He made us sit together in the heavenly places."

"He is the foundation of all, and the Head of the church. (Eph. 5:23), in Him our carnal nature deserved to sit on the Heavenly throne. The body was honored, for it had a part in Christ who is God. Moreover, the nature of all human beings was honored for it had a part in the body. We dwell in Him by Him taking our physical nature." St. Ambrose ⁶⁴

We enjoy the resurrection of Christ and His sitting in the heavenly places, as the first fruit, through the resurrection of the soul from the death of sin and enjoying the deposit of the heavenly life.

The resurrection of the spirit, which we have gained in the risen Christ Jesus is greater than the resurrection of the body. For the resurrection of the body is achieved without our will. When the Lord Jesus told Lazarus, "...Lazarus, come out" (John 11:43), immediately, he obeyed and was raised. This was repeated when the Lord Jesus raised 'Jairus' daughter and the daughter of the widow of Nain. When St. Peter prayed to God, he raised Tabitha by the name of Christ. (Acts 9:40) "-In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will

sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.” (1 Cor. 15:52) However, the raising of the spirit is achieved by our faith in the risen Christ and being steadfast in Him until the end. This is not achieved automatically but by our free will. Listen to the rebuke of our Lord Jesus, "...How often I wanted to gather your children.... But you were not willing!" (Matt. 23:37) This requires the submission of our human will to God's good will toward us. **St. John Chrysostom** said: "Influencing the will is harder than influencing the nature."65

Tenth: St. John Chrysostom said: "Lest anyone thinks that the resurrection of Christ and His sitting in the heavenly places are matters which concern only the Lord Jesus, St. Paul confirmed their effectiveness in the human race throughout all the ages, by saying, '**That in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourself. It is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.**'" (Eph. 2: 7 –9)

"He might show", this Greek word does not mean only "to show", but "to prove." The resurrection of Christ and His sitting in the heavenly places is a definite proof of His rich surpassing grace, so that believers may enjoy the kindness of the Father by abiding in Christ Jesus. Christ became the Head who presents proofs of what the believers enjoy by uniting with Him. Here we find that our salvation is achieved through our faith as a free gift of grace or a divine gift, and not because of our worthiness.

"For by grace you have been saved.' Notice that He descended to you, lest you brag because of the blessings He grants you. Even the faith is not from our own, for if Christ has not come and called us, how could we have believed? The work of faith is not from our own, but it is a gift of God. Probably, you would say, 'Is faith enough for our salvation?' No...

Know that by grace, you will be saved, so you may feel that you are indebted to God. If we attribute our good deeds to God, then our reward due to our humility is much greater than our reward due to the deeds themselves.

If grace does not wait for our response, then it would have abundantly poured on every soul. But because grace is conditional on our response, then it dwells in some and forsakes others, for God first demands that we choose Him." **St. John Chrysostom** 66

"Do not feel proud, lest you lose everything you have received." **St. Augustine** 67

Then, our reconciliation with the Father is achieved through the rich divine grace, which is poured out by the cross of our Lord Jesus, so it changed our status from being in a state of enmity to a state of adoption. He raised us up from spiritual death to a risen life and from the earthly state to sitting in the heavenly places. This is like renewal to the creation, which was more costly than the first creation, for the first creation required only the utterance of God, but the new creation required the crucifixion of the Son through the blood of His cross. Thus, St. Paul continued his words declaring the surpassing work of God by saying: "**For we are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.**" (Eph. 2: 10)

"Notice the words he used. He refers to the new birth, which is truly a re-creation. We came to existence out of nothing. When the old man was living, we were dead, but truly now, we are a new creation. This new creation is much better than the old one, for in the former, we just existed, but in the latter, we obtained what is better, which is '...created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.' (Eph. 2:10): Not only to start but we should walk in them, for we need good deeds to remain with us and accompany us until our departure.

If we have to travel to a royal city and we crossed most of the way but before approaching our destination, we sat and became lazy. What have we gained? Nothing. The hope of our calling is "good deeds", or else we do not benefit.

He does not rejoice that we achieved only one deed, but He wants us to achieve all deeds. We have to use our five senses in the appropriate time, thus we have to attain many virtues." **St. John Chrysostom 68**

2. The secret of the reconciliation of the human race:

We have mentioned that the cross is complete with its vertical and horizontal dimensions, without any separation. By reconciling man with heaven, man forsook his sins, through God's free grace and the risen life, and man loved his brother, regardless of his origin! That is why St. Paul, after talking about our reconciliation with God, he tackled the subject of our reconciliation with the entire human race. Since the veil, which obstructed man from heaven, was destroyed, then the wall between the Jews and the Gentiles has to be destroyed too.

St. Paul started his talk by saying how the Gentiles were strangers from Israel and God by saying: **"Therefore, remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands, that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world."** (Eph. 2: 11,12)

This is the picture of the Gentiles before accepting faith. Notice the following:

First: The Gentiles were uncircumcised, that is they do not carry the sign of the covenant with God, which God demanded from Abraham and his sons. (Gen. 17: 9 –14) They had no covenant, but the Jews had taken the covenant, but unfortunately, this covenant was in the flesh without any deep inner impact. He said, "...made in the flesh by hands," (Eph. 2:11), that is, it does not carry any inner direction nor it does differentiate them from the Gentiles. He clarified this point in his epistle to the Romans: "For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh, but he is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God." (Rom. 2:28,29)

After he described the work of God's surpassing grace in everyone, he said: "For we are His workmanship in Christ ". There is no more pride for the Jews about the circumcision, for it is made in the flesh "by hands". What a great difference between "God's work" and "what the human hand does"!

Everyone received new circumcision, not made by hands in the flesh, but as St. Paul said, "In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead." (Col. 2: 11,12) Thus, there is no way to compare the symbolic circumcision of the flesh and the new circumcision in the baptismal font.

Second: The Gentiles were "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel", that is they did not carry the citizenship of Israel, hence they were strangers from the divine citizenship, which made them lose the hope, for they did not receive the divine Law nor enjoyed the prophecies of the prophets which pointed to the coming of the Messiah the Savior of the world.

St. John Chrysostom said: 'St. Paul did not say that they were isolated but said they were aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, that is, they have no part in this commonwealth.

This is a touchy expression, for it means that they were outside this commonwealth, not as strangers but due to negligence, therefore, they fell and did not deserve the covenants.'69

Third: "...without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12). This expression does not mean that they were atheists or denied the existence of God, but they did not have the knowledge of God, as he said in another place, "...Like the Gentiles who do not know God." (1 Thess. 4:5)

As they come closer to Christ and accept faith, their image has completely changed and their position in regards to God and the Jews has changed, for he said:

"But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace." (Eph. 2: 13-15)

In the Old Testament, the Jews were close to God, not only through the circumcision but also through offering sacrifices, as Moses the prophet said, when he sprinkled the blood over the people: "And Moses took the blood, sprinkled it on the people, and said, "This is the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you according to all these words." (Ex. 24:8) However in the New Testament humans became close to God in a covenant of brotherhood through the sacrifice of Christ.

Christ, sacrificing Himself a sacrifice of love, joined us together in a bound of unity with Him, and broke down the middle wall of separation, which the Jews have erected around the temple so that no stranger may cross it. This represented the enmity between the Jews and the Gentiles, and the complete separation between both of them, not only by not crossing to the Jewish temple, but the isolation of the Jews from the life of the Gentiles, and separating themselves from all directions of life so they may not get defiled with their abominations.

Josephus tells us that this middle wall was three inches high, separating the outer court of the temple from the inner court. There were signs threatening by death every stranger who crosses it⁷⁰. In the excavations which Ganneau and C. Clermont did in Jerusalem in the year 1871, there was written one of these warnings, saying: "No stranger is allowed to enter the fenced area around the temple, and whoever does will be condemned to death."

This middle wall created two directions for the Gentiles, for some admired their purity from the pagan defilement, so they accepted the Jewish regulations, and others considered that being fanatic, so they were filled with bitterness against the Jews and despised them.

He did not abolish the middle wall so that the Gentiles and the Jews enter the temple of Jerusalem, but He abolished the enmity by His blood, so that all may become members in His Body, "...To create in Himself one new man from the two..." (Eph. 2: 15)

Probably, this refers to the Eucharist, where all may participate in one Body, so all have continual renewal and harmony until "The one renewed church" is declared. The believing human race meets in the Eucharist to find a true place to abide in Christ.

St. Paul emphasized this reconciliation which has been accomplished in the cross in more than one place, for he said, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Gal. 3: 28)

"And by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross." (Col. 1:20)

"He is our peace who made the two into one."

What does he mean by "made the two into one"?

This doesn't mean that He raised us to their mean place, but that He raised them and us to what is higher; nevertheless the blessing for us is greater, for they had the promise and were closer than us. However, we had no promise and we were more far than them, that is why he said, "...The Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy..." (Rom. 15:9). Truly the promise was given to the Jews, however, they did not deserve it. He did not give us a promise; however, being strangers and having nothing in common with them, still we became one, not by uniting with them, but by being united with them in the One.

This is an illustration: suppose that there are two statues: one made from silver and the other made from lead, and both were melted and they became gold, thus, the two became one.

In other words, let's pretend there are two persons: a slave and a son by adoption, and both of them sinned against the father, so one became an unworthy son for all the inheritance, and the other became a vagabond who does not know a father. Both became heirs and true sons. Both were raised to the same honor and the two became one, one came from far and the other from a shorter distance. But the slave became more courteous than what he was earlier before he had sinned.

He continued his speech by saying: "... has broken down the middle wall of separation." He interpreted the middle wall of separation by saying, "...Having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances..."

Truly, some say that he means the wall, which the Jews have put against the Greeks, for he never allowed the Jew to mingle with the Greek. However, the meaning is different, for he said, "...in His flesh the enmity..." (Eph. 2:15), the middle wall as an obstacle between all of us and God on the same level. As the prophet said, "But your iniquities have separated you from God..." (Is. 59: 2), this enmity which was between God and the Jews and the Gentiles was a middle wall. This wall was not broken when the Law was founded but on the contrary got stronger. St. Paul said, "Because the law brings about wrath..." (Rom. 4:15) He does not put the blame on the law but rather on our iniquities; he says here, "...the middle wall..." (Eph. 2:14), for through our disobedience, the enmity started.

The law was like a wall made for our protection, that is why, it is called "wall" to enclose what is inside. Listen to what the prophet said, "...He built a tower in its midst..." (Is. 5:2)

"In any case, the law became a middle wall not for their peace but to isolate them from God, and the middle wall became a division. To explain this, he continued: 'Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, that is the law of commandments contained in ordinances...' How did this happen? By His crucifixion on the cross, He abolished the enmity, not only through that, but also by keeping the commandments." **St. John Chrysostom 71**

"...So as to create in Himself one new man from the two..." (Eph. 2:15)

Notice that the Gentile did not become a Jew, but both of them became a new creation. He used the word "create" and not "change" to manifest the power of His work.

"...So as to create in Himself one new man from the two..." (Eph. 2:15), that is by Himself. So He did not assign this job to someone else, but He Himself accomplished it. He dissolved both of them and made one glorious one.

He held the Jews with one hand and the Gentiles with the other, and He was in the middle, so He mingled the two together. All the conflict between them was removed and He reformed them from above from fire and water, and not by water and dust.

"...One new man from the two, thus making peace..." (Eph. 2:15) making peace with both of them with God, and with each other.

"...In one body..." (Eph. 2:16), that is in His body, for He is the one who endured the due punishment.

"...Through the cross thereby putting to death the enmity." (Eph. 2:16) No words are stronger than these, for St. Paul said that His death has mortified the enmity through His suffering.

He did not say that He "abolished" the enmity, but rather he "mortified" it, so it does not rise again.

"As long as we are abiding in the body of Christ and are united with Him, then the enmity remains dead." St. John Chrysostom 72

Since the Lord has paid the price of the reconciliation in His sacrificed Body, then this reconciliation is a rejoicing reconciliation for everyone. St. Paul said, **"And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near."** (Eph. 2: 17)

St. John Chrysostom said: "Christ did not send this joyful news through others, but He Himself came. He did not send an angel nor an arch angel to fulfill this mission, but it required His coming."⁷³

He came by Himself to preach to everyone, the far and the near, not by words of peace but by an act of peace.

Isaiah the prophet saw this good news through the prophecy, so he said, "...Peace, peace to him who is far off and to him who is near," says the Lord, "And I will heal him." (Is. 57:19)

The cross in the body of Christ has accomplished the reconciliation between the two parties, but the Father and the Holy Spirit have their positive role in this act. St. Paul said, **"For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father."** (Eph. 2: 18) This is a strong statement relating to the trinity, where St. Paul declares that through the incarnation of the Son, the human race approached the Father through the work of the Holy Spirit. In other words, the reconciliation is getting closer to the Father, through the Incarnate Son in the Holy Spirit.

The Gentiles enjoyed the work of the Trinity that is why they became no more strangers but became one with the Jews and the household of God. He said: **"Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God"** (Eph. 2: 19) The Gentiles and the Jews were strange children, whom the Lord has embraced in His body by His Holy Spirit to become two sons to the Father "...members of the household of God".

After accepting faith, the Gentiles had the same rights as the Jews, for they entered in the building of the universal church whose foundation is the apostles and the prophets and the Lord Jesus the Cornerstone. In other words the Jewish nation no more monopolize the prophets of the Old Testament, the apostles of the New Testament or Christ Himself.

St. Paul said, **"Having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit."** (Eph. 2: 20-22)

The Jews and the Gentiles established one spiritual building. Its foundation is the apostles, the prophets and the Lord Jesus the cornerstone, in whom all the prophecies of the Old Testament and the ministry of the New Testament are fulfilled.

In reality, Jerusalem is "...The tabernacle of God with men..." (Rev. 21:3). St. John saw the names of the twelve apostles written on its foundation (Rev. 21:14), and the names of the twelve tribes on its doors. (Rev. 21:12)

In more than one place, **St. Augustine** explained the role of the Lord Jesus Christ as the cornerstone who binds the Jews with the Gentiles in one building, as two walls with two different directions mingled together. He said: "It happened in the day of His birth that the Jewish shepherds saw Him, while in the day of Epiphany, the Gentile wise men worshiped Him. Truly, He was born as a cornerstone for both. St. Paul said, 'That He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity.' (Eph. 2:16) What is the cornerstone, but tying two walls with different directions, as if they are exchanging kisses! The circumcised are with the uncircumcised, that is, the Jews with the Gentiles. They carried common animosity, and they are isolated from one another. The Jews worshiped the One True God, while the Gentiles worshiped many false gods. The Jews were close to God while the Gentiles were far. He led both groups to Himself, that is He reconciled them both with God in the one body, as he said, '...through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity.' (Eph. 2:16)"

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"Calling the Lord Jesus the chief cornerstone and the Head of the church, hence, the church becomes the cornerstone, which included both the Jews and the Gentiles."

St. Augustine 75

"What is the purpose of this building? The purpose is that God may dwell in that temple. Each one of you is a temple, and all of you together make a temple. God dwells in you, being the body of Christ and a spiritual temple. He did not use the word that implies that we went to God, but rather that God Himself brings us to Himself. We did not go to Him by ourselves, but He Himself brought us close to Him. The Lord Jesus said, 'No one comes to the Father except through Me.', also, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life.' (John 14:6) "

St. John Chrysostom 76

Chapter Three

THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH AND THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST

St. Paul cherishes his discovery of "the mystery of Christ", not through his human capabilities or his talents, but through a revelation of God about this hidden mystery since the eternity. He is the Bearer of the incomprehensible riches of Christ. The mystery of Christ is the call of the Gentiles to partake of the inheritance and to obtain the promises in Christ through the Gospel. It is the fulfillment of the universal church, which extends to both Gentiles and Jews to embrace every believer to be in Christ and Christ to be in his heart.

- 1. The mystery of Christ and the call of the Gentiles: Eph. 3: 1 - 8**
- 2. A divine and heavenly call: Eph. 3: 9 –11**
- 3. An assured call: Eph. 3: 12**
- 4. A call requires spiritual strife: Eph. 3: 13**
- 5. The intercession of St. Paul for everyone: Eph. 3: 14 – 21**

1. The mystery of Christ and the call of the Gentiles:

"For this reason, I Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles, if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery as I have briefly written already," (Eph. 3: 1 –3)

In this statement, we notice the following:

First: He started by saying "For this reason." St Paul, as a prisoner of Jesus Christ, is talking about the mystery of Christ, that is the mystery of the opening of the door of faith to the Gentiles, as well as the Jews, so that all may become one living building and a temple of God. St. Paul became an apostle and a prisoner, just for their sake in the Lord.

St. Paul repeated the word "I" more than once (Eph. 1:15 & 3:1 & 4:1 & 5:32), not because he is self-centered, for his ego, but to ascertain his admiration of the message, which God has declared to him its mystery, and due to it, he became a prisoner. His feelings were concentrated in him accepting joyfully to be imprisoned, so that the Gentiles may enjoy freedom and also for his brethren, the Jews (1Thess.2:14-16; 2Corin.11:24,25).

He cherished his apostle-ship and his imprisonment for the salvation of each soul, and he considered being "the prisoner of Christ Jesus" as an honor for him. He felt his obligation for the mission work, regardless of the cost. **St. John Chrysostom** said: "Earlier, St. Paul mentioned Christ's great care for us, and now he mentions his care for them, that it may be capable of bringing them close to him, though it is of little value when compared to Christ's. That is why he said, (the prisoner) or I am obligated to you. If my Master was crucified for you, so I should also be tied up for your sake." 77

He wanted to declare his imprisonment in Rome to assure his determination on fulfilling "the mystery of Christ", that is, preaching in His name, even if this means that the Jews hate him and imprison him.

Probably St. Paul's feelings concentrated on his reflection on God's great love, which imprisoned him, (Phil. 3:12) to pull him from struggling against service to working on behalf of Christ and His power. Therefore he often repeated the statement "his exceeding power". He felt

that he is the prisoner of the love of Christ and His great attracting power, which works on behalf of His kingdom.

Second: It seems that some of those to whom he wrote did not see him but only heard about him (Eph. 3:2). There were no personal relations, but very confidently, he feels that all the blessings that were granted to him were especially for them. These are the servant's true and strong feelings that all the gifts that were granted to him were not given to him out of favouritism, but they are divine gifts for the salvation of the souls.

St. John Chrysostom said: "Here he points to the prophecy which was given to Ananias in Damascus concerning him, when the Lord told him, 'Go for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings...' (Acts 9:15). He means 'the dispensation of grace', the revelation of Jesus Christ to him for he said, 'For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ.' (Gal. 1:12) He means that God has granted him this revelation for their sake, for he said, "Depart, for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles." (Acts 22:21)" 78

"...As I have briefly written already." (Eph. 3:3) The Greek word "prographo" used here has at least three meanings: the first meaning is whatever he has written in the same epistle where he talked to them about the mystery of God's will in heaven and on earth in Christ Jesus (Eph 1: 9, 20). He also talked to them about the mystery of Christ pertaining to the reconciliation of the Gentiles and the Jews in one body through the cross (Eph 2: 11 – 22). The second meaning is that he reminds the listener of what he had written in one of his previous epistles about this revelation, and not specifically that it is an epistle directed to the Ephesians, for his epistles openly circulated. The third meaning is that he had previously written in general and not through a specific epistle.

Third: St. John Chrysostom relates that what St. Paul had written about "the mystery of Christ" which pertains to the acceptance of the Gentiles in the same body like the Jews, was very concise because they were unable to accept it. The Jews could not realize nor accept the great riches, which God has bestowed on the Gentiles to become partakers of the inheritance and the promises. This mystery, which was very strongly manifested to St. Paul, was not declared to the prophets of the Old Testament strongly but partly, for he said:

"By which when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ, which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit of His holy apostles and prophets: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the Gospel." (Eph. 3: 4 – 6)

The fact is that the acceptance of the Gentiles to faith was kept a secret from the previous generations. The Holy Spirit revealed the secret now to the apostles and the prophets (prophets of the New Testament).

"Which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets" (Eph. 3: 5)

Tell me, what is that? Did not the prophets know this mystery?

How, then, did Christ say that Moses and Elijah wrote that about Me?

Also, "For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me." (John 5:46)

Also, "You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me." (John 5: 39)

He means that this was not declared to all people, for he added, "which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit..." (Eph. 3:5). Imagine if the Spirit did not declare it to St. Peter, he would not have gone to the Gentiles. Listen to what he said, "... who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have." (Acts 10: 47) This means that God has chosen them to accept this grace by the Spirit. The prophets have uttered with that, but they have not truly known this grace Even the apostles did not know it after they have heard it, for it has surpassed all the expectations.

"That the Gentiles should be fellow heirs of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the Gospel." (Eph. 3:6)

"What does this mean? They become partakers of the inheritance, the promises and the body. How great is the last, as they become one body and closer to Him in a strong relationship."

St. John Chrysostom 79

Fourth: Some scholars relate that some expressions, which St. Paul had used like "sons of men, apostles, prophets" were strange to St. Paul's style in writing. Most probably, these are excerpts, which St. Paul had copied from a church hymn at that time.⁸⁰

Fifth: More than once, St. Paul emphasizes the fulfillment of "the mystery of Christ", not due to our worthiness or is it hindered by human obstacles, but is fulfilled according to "the effective working of His power." Regarding himself, he is a mere servant of God, the least of all the saints, but he was entrusted to fulfill God's plan through Christ' great riches. He said:

"Of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power. To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ." (Eph. 3: 7, 8)

St. John Chrysostom relates that St. Paul, looking at God's great power, sees himself less than the least of all the apostles, for he said: "When he is about to talk about the greatness of God's grace, he says that this grace was given to him, who is less than the least of all the saints. This was true humility, for he remembered his former sins, although they were forgiven. He called himself, '...a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man...' (1 Tim. 1: 13) He also calls himself, '...one born out of due time' (1 Cor. 15: 8) After accomplishing many great acts, St. Paul still calls himself, 'less than the least of all the saints.' This is truly great humility."

"He did not say 'the least of the apostles', but 'less than the least of the apostles.' The former statement is less acute... He also said, '...I do not deserve to be an apostle...' (1 Cor. 15:9)"

St. John Chrysostom 81

Probably St. Paul was so humble to the extent that he considered himself not only the least of the apostles but also less than the least of the saints. This humility was essential for two reasons. First, because when the building is too high, then the foundation is very deep. He has to build a very high building, for he was granted a special grace to preach to the Gentiles that is to become like one of them and present them "the unsearchable riches of Christ." In other words, he didn't stand in the face of the Gentiles or did he preach as if from far away, but he went ahead, entered amidst the Gentiles, to dig deep foundation, to present the living building suitable for Christ Jesus. Second, he considers humility as a weapon against those who attack us. St. Paul is teaching us to meet our attackers with the spirit of great humility, so we may win them and win ourselves too!

2. A divine and heavenly call:

St. Paul humbled himself to declare his enjoyment of a special grace, which is the grace of preaching among the Gentiles to enjoy the unsearchable riches of Christ. He called this act, which is the acceptance of the Gentiles to the faith, "the mystery of Christ." This mystery was not a mere thought from St. Paul, but rather it is to fulfill God's hidden eternal plans. This divine heavenly mystery was hidden, but it is revealed to embrace everyone and to declare to the heavenly creatures that the earthly Gentiles are partakers with them. He said:

"And to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Eph. 3: 9 –11)

We notice the following:

First: Since God's grace has enlightened his eyes to see "the mystery of Christ", therefore, it was necessary for him to lead everyone to see what he had seen, God's hidden mystery since eternity, the mystery of God's love, the Creator of everything and the Savior of everyone, the eternal mystery in God's plan.

Second: St. John Chrysostom said: "Truly, the mystery was not declared to any man, but do you manifest the mystery to the angels, the archangels, dominions and authorities? He said, 'Yes, although it was hidden in God the Creator of everything'. Do you dare and utter that? Yes, and how was it declared to the angels? 'Through the church'... Didn't the angels know Him? Didn't the archangels know Him? Even those who did not know Him! He called it 'the mystery', for the angels did not know it nor was it declared to anyone. Truly, the angels knew that the Gentiles were called, but they did not know that they were called to enjoy the same privileges, which the Israelites have enjoyed and to sit on God's throne. No one expected that nor believed it! 82"

Third: No doubt that the heavenly creatures have realized the wisdom of God since He created them, however, they saw wonders in the church of the New Testament. That is why he said "the manifold wisdom of God". In the translation of St. John Chrysostom, it is mentioned "the great manifold of the wisdom of God." They have seen new depths in God's wisdom, which transformed the pagans and the attackers of the truth to become children of God and heirs with Christ!

Fourth: St. Jerome related that St. Paul distinguished between two of the heavenly hosts, which are the authorities and the dominions that enjoy the mystery of God. Also, the church includes members, who belong to the one body, but they have different spiritual levels, or as St. Paul said, "... one star differs from another star in glory." (1 Cor. 15: 41)

St. Jerome said: "Whoever sows little and whoever sows much are both on the right side; Although both of them are sowers, yet they differ in quality and quantity. 83"

3. An assured call

Writing about the divine mystery, which was declared to him and which he devoted all his life to fulfill, St. Paul is very confident that God will fulfill His plan in spite of his imprisonment or captivity. Truly the apostle was under many restrictions, yet he confidently feels the freedom in fulfilling the mystery of Christ, for he said, **"In whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him." (Eph. 3: 12) (The Greek word Parresia meaning freedom) Eph. 3: 12**

“In whom we have access, not as captives but as persons asking for forgiveness, and not as sinners, for he says: “we have boldness and access”, that is boldness connected with joyous confidence. This comes from our faith in Him.” **St. John Chrysostom 84**

4. The call requires strife:

St. Paul has no credit at all in this call to achieve “the mystery of Christ”, for it is according to the working of His might. But St. Paul was not negative but struggled and endured even prison, in consideration for the glory of the Gentiles. Now he is asking the Gentiles themselves to participate in that strife, by saying: **“Therefore, I ask that you do not lose heart at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.” (Eph. 3:13)**

“God loved them and He sacrificed His Son for them, and allowed His servants to suffer for them. St. Paul was imprisoned so that they may receive abundant blessings. Certainly this was due to God’s surpassing love for them. He said by the prophet Hosea, ‘...I have slain them by the words of My mouth...’ (Hosea 6:5)” **St. John Chrysostom 85**

5. The intercession of St. Paul for everyone:

As long as the fulfillment of “the mystery of Christ” is a divine act, his or their strife is not enough, but through all these tribulations, he does not cease to pray for them asking for God’s power. As he says: **“For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named.” (Eph. 3: 14,15)**

Probably, St. Paul wanted to follow the example of the Lord Jesus Christ when He entered the garden to drink the cup of suffering for our glory. He knelt before the Father to carry the cross and to achieve the reconciliation. Thus, it is appropriate for every minister to kneel before the Father, in obedience to carry the cross for the salvation of others.

“He manifests the spirit of his prayers for them, for he did not say ‘I pray’, but he showed his supplications by bowing his knees. ‘From whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named.’ He means that he does not consider her from the angels but He created tribes in heaven and on earth, and not as the Jews were.” **St. John Chrysostom 86**

In other words, St. Paul, bowing his knees to the Father out of his whole heart, asks for the fulfillment of the divine will, to combine the heavenly and the earthly creatures as a holy family united in the Lord Jesus Christ.

What does St. Paul ask in his prayers and intercessions for them?

First: “That He would grant you according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man.” (Eph. 3: 16)

St. Paul, by his true strong love for them, does not cease to pray for them so God may abide in their inner man and grant them spiritual power, for the sake of the riches of His glory. He is saying that his prayers are in accordance with God’s will and His desire to work in their inner man.

To be strengthened in the inner man is the enjoyment of the dwelling of Christ in their hearts. **“That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith...” (Eph. 3: 17)**

St. Paul is focusing their attention to the inner man so that Christ is manifested declaring His kingdom inside them. **St. John Cassian**, talking about fasting as one of the spiritual exercises, emphasized the inner man in Christ and not to fast as mere abstaining from food. He said: “When the outer man fasts, the inner man has to fast from evil food, for St. Paul is urging us to present the inner man pure to be worthy to accept Christ.” 87

The secret of the power is “the dwelling of Christ” by faith in our hearts.

“Christ abides by faith in you. When faith is present, Christ is present too. Waking up the faith is waking up Christ. Leanness of faith is sleep of Christ. Rise and urge yourself saying, “Lord, I am perishing.” Do not let the devil turn you away from the faith, do not let him swallow the fish.”⁸⁸

Christ has declared this gift to the faithful loving hearts. He said, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make our Home with him.” (John 14:23)

Second: “...That you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height, to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.” (Eph. 3: 17,18,19)

As Christ correlated His dwelling in the heart with purity through true love which keeps His word (John. 14:23), in the same manner, St. Paul declares that the dwelling of Christ in the heart makes the soul grounded and rooted in the divine love, and is granted the gift of “spiritual enlightenment which passes knowledge.”

Our unity with Christ, which is based on love, reveals the divine mysteries so that one may realize what is the width, the length, the depth, and the height and know the love of Christ which passes knowledge, so we may be filled. It is like a continuous chain between “the unity with God”, “surpassing love”, “divine knowledge”, and “the fullness.”

These are the gifts of the Heavenly Groom to His bridegroom who is united with Him. She enjoys His love, which passes knowledge so she may realize His mysteries and go in an uninterrupted growth, from fullness to fullness!

“Christ dwells in these faithful hearts, who are rooted in His love who remain steadfast, until they receive the full power and may be filled with all the fullness of God. What does St. Paul mean? Although the love of Christ is above all human knowledge, yet you can comprehend it if Christ dwells inside you. Not only you may know Him, but you may be filled with all the fullness of God.” **St. John Chrysostom 89**

“The width is the good deeds; the length is the persistence of doing good deeds; the height is the hope in the blessings to come. That is why you are called ‘Lift up your hearts’, do good, persist for the sake of God, consider all earthly matters as rubbish.”

St. Augustine 90

St. Augustine relates that St. Paul, talking about the length, width, height, depth, refers to the cross as the fountain, which pours God's surpassing love. The height is that part which Christ lays His head on, as a symbol of expecting the reward from God's justice, as mentioned in Romans 2: 6,7: “Who will render to each one according to his deeds, eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality.” The length is the cross where Christ was laid as a symbol of patience and perseverance according to God's will, or “longsuffering.” The depth is the part grounded in the earth, representing the nature of the hidden mystery, the mystery of the cross, or the mystery of God's love.

We can say that through the transfiguration of the Crucified Christ inside us, we have the height where our sight is opened by hope in the eternity. Also, we have the depth where we are rooted by the grace of God in His hidden love. We, also have the length and the width, that is, the practical love to God and to people, on two levels: horizontal and vertical, in other words, our faith, hope and love are steadfast in and for God and people.

Finally, St. Paul, seeing that these divine gifts are surpassing, he ascertains that God is glorified in us through His great acts in the church. He said: **“Now to Him who is able to do**

exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever, Amen." (Eph. 3: 20, 21)

St. John Chrysostom said: "God has done 'above all things, more than we expect or think' Truly we pray, but He answers more than we ask, for we have never asked these matters nor expected them." 92

St. Paul feels that with the incentive of love, he persistently asks from God, and God overflows His gifts more than St. Paul expects or asks, that is why he concluded his speech by offering thanksgiving to God who is glorified in His church.

How beautiful are His words: "To Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus", for the Father is glorified in the church, the bride of Christ, and His work is strongly manifested in the life of her members.

Part Two

The Practical Church Life

1. Unity and respecting talents: ch. 4
2. Worship and behavior: ch. 5
3. Practical life and spiritual strife: ch. 6

The General Church Life

Since the universal church is truly the hidden "mystery of Christ", and she declared to us the coming of Christ, so the delight of the Father was fulfilled in Him. The heavenly creatures rejoiced with us as a holy bride and a holy body to the holy Head. She embraced the members of the body, whether they are Jews or Gentiles. This universal church has to be practically translated in our church life, in our worship, in our family and social behavior, and in our hidden spiritual strife. This was what St. Paul had confirmed in the last three chapters. (ch. 4-6).

Chapter Four

UNITY AND THE KINDLING OF TALENTS

God, in His great love, declared to us "the mystery of Christ", which is the mystery of the universal church which embraces the Gentiles to enjoy the life in Christ. To meet this divine love practically, we have to be widening our hearts to one another to carry the unity of the spirit. This unity does not mean that we resemble or copy one another, but with different talents, we work together to complement one another for the edification of the church and the edification of our souls until we reach "...the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." (Eph. 4:13)

1. Love and the unity of the spirit: Eph. 4: 1-3

2. Unity of faith and the diversity of talents: Eph. 4: 4-11

3. Unity and the edification of the church: Eph. 4: 12-16

4. Unity and the new life: Eph. 4: 17-32

1. Love and the unity of the spirit:

Since St. Paul feels that he is obligated to fulfill "the mystery of Christ" through the grace, enduring all difficulties for them, it is befitting that they realize the divine call to which they were called. The servant should not be the only one who works, but every member has to play his role, or in other words, has to keep his church membership through hard work. The focus of that work is to abide in fervent love, which grants the unity of the spirit through the harmony of all the members as one body to the One Head.

He commanded them: "I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to have a walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with long suffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace." (Eph. 4: 1-3)

Since every member has to give up something for the subject of "the unity of the spirit" or "the bond of peace", St. Paul began by saying that he has to give up his right, which is the secret of his glory and honor. He calls himself "the prisoner of the Lord". **St. John Chrysostom** said: "What a great honor! It is more honorable than the honor of the kings or the ambassadors. It is more honorable for him to be a prisoner for Christ than to be an apostle or teacher or a preacher. The one who loves Christ understands what I am saying. Whoever is devoted to Christ and is inflamed by the love of Christ knows the power of these chains. He prefers to be a prisoner for His sake than to have the heavens as his dwelling place. His hands were more glorious than if they were decorated with golden ornaments or a royal crown." 93

St. John Chrysostom devoted the eighth sermon to interpret the epistle to the Ephesians, glorifying any kind of sufferings for the sake of Christ more than the glory we receive from the hands of the Lord Christ Himself.

Regarding the unity of the church, this topic has absorbed the mind of the church fathers. We should not be surprised to see **St. John Chrysostom** devoting the ninth sermon to interpret the epistle of the Ephesians to explain the three statements in the beginning of this chapter. St. Paul has summarized his talk by a few words in another place by saying: "The name of the church is not a name of division but a name of unity and harmony. It has to be one church in the world, in spite of the various churches in different places." 94

[The parts of the one parish are all gathered through many bishops.]

“The church is one; she extends with her plentiful fruits among the multitude as the numerous rays of the sun although the light is one and as the many branches of the tree although the root is one. In the same manner, the church has plunged in the light of the Lord, sending her rays to the whole world; however, the light is one reaching every place, and the unity of the body is not taken from her.” St. Kibrianos 95

How great is the authority of the chains, which St. Paul had! These are more glorious than the miracles. He wanted to talk specifically about his chains, therefore, he said, "I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called." (Eph. 4:1) How does this happen? "With all lowliness and gentleness, with long suffering, bearing with one another in love." (Eph. 4:2)

He was not only honored because he was a prisoner, but due to the fact that this was for the sake of Christ! He said, "in the Lord", that is, he is a prisoner for the sake of Christ. Nothing can match that love!

Now the chains draw me, so it gets me farther from talking about the subject. I cannot but stop to talk about these chains.

Do not be bored, for I want to offer an answer to a question, which many ask. If tribulations are glorified, then why did St. Paul say in his defense to King Agrippa, "I would to God that not only you, but also all who hear me today, might become both almost and altogether such as I am, except for these chains." (Acts 26:29)

He did not say that to belittle the chains, for if it were true, why then would he glory in tribulations, imprisonment, when he said, "...Therefore, most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities..."? (2 Cor. 12:9) Is there a conflict in what he said to King Agrippa? Actually those who were listening at that time were not ready to accept the beauty and the blessings of the chains.

When he wrote to the Hebrews, he did not say that, but he urged them to remember the prisoners as if chained with them. (Heb. 13:3)

How great are the chains of St. Paul!

It is a beautiful sight to see St. Paul chained outside the prison, as well as inside. All the time, the saints carry a glorious sight, for they are filled with rich grace, especially when they are exposed to many dangers for the sake of Christ, when they are imprisoned. As the brave soldier represents a beautiful sight when he stands beside the king, reflect on how great St. Paul would look when preaching with his chains!

I remembered a great story. The righteous martyr Babelus was completely chained as St. John the Baptist was chained when he rebuked the king for his rebellion. At his death, he commanded that the chains remain buried with his body, and up till today his chains are still with his relics. Thus, his love for the chains for the sake of Christ was so strong. Also, David the prophet said about Joseph, "They hurt his feet with fetters, he was laid in irons." (Ps. 105:18) Even women were also chained. Anyway, we are not in chains, and I do not command you to be in chains, as long as the time is not time for chains.

“Chain your heart and thoughts and not your hands! There are other chains; whoever is not chained with one (that is, the spiritual obligation), will definitely be chained with the other. Listen to what Christ said, ‘...Bind him, hand and foot...’ (Matt. 22:13) God does not permit that we go through these chains!” **St. John Chrysostom 96**

“He said, ‘I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called.’ (Eph. 4: 1)

What is this calling? You were called His body, and Christ became your Head. Although you were enemies and had committed many sins, yet He raised you and made you sit in the heavenly places. (Eph. 2:6). It is a high calling to a very high privilege, not by our calling to forsake our earlier state but rather to enjoy all these privileges.

But how can we walk through it? ‘...With all lowliness...’ (Eph. 4:2) This is the basis of every virtue. If you were humble and reflected on what your condition was and how you were saved, then these will drive you to every virtue. You do not brag because of these privileges, but you humble yourself because you know that all these are due to the grace of God.

A humble person can be an honored slave and thankful at the same time. ‘...And what do you have that you did not receive?! (1 Cor. 4:7) Listen also to what he said, ‘...But I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.’ (1 Cor. 15:10)

He said, ‘With all lowliness’, not only by words or deeds, but also by endurance, even in the tone of your voice. Do not be humble with one person and not the other, but rather be humble with everyone, whether friends or enemies, great or abject. This is the true humility.

Be humble even when you do good deeds. Listen to what Christ said, ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.’ (Matt. 5:3) This was the first beatitude.”

St. John Chrysostom 97

Since we are called the One Body of Christ, then we can never enjoy the unity of the spirit and be persistent in it without true humility, which is the basis of all virtue and the beginning of all beatitudes.

Our abiding in the truth according to the calling of Christ requires that we enjoy "all humility". Since the Word of God, in His humility, has emptied Himself and became like one of us, to embrace us to Him and make us abide in Him as a body to the One Head. When we have His mind and carry His humility, we carry the unity of the Spirit with one another, in other words, the Divine Word descended to us to grant us our unity in Him, our unity with the Father by His Holy Spirit, and our unity with one another.

When we abide in humility in the Lord, we carry meekness toward our brothers enduring one another in love as a living foundation to keep the unity of the spirit. He said, "With all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit, in the bond of peace." (Eph. 4:2-3)

If you do not endure your brother, how can the Lord endure you? Where there is love, there is endurance for everything!

"Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." (Eph. 4:3)

Bind your hands with moderation. One more time, we see the good name "the bond of peace". We stopped mentioning the bonds and chains, but here they are mentioned spontaneously.

The previous bonds (the chains for imprisoning St. Paul) were good, and these, too, are good. These were the fruits of this kind of bonds (that is, enduring the sufferings was a fruit of enduring the bond of love).

Bind yourself with your brother with love, for those who are bound with love can easily endure everything. Bind yourself with your brother; you are lord to yourself and to your brother. I can achieve befriending others by being gentle to them. He said, "endeavoring" meaning that it is not easy but it requires effort.

"Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit" What is this unity of the Spirit? In the human body there is a spirit, which gathers all members in spite of their diversity. In the same

manner, the Holy Spirit was given to unite those who were dispersed because of sex or other reasons. Then the big and small, rich and poor, child and youth, woman and man, all will unite into one body. This spiritual relationship is above the natural relationship, for the unity here is stronger and more complete.

How can we keep this unity? ̇We can keep it "By the bond of peace". There can never be any unity if enmity and contentions exist! St. Paul said, "...For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?" (1 Cor. 3:3) When fire touches a piece of dry wood, a flame is kindled, however when it is wet, nothing happens. In the same manner, a cold nature cannot produce that unity, however the heat of love can create this unity through the bond of peace.

If you want to cleave to someone, that person has to cleave to you. In the same manner, if you want to have this mutual bond, we have to unite with one another and become all one soul.

Glorious is that bond where each one has to be united with the other and with God.

"This bond does not impede the movement of the hand but rather facilitates the movements and grants her courage to work more than what the free hands can do. When the strong holds the weak, he will help him and does not let him perish, also he will revive the negligent. "When someone supports his brother, they make a strong city." (Prov. 18:19 Septaugent Translation) Nothing can shake these bonds (the bond of peace), neither the distance nor the heaven nor the earth nor death nor anything else, but it is stronger than anything else." **St. John Chrysostom 98**

"It was proven that there is no unity or peace unless the brothers themselves endure one another through keeping the bond of agreement by patience."] St. Kybrianos 99

Do you think that you can abide if you withdraw yourself and built a different habitation (That is, you have forsaken the bond of peace and unity). He said to Rahab, who was a symbol of the church, "So it shall be that whoever goes outside the doors of your home into the street, his blood shall be on his own head, and we will be guiltless. And whoever is with you in the house, his blood shall be on our head if a hand is laid on him." (Josh. 2:19)

St. Kybrianos 100

2. The unity of faith and the diversity of talents:

The epistle to the Ephesians is the epistle of the Christian unity, for St. Paul presents to us seven kinds of unity, which all interact so that the church may live in one faith.

First: One body (v.4): probably he means here the unity of the holy community, from the standpoint of the church organization. Since unity is an inner spirit, then there is no separation between the spirit and the body, and between the inner life and the apparent planning.

One body refers to the church's unity stemming from the sacramental unity, 101 especially during the Eucharist. The outside organization of the church is considered secondary in regards to her holy sacramental life. The Holy Spirit works in the church through the holy sacraments by uniting everyone to God. Since its inception, the church looks up to the altar to find the Body of Christ, the One Sacrifice, to find her life and the reason for her existence. Through Him, she enjoys unity with the One Christ, and her rising as one body living for Him. This is what all the first liturgies have testified. For example:

As the broken bread was once scattered on the hills, but was assembled to become the One Bread, in the same manner, gather your church from the utter most part of the earth, to Your kingdom. (Liturgy) Diadache

As the elements of this bread were scattered on the mountains, but now were gathered to become one, likewise build your holy church, from every nation, country, city, village and home, and make her one living universal church. (Liturgy of Bishop Serabion)

Now, what is this one body? They are the believers in the whole world, those who exist now and those who existed before and those who will exist. Once more, those who pleased God before the coming of Christ are "One body". How can this be? This is because they also have known Christ. How was this manifested? He said, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad." (John 8:56) He also said, "For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me, for he wrote about Me." (John 5:46) It was not possible for the prophets to write about "The One" unless they had known what was written about Him. However, they had known Him and worshiped Him, thus they became one body.

The body is not separate from the spirit, or else it wouldn't be a body. It is the custom between us to call things that are united and homogenous, one body. Whoever submits to one head is one body; and where there is one head, there is one body.

The body is composed of members, we think some are honorable and some are not. The honorable member should not antagonize the abject, and the latter should not envy the first. Truly each member does not contribute like the other, but each one offers what is needed. Since all the members were created for different purposes, then they are all considered equal in honor.

There are many members in the church, some represent the head and are elevated to the highest, and some resemble the eyes, which are in the head looking at the heavens. Some represent the healthy feet, for walking on the earth is not a crime, but running toward the evil is. The prophet Isaiah said, "Their feet run to evil..." (Is. 59:7)

May the head not brag over the feet, and the feet do not look with evil toward the head, lest the beauty of every member is spoiled and the fullness of his work is hindered.

It is true that whoever plots evil for his neighbor will get it himself, and if the feet refuse to carry the head, then they harm themselves by immobility and laziness. And if the head rejects to care for the feet, it will be harmed herself at first.

St. John Chrysostom 102

Second: One spirit (Eph. 4:4): Unity in its essence is not an outer organization, but inner life led by the One Holy Spirit, to grant all one spirit and a harmonious inner life.

"Through the Holy Spirit who gathers God's people into one, the evil spirit who is divided against itself is expelled.

One of the attributes of the Holy Spirit is the fellowship by which we became one body to the Only Begotten Son, for it is written, 'Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy.' (Phil. 2:1)"

St. Augustine 103

When the Almighty descended and confused the tongues, He divided the Gentiles. But when He distributed the tongues of fire (the Holy Spirit), He invited everyone to unity by mutual agreement. We glorify the Spirit full of holiness.

Kontakon hymn of the Greek Orthodox Church.

God says, "In one house, it shall be eaten; you shall not carry any of the flesh outside the house..." (Ex. 12:46)

"The body of Christ, the holy Body of the Lord cannot be carried outside the house. There is no house for the believers except one, the church. This shelter for the unity of the Holy Spirit was referred to by David the prophet when he said, 'God sets the solitary in families; He

brings out those who are bound into prosperity...' (Ps. 68:6) In the house of God, in the church of Christ, all with one mind dwell together in agreement and simplicity."

St. Kybrianos 104

"The church, accepting this ministry and faith, though she is scattered in the whole world, yet she lives in one house with keenness. She believes in the doctrines, as though she has one spirit and one heart. She declares these teachings and delivers them in complete harmony as if she has one mouth." St. Ereanus 105

"The love which St. Paul demands is not a general love, but love which makes us abide with one another and makes us united without schism so we become one unit, like the love which produces many glorious fruits. That is why he said, 'one body', and added, 'one spirit', revealing that the one body has one spirit, for there may be one body but not one spirit, like one befriending a heretic.

With this expression, he wanted to reveal that they pretend to be united, as if he is saying, "Since you have accepted the one spirit and drank from the one fountain; therefore, you should not be divided in your thoughts. He wanted, through the spirit, to provoke their jealousy."

St. John Chrysostom 106

Third: "...One hope..." (Eph. 4:4): The work of the Holy Spirit, the Leader of the church, stirred the spirit of hope toward the heavenly inheritance and the enjoyment of the fellowship of the eternal glory. This one hope to which we are called, removes from us our temporal honors and love of authority, so we may ask for the invisible and race to take the last seat, which the Lord has taken when He obeyed to the point of death, the death of the cross.

"He added, '...Just as you were called in one hope of your calling.' (Eph. 4: 4) He means that God called everyone by the same conditions; He does not prefer one to the other, but grants eternity to everyone and free eternal life for all, eternal glory and inheritance. He is the Head of everyone; He raises everyone and makes them sit together in the heavenly places (Eph. 2:6). Can you say that a great God called you and a lesser God called the other? Have faith saved you while works saved the other (the Law)? Did you receive forgiveness in baptism while others did not receive it?"

St. John Chrysostom 107

Fourth: "One Lord..." (Eph. 4:5) "He wants us to unite like the unity of the holy Trinity. This union is the most perfect union, which has to be reflected on the unity of the believers."

St. Cyril the Great 108

"The task of the One Lord is to embrace us to become perfect and heavenly by the spirit of unity. He desires that all be saved and that all become children of God and become saints in the One Perfect Man. There is the One Son of God, by Him we are renewed through the Holy Spirit, He desires that all may come to One Perfect Heavenly Man." **St. Hippolitus the Roman** 109

Fifth: "...One faith..." (Eph. 4:5) The first task of the church is to present the true steadfast faith to the world, that is why St. Kiprianus called the church "the house of faith." 110 The church has kept that faith as a deposit, which is delivered to the next generations without deviation. St. Ereanus said: "The early universal church is the one who works in uniting the one faith."111]

Origen commented in one of his sermons on the Passover about the one faith by which the one church lives to save others, commenting on the fact that each family had to practice the Passover in one house. (Ex. 12:46) He said: "There is one house which has the salvation in Christ, which is the church in the world, which was estranged from God but now she enjoys

being close to God, for she accepted the apostles of the Lord Jesus, as in the Old Testament, Rahab accepted the two spies, sent by Joshua, in her house; henceforth, she was the only one who enjoyed the salvation while all Jericho perished.”

Sixth: One baptism (Eph. 4:5)

In the sacrament of baptism, the believers, from the Gentiles, accept the membership in the One Body of Christ, where they share His burial and enjoy His risen life, which prepare them to become the one heavenly bride to the One Heavenly Bridegroom.

“There is nothing common between us and the heretics, not one Lord, or one church, or one faith, or one spirit, or one body. It is obvious that there is no common baptism between us and the heretics, for there is nothing common between us and them.” **St. Kibrianos** 113

Seventh: “One God and Father of all...” (Eph. 4:6):

The universal church is related to the One Shepherd and Father, in spite of many church leaders, thus her Father becomes the secret of her unity. St. Paul said, "One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all." (Eph. 4:6)

God's fatherhood to the believers is amazing, for it embraces us under His love and care, so we may appear as children to one Father "above all", who arranges all our life through His fatherhood. His saying "through all" means that as a loving Father, He plans our life, through all, that is, through us as members in the body of His Beloved Son. His saying "in you all" emphasizes His dwelling inside us. Thus, His fatherhood appears in three complimentary aspects:

A. His fatherhood (who is above all)

B. His work in us and we becoming His children. (Through all)

C. His dwelling in us (in you all).

Some scholars noted that St. Paul, addressing the issue of unity, included three aspects:

A. Pertaining to the church: one body, one spirit and the hope of the one calling (Eph. 4:4).

B. Pertaining to the faith: one Lord, one faith and one baptism (Eph. 4:5)

C. Pertaining to God's fatherhood to us: He is above all, through all and in us all. (Eph. 4:6)

St. Paul addressing the issue of the unity of the church, said that it is based upon the unity of the body, the spirit, the faith and baptism, through our union in the One God and our enjoyment with His one fatherhood for all. The unity of the church does not mean that the members are dissolved and that all are identical, but it is a harmonized unity through the various talents. In more than one place, St. Paul confirms that the various talents give a sign of the vitality of the church (Rom. 12:3-8 & 1 Cor. 12:1-31). These talents are given to the members as a divine gift, according to God's wisdom and fatherhood, as a wise Father who gives everyone according to his ability, and not with partiality, but He gives abundantly according to His divine nature . He said, "But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift." (Eph. 4:7)

St. John Chrysostom commented: “Notice that he did not say according to each one's faith, lest those who do not have enough faith fall in despair, but he said according to the measure of Christ's gift. The basic point is that all participate in the baptism and the salvation through faith, and all take God as their Father and have fellowship in the one spirit. The one who is granted more gifts is required to produce more, for the one who was given five talents

produced five more, while the one who was given two talents produced two only, but still received a reward like the first one. In the same manner, St. Paul is emphasizing the point that the gifts are not given to honor one person over the other, but for the service in the church. He said, 'For the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.' (Eph. 4:12) He said about himself, '...woe is me if I do not preach the gospel.' (1 Cor. 9:16) He was granted the gift of apostleship, therefore, woe to him if he neglects it.

'According' (Eph. 4:7) what does it mean? It does not mean according to our worthiness, or else no one would have received what he had already received, but according to the free gift which we have received.

Why, then, would one receive more gifts than the other? The reason is for diversification, so that each would participate in the edification of the church. Therefore, one receives more gifts than the other not because he is worthy, but to benefit others, according to the measure of God, for it is mentioned in another place, 'But now God has set the members, each one of them in the body, just as He pleased.' (1 Cor. 12:18)" **St. John Chrysostom** 120

The gift is divine and is granted according to the surpassing wisdom of God or according to the measure of Christ, as St. Paul said. No doubt, our acceptance of the free gifts opens a door for more free gifts. St. Jerome said: "This does not mean that the measure of Christ has changed, but according to how much we can accept, He pours His grace on us."121

Anyway, there is no opportunity for bragging or despair, for our talents are God's free gifts, which He grants to us, not due to our worthiness, but for the spiritual building of the church. He descended to us and showed His practical love on the cross, and ascended to distribute His free gifts according to the richness of His wisdom. St. Paul said, "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive and gave gifts to men." (Eph. 4:8)

"...He led captivity captive and gave gifts to men." (Eph. 4:8)

"When He ascended on the cross, He nailed sin, which deprived us from the Paradise, and led captivity captive, as it is written. Why did He lead captivity captive? When Adam fell in sin, our enemy made us captives and made us under his dominion. Hence, all the souls after they depart would go to Hades, for the Paradise would be closed before them. When Christ was lifted up on the cross that grants life, He removed us from captivity due to our fall by His blood, in other words, He took us from the hand of the enemy and made us His captives through His conquer and expelling the one who previously made us captives. That is why it is written, 'He led captivity captive.'"

Father Dorotheos from Ghazza 122

"Now this, He ascended, what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things." (Eph. 4:9,10)

When you hear these words, you do not think of just moving from one place to the other, but St. Paul is emphasizing what he had already written in his epistle to the Philippians (2: 5-9), which is emptying Himself to the point of death of the cross and ascending so that everyone submits to Him. He obeyed to the point of death. He descended to the lower parts of the earth means that He accepted death. Jacob said, "...you would bring down my gray hair with sorrow to the grave." (Gen. 42:38) Also in the Psalms, it is written, "...lest I be like those who do gawn in the pit." (Ps. 143:7), that is who resemble the dead.

Why did He descend to this region? And what captivity is he talking about? He talks about the devil, for He made the devil, death, the curse and sin captives...

He descended to the lower parts of the earth and He ascended above all. This shows His divine authority!

His descent to the lower parts of the earth did not harm Him nor was it a hindrance to become above the heavens. The more one humbles himself, the more he is glorified!

St. John Chrysostom 123

St. Paul clarified the price, which the Lord Jesus has paid to offer us the gifts of the New Testament or the different talents. When He descended to the lower parts of the earth, that is, He died; He ascended up to the heavens to raise us up with Him. Now He declares that the gifts of God to the members of His church are for everyone and not restricted to certain people. He abundantly pours His gifts, though they vary from one member to the other. Every member has a gift, and there is no member without a gift, or else he becomes a burden to the body. He said, "...That He might fill all things. And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers." (Eph. 4: 10,11)

"He fills all things" He fills them with gifts and talents so they practice their work by the Holy Spirit as true members in the dynamic Body of Christ. His Body never ceases to work nor becomes old.

“ ‘God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers...’ (1 Cor. 12:28) Whoever does not participate in the work of the church does not participate in the spirit, for where the church is, there is the Spirit of God, and where the Spirit of God is, there is the church and every kind of grace.” St. Ereanus 124

“You yourself became a priest in baptism... you became a priest in the sense that you present yourself an offering to God.” **St. John Chrysostom 125**

“He continued his talk manifesting God's care and wisdom, for the One who accepted to descend to the lower parts of the earth for our sake distributes His spiritual gifts not aimlessly. He mentions in another place that this is the work of the Spirit, ... The Holy Spirit has appointed you bishops to shepherd the church of God. Here he gives credit of the work to the Son (Eph.4:11) and in another place to God. (The Father) (1 Cor. 3:6-8)

He said, ‘For the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the Body of Christ.’ (Eph. 4:12) Do you realize the honor of this post? Any work is for the edification, everyone builds and everyone serves.” **St. John Chrysostom 126**

3. The Unity and the Edification of the Church:

St. Paul, addressing the issue of the unity of the church which is based on the unity of faith (Eph. 4:1-6), continues to emphasize the unity of the work in spite of the diversities of talents (Eph. 4:7-11), where each one has a role in edifying the church from the hand of the One Christ who sacrificed to the point of death and rose to overflow His divine gifts on the church. Now he addresses the unity of the goal (Eph. 4:12-16), for in spite of the diversities of gifts, yet the goal is one, which is the edification of the church. (Eph. 4:12)

The talents are the gifts of the Holy Trinity, one time he refers them to the Holy Spirit, and another time he refers them to the Lord Jesus, and a third time he refers them to the Father. These are the gifts of the Holy Spirit, which are offered to the church through the worthiness of the Son who sacrificed His life a ransom for us. These are granted by the Father presented by the Holy Trinity for the edification of the whole church. St. Paul said, "For the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." (Eph. 4:12) In the mean time, it is for edifying every member, in other words, the unity of the goal glorifies the universal church, as well as it glorifies the inner church of the heart. It achieves the spiritual

growth for the community, as well as the spiritual edification of every person until he reaches the fullness of Christ. (Eph. 4:13)

First: For the edification of the community:

St. Paul clarifies what he means by the edifying of the body of Christ. He said, "Till we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." (Eph. 4:13)

Having different talents is for the purpose of each one working for the one goal of attaining the unity of the faith. **St. John Chrysostom** said: "Since we all have the one faith, we ought to work to achieve the goal of edifying others. We cannot stop working even if others envy us. God has honored you to edify others. St. Paul was occupied with this goal, also the prophet was prophesying, the evangelist was preaching and the teacher was teaching to achieve that goal. All had one common work; since we all have one faith, then there is unity and the "perfect man" is achieved." 127

The diversities of talents in the church, the one body of Christ, with the unity of the faith, all work in harmony for the edification of the church. Thus, everyone grows into "the knowledge of the Son of God to a perfect man". The unity of the church is based on the diversities of talents but with the unity of the goal. The unity of the faith transfers us from the spiritual childhood to the spiritual maturity, for we all grow from the spiritual knowledge to a deeper knowledge until we all reach the stature of the fullness of Christ. **St. John Chrysostom** said: "What he means by fullness is the perfect knowledge, for as man (the perfect man) is steadfast, the child is hesitant. The same applies to the believers." 128

We are like those who are still in the childhood stage attaining to grow to a perfect man. That is why St. Paul calls us "children" (1 Cor. 13:11). Comparing what we have received from spiritual knowledge to the future knowledge, he considers us children. "For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away. When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child, but when I became a man, I put away childish things. 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 Cor. 13:9-12)

As long as in our strife, we work with one goal in mind, with the unity of the faith, then we are growing from the state of childhood to maturity, to attain "the stature of the fullness of Christ."

Second: Pertaining every member:

We cannot separate any member from the community, nor the community from any member. Any growth in the life of the community is considered growth for the members, and every true growth in the life of the members is considered edifying for the church. When we hear "the stature of the fullness of Christ", this is not addressed only to the church as a community or to isolated members, but rather it is to urge the community as a group and to every member to attain the high levels of spirituality.

St. Paul wants us, by our free will, to unceasingly struggle by the power of the grace. We should never despair, remembering the words of Father Serenus: "We should never retaliate from our strife, being in vigils without despair, for "...the kingdom of God suffers violence and the violent take it by force." (Matt. 11:12)" We can attain no virtue without strife. Father Theonas talks about the strife, declaring that God does not force us to climb to higher levels, but He urges us, through His advice and our yearning, to attain perfection, by our free will.

After St. Paul has raised us to the heavenly mountains to attain "the stature of the fullness of Christ", he warned us of the obstacles, asking us to struggle without ceasing, as little children

who need to grow in spite of the obstacles that meet us. He says, "That we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the Head, Christ." (Eph. 4:14,15)

The Lord Jesus works in immature children, whom He supports and makes them grow to become mature spiritual men, and instead of weakness, He grants them power. In other words, each member of the church lives in an unceasing dynamic movement, growing in love, that is, in Christ who did not please Himself (Rom. 15:3), but loved everyone and sacrificed Himself to establish the church.

St. Paul compares the church to a boat amidst the waters of this world. If the sailors do not all work with one spirit, they become as children who are exposed to many troubles and cannot resist the winds and waves so they perish.

St. John Chrysostom notes that St. Paul talks about the church as one building. If every one does not cooperate, then it will collapse and each one will lose his life. He said:

“ ‘That we should no longer be’, implies that they were thus in the old times, considering that he also needs to be corrected. He wants to say that there are many workers lest the building be shaken, the stones should not be tossed to and fro but should be steadfast. This is a child’s trait to be carried to and fro. He presented this analogy to show the great risk, which the souls are, exposed to¹³¹. He revealed the dangers of life without having a united faith and goal, comparing the workers to children playing; each one carried by false teachings and is deceived by people. He ascertained that they should walk toward the way of “ ‘unity’”, through the unity of all with love under the leadership of ‘Christ the Head.’ He compared the church to the body, and all members grow through their unity with Him, and they are built through His work in them. (Eph. 4:15,16)”

The body grows together, without any member losing its identity, but each member enjoys His gifts according to what he can accept from the Head. **St. John Chrysostom** said: “All members depend on Him and they all enjoy His divine care and the gift of the spiritual talents according to their abilities, which leads to their growth. Each member has to be united with the body and in his appropriate place, or else he will lose his unity with the body and is deprived of accepting the spirit.”¹³²

Through the unity of the goal, we enjoy the love, which binds us with the Head, so He may work inside us, each in his place according to what suits him for the building of the whole body. We no longer are a working community, but rather members for each other where the Head works in us with love, according to each member's talent granted by the Holy Spirit.

St. John Chrysostom said: “If we want to obtain the gifts of the Holy Spirit from the Head, then let us cleave to one another. There are two kinds of separation from the body of the church: the first one where love is cold, and the other where we commit inappropriate things which is not proper to our relation with this Body. In either way, we are cut off from the ‘fullness of Christ.’

Nothing causes divisions in the church except the love of authority!

Nothing causes God's wrath except the schism in the church! Even if we do all the good deeds yet we cause division in the church, then we tear His body like those who mar His body.”¹³³

4. Unity and the new life:

In order for the unity to be a dynamic life, St. Paul concludes his talk by asking them to be in continuous renewal, by putting off the old man and putting on the new man in the

baptismal water. Many western scholars state that this statement about the new life pertains to the liturgy of baptism. For example, we mention the following: "That you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man..." (Eph. 4:22) "And be renewed in the spirit of your mind;" (Eph. 4:23) "and that you put on the new man..." (Eph. 4:24)

In order for him to point the power of "the new life" which we have in Christ Jesus through the baptismal water by His Holy Spirit, and our commitment to grow in this new life, he demonstrated first how we took off the old man, which was apparent in the life of the Gentiles and their behavior.

He said, "This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles who walk in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; who being past feeling, have given themselves to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness." (Eph. 4: 17-19)

We notice the following:

First: St. Paul wanted to let the Lord Jesus Himself to testify, so they realize the seriousness of the matter when they compare the life of the Gentiles outside Christ and the new life in Christ.

Second: St. Paul warns them not to behave like the rest of the Gentiles "...in the futility of their mind" (v:17). Futility of mind means that their mind is occupied with vain temporary matters instead of reflecting on heavenly matters and being occupied with the eternal life.

St. John Chrysostom said: "What is futility of mind? It is being occupied with vain matters like the cares of this earthly world. It is written, '...Vanity of vanities, all is vain.' (Ecc.1:2) One may wonder, if these matters were vain, why were they created? If this is God's creation, why then is it vain? God's creation is not vain, God forbid, the sun, the moon, the stars, our bodies are all not vain but they are very good. (Gen. 1:31) What is vain, then? Listen to what the wise Solomon said, 'I made my works great; I built myself houses, and planted myself vineyards. I made myself gardens and orchards, and I planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. I made myself water pools from which to water the growing trees of the grove. I acquired male and female servants, and had servants born in my house. Yes, I had greater possessions of herds and flocks than all who were in Jerusalem before me. I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the special treasures of kings and of the provinces. I acquired male and female singers, the delights of the sons of men, and musical instruments of all kinds. So I became great and excelled more than all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me. Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart rejoiced in all my labor; and this was my reward from all my labor. Then I looked on all the works that my hands had done and on the labor in which I had toiled; and indeed all was vanity and grasping for the wind. There was no profit under the sun.' (Ecc. 2:4-11) David the prophet also said, '...Surely they busy themselves in vain; he heaps up riches, and does not know who will gather them.' (Ps. 39:6) This is vanity of vanities: the luxurious buildings, the abundant riches, the slaves and luxury in public squares, your pride and vanity glory in self-righteousness. All these are vain and not from God's hand but from our making. Why is it vain? It is vain because, it has no beneficial purpose. Riches are vain when spent on luxuries, but not vain when spent on the needy and poor. (Ps. 112:9)"

Third: One may wonder: why would the Gentiles be blamed as long as their minds are darkened and they are estranged from the life of God because of their ignorance and the hardness of their hearts?

St. Paul answers, "Who being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness." (Eph. 4:19) This means that what they practice from uncleanness stems from their having no feelings, so by their own free will, they submit themselves to lewdness and greediness.

St. John Chrysostom said: " 'Who being past feeling, have given themselves over to ...' (Eph. 4:19) It is written, '...God gave them over to a debased mind...' (Rom. 1:28) Did they give themselves over to a debased mind or is it God who gave them over to a debased mind? Saying that God gave them over to a debased mind means that this happened with God's permission." 135

Fourth: St. Paul associates between the vain faith and the futile thought and the unrighteous behavior. The thought and the behavior are like a chain, where each one affects the other. When the thought is filled with vain temporary matters, then it is filled with darkness and ignorance, and when it is filled with darkness, then it deteriorates to the evil, and the evil drives it to a deeper darkness.

St. Augustine said: "that behind every atheism, there is an evil lust (an evil thought)!"

St. John Chrysostom said: "Isn't the evil life is the foundation of evil teachings as well? The Lord Jesus said, 'For everyone practices evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.' (John 3:20) When we sink in the depths of the water, we cannot see the sun because of the density of the water, and it becomes a hindrance and our heart becomes blind and we lose the feeling of the fear of God in the soul. It is written, '...There is no fear of God before his eyes.' (Ps. 36:1) Also, it is written, 'The fool has said in his heart, 'there is no God' (Ps. 14:1) Blindness comes from losing the feelings." 136

Fifth: St. Paul, correlating the blindness of the thought or its deviation with evil behavior. One may wonder: how can I protect my life from the evil? St. Paul associated evil with greediness. He said, "...To work all uncleanness with greediness." (Eph. 4:19) If living a holy life may appear hard for man, is falling in greediness a must? In other words, what is the excuse of the Gentiles in being greedy? Father Marcos the ascetic said that when man obeys the commandments, which he is able to do, then God will work in him and will help him to obey the commandments, which he cannot do. When we control ourselves from greediness, then He controls our feelings, away from any uncleanness. When we are faithful to the Lord in all what He has given us, then He will work with His rich grace in us.

St. John Chrysostom said: "They could have been moderate in riches and luxuries, but they indulged with no moderation, so they completely perished." 137

After St. Paul demonstrated the evil ways of the Gentiles, in their thoughts and behavior, he ascertained that this is not befitting for believers who have met the Lord Jesus as Teacher and Helper and the One who renews their thoughts continuously by His Holy Spirit.

He said, "But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have learned him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus, that you put off concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in righteousness and true holiness." (Eph. 4:20-24)

This statement, in essence, is the praise of the New Testament, where the believer glorifies the surpassing works of God in his life and praises the richness of His abundant grace. Most probably, this is part of the liturgy of the baptism in the apostolic age, where God's work is declared. We notice the following:

First: He did not say, "You have learned from Christ", but he said, "You have not so learned Christ." (Eph. 4:20) This means that as Christ is the Teacher who made the apostles His disciples, He is still living in His church teaching through His servants. He does not teach us about others but He teaches us "Himself" living inside us. This is what St. Paul meant by "learned Christ."

The human race has enjoyed the law, supported by the natural law, then the Mosaic Law. Then the Lord Jesus came and offered "His life", so we can obtain His righteousness, His holiness and His resurrection working in us.

We have heard Him and saw "The Truth in Jesus", for He said, "I am the Truth..." Since the Truth is in us, then the vain and futile matters cannot exist inside us.

Second: For the second time, St. Paul associates between the true teachings and the holy life, for he said that as long as we enjoy the truth, that is the true faith in Christ Jesus, then we should take off the old man.

St. John Chrysostom said: "The teachings are true, in the same manner the life is true! Sin is vain and futile, but the righteous life is 'truth'. Purity is truth for it leads to a great goal, but lewdness leads to nothing." 138

May our true faith in Christ Jesus "The Truth" be associated with our behavior in Him, so that faith working through love is manifested in us, as St. Paul says.

Third: When we carry the Lord Jesus in our hearts, then we reject the works of the old man, and we walk according to the new man, who was given as a free gift through baptism. This new man needs to continually grow through daily renewal, as a sign of the vitality of the believer. St. Paul said, "Be renewed in the spirit of your mind." (Eph. 4:23) He means by the mind, "the inner man". The spirit of the mind means renewing the works of the Holy Spirit by responding to Him. Renewal touches the mind not the spirit; for through the spirit, our inner man is renewed daily. St. Paul said, "...Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day." (2 Cor. 4:16)

St. John Chrysostom commented on this statement (Eph. 4:23): "How can the renewal happen? 'In the spirit of your mind.' Whoever has the spirit cannot commit an old deed, for the spirit cannot tolerate the deeds of the old man. He said 'In the spirit of your mind', that is the spirit that is in your mind." 139

St. Paul continued: "And that you put on the new man, which was created according to God, in righteousness and true holiness." (Eph. 4:24) Since he asked to put off the old man, then we cannot remain naked, but we should put on the new man carrying the righteousness and holiness of God. We notice the following:

A. There is no middle situation, for either one is putting on the old man, who works for the devil and evil, or either one is putting on the new man who works for God. There are no compromises, for either one carries the weapons of unrighteousness or the weapons of righteousness. You either belong to the kingdom of the devil or the kingdom of God!

St. John Chrysostom said: "Man cannot be without work, for either he does evil or good!"

B. The new man, whom we put on, is not from ourselves, but he is created according to God in righteousness and true holiness. (Eph. 4:24) This is the work of His creation. **St. John Chrysostom** commented: "God created him to become his son, in baptism." 140

In the New Testament, righteousness is the true holiness, and not like the symbolic righteousness of the Jews, for we have enjoyed the Truth living and working inside us.

Since we have received the gift of "the new man" as a garment of righteousness in Christ Jesus, it is appropriate for us that we should struggle to continuously remain with that garment. **St. John Chrysostom** said: "How can he talk with those who have on the new man? He talks with them about the good deeds in the Lord. They have obtained this garment in baptism, but now through their daily life and work, not according to the deceitful lusts (Eph. 4:22) but according to God. (Eph. 4:23)" 141

St. John Chrysostom continues saying: "We should never take off the garment of righteousness, which the prophet calls: '...the garment of salvation' (Is. 61:10). Let us put on the garment of righteousness and never put it off. David the Prophet said, 'As he clothed himself with cursing as with his garment, so let it enter his body like water...' (Ps. 109:18) Also, 'Who cover Yourself with light as with a garment...' (Ps. 104:2) Let us put on virtue every day, not just one day or two, and never put it off. Man is marred when he takes off virtue, not when he takes off his clothes. When one takes off his clothes, other people see his nakedness; but when one takes off virtue, first his fellows see his nakedness, second God and the angels do. When you see someone going naked to public bathrooms, don't you feel annoyed? How about if you put off the garment of righteousness, what do we say?" 142

C. St. Paul's calling to take off the old man and to be continually renewed in mind is a calling to practice the new life and to reflect on the heavenly matters where there is a new praise. In other words, this is a spiritual release toward the eternity and enjoying the new life, through leaving the killing letter. St. Jerome said: "Where we sing the new praise (Rev.14:3) and the old man is removed, we walk in the newness of the spirit and not in the strictness of the letter." 143 Thus, our life is transformed to a new song which we sing or a practical praise where the Spirit of God plays on the strings of our inner life, preparing us for the life to come where the unceasing new praise is sung.

This calling declares the meaning of the spiritual growth or the continuous renewal. Father Theodore, in his discussions with St. Kasian, said: "We need what St. Paul said: 'To be renewed in the spirit of your mind.' (Eph. 4:23) until we reach the spiritual growth so we forget what is behind (Phil. 3:13). When one neglects that, he retaliates, and failing to attain new virtues means a great loss. When there is no desire to advance, then there is a great risk of regressing." 144

After talking about the spiritual growth through the renewing of the spirit of mind and putting off the old man and putting on the new man, he said:

First: "Therefore putting away lying, each one speaks truth with his neighbor, for we are members of one another." (Eph. 4:25)

Note that he talks here about the works of the new man (Eph. 4:25-32). He addresses our relations with others, for the holy life touches our inner depths, as well as it touches our relations with others. Lying harms our common membership built on truth. Stealing robs others' rights instead of caring for the needs of others. Every sinful attitude grieves the Holy Spirit dwelling in us and in others. (Eph. 4:3)

Now he is addressing the issue of not lying but speaking the truth. It is not enough to avoid the negative side but we should follow the positive side too. Let us reject the vain matters and accept the truth, for we are members for one another. **St. John Chrysostom** said: "St. Paul said: may the eye not lie to the foot, nor the foot to the eye. Suppose there is a deep pit, does the foot lie to the rest of the members and not say the truth? If the eye sees a serpent or a wild animal does she lie to the foot?" 145 The unity of the members as a complimentary body requires that all members are truthful with each other, or else the whole body will break down because of

lying and deceit. **St. John Chrysostom** said: "Let no one deceive his neighbor, as the Psalmist said, 'They speak idly everyone with his neighbor, with flattering lips and a double heart they speak.' (Ps. 12:2) Nothing brings enmity except deceit and malice." 146

Second: "Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil." (Eph. 4:26,27)

Nothing gives place to the devil except wrath. If anger has a place in our hearts and the Lord Jesus, the Sun of Righteousness, does not shine with the rays of His love to remove the spirit of anger from our hearts, then the devil will settle and reign in our lives!

"What are we going to do, we, whom the sun went down on our wrath in the Day of Judgment not one day, but for long years? If you become angry, this is natural, but to put limits on our anger, this is Christian." St. Jerome 147

"Anger, which is full of stubbornness, brings harm to the soul, no matter whom you are angry at." Father Joseph 148

"At daytime, many can calm their anger and overcome it, but at night, when one is at solitude and all the bad thoughts come to one's mind, the devil takes advantage of that opportunity and ignites the spirit of anger in us. To avoid that let us live in peace with each other before night falls." **St. John Chrysostom** 149

"If you become angry, do not let the sun go down on your wrath, lest the Sun of Righteousness goes down on your wrath and you stay in darkness." (Malachi.4:2)

St. Augustine 150

"Be angry and do not sin..." (Eph. 4:26) Notice his wisdom, for he is warning us not to sin, however, if we do not heed His voice, He does not forsake us because of His fatherly compassion. The physician prescribes medication to the patient, but if the patient does not follow the treatment, the physician attempts to persuade him, so he may get healed. St. Paul is using the same method. He says, "Putting away lying..." (Eph. 4: 25) Lying produces anger, therefore, he continues his talk to treat anger. What does he say? "Be angry and do not sin..." It is very good not to be angry, however, if one gets angry, let this anger not stay too long, for he says, "Do not let the sun go down on your wrath." Are you full of anger? It is enough to be angry for one hour, two or three, but do not let the sun go down while you are still holding grudges against someone.

Because of God's goodness, He, the Sun of Righteousness, has sent His Son to forgive your sins, so why do you not want to forgive your brother? This is great wickedness!

"Nor give place to the devil." (Eph. 4:27)

"When you fight with someone, then you give place to the devil. Be an enemy to the devil, and not an enemy to another member in the church." **St. John Chrysostom** 151

"By your own evil will, you give the devil a place, then he will enter and rule and exploit you. This will not happen unless you give him a place." **St. Augustine** 152

"Regarding escaping from evil: No one approaches danger and stays in peace for a long time. In the same manner, no servant can escape from the devil if he hinders himself by the traps of the devil." **St. Cyprian** 153

Third: "Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need." (Eph. 4:28)

It is not enough that the robber stops stealing, the works of the old man, but he has to practice the deeds of the new man by working hard and giving.

"'Let him who stole steal no longer.' This does not remove sin, but how to remove it? If they work and do deeds of love with others! He does not ask that we work only, but that we work

and toil and do good deeds with others for the robber too has deeds, but evil ones.” **St. John Chrysostom 154**

Fourth: "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers." (Eph. 4:29)

Once more, he is not only asking to avoid the negative aspect by avoiding corrupt words, but rather being obliged to speak good words for the edification of others.

“Let us ask for His help and let us open our mouth in the appropriate time, for the Wise Solomon said, ‘...A time to keep silence and a time to speak.’ (Ecc. 3:7) If we have to continually open our mouth, then there would have been no need to have a door for the mouth. And if the mouth has to be shut all the time, then there would have been no need to guard it. But the door and guard are for a purpose that everything is done in the appropriate time. In another place it is written, "let your words be balanced" (Sirach 28: 29), that is, we have to be careful and think before uttering any word.” **St. John Chrysostom 155**

“Speak what builds your brother, and do not utter more words. God granted you a mouth and a tongue so you may thank Him and build your brother. If you destroy that building, then it is better for you to be silent. The Psalmist David said, ‘May the Lord cut off all flattering lips, and the tongue that speaks proud things.’ (Ps.12:3) The mouth is the cause of all evils; it is not really the mouth but rather abusing it.” **St. John Chrysostom 156**

Since the holy mouth, sanctified by the Holy Spirit, builds the brothers, then the evil mouth destroys the divine building in them, and then it resists the work of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, St. Paul warns us by saying,

"And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." (Eph. 4:30)

St. John Chrysostom said: “This matter is scary, for he said in the epistle to the Thessolonians, ‘Therefore, he who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit.’ (1 Thess. 4:8) If you say a cruel word to your brother and hit him, you did not only hit him, but you grieved the Holy Spirit. He rebuked us saying, "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." He is the One who makes us a royal flock; He separates us from the earthly matters and does not allow us to fall in what grieves God. Do we still grieve Him? He is warning us, ‘He who rejects this does not reject man, but God who has also given us His Holy Spirit.’ Let this seal remain on your mouth and do not destroy its prints. The spiritual mouth cannot say, ‘What if I insult somebody?’ This is a great wickedness. You have a spiritual mouth, which calls God "My Father", so how can you at the same time with the same mouth insult your brother? May the God of peace preserve your mind and tongue with His fear, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Glory be to Him, forever and ever, Amen.” **St. John Chrysostom 157**

He reminds the believer that he has put on the new man by the Holy Spirit, who sealed him as a royal flock, so he became under the ownership of Christ and not the devil. Therefore, he cannot go back to the works of the old man, which are sealed by the devil. Therefore, he says, "Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ also forgave you." (Eph. 4:31, 32)

He put all kinds of evil pertaining to our relations with others especially through the mouth in one scale, and put kindness and forgiveness in the other scale. When the Holy Spirit works in us, the Lord Jesus, the desire of all nations, is manifested in us, then we carry inside us,

sweetness not bitterness, and we live in the fellowship of the heavenly life instead of the bitter life. That is why it is mentioned, "Let all bitterness ...be put away..." (Eph. 4:31)

St. John Chrysostom mentioned in details that bitterness defiles the whole body, as well as the soul.

Let us remove the deeds of the old man, so we may not carry any bitterness toward any man, then there are no roots to any anger, wrath or clamor or evil speaking, but on the contrary we are kind, compassionate, forgiving, as the Father forgave us through the blood of His Only Begotten Son.

"St. Paul takes us away from sin and makes us enter into the life of virtue. For what is the use if we just pluck out all the thorns and do not sow good seeds? He who does not carry any bitterness does not mean that he is gentle and not hot tempered. Therefore, we are in dire need to struggle until we reach that level of kindness and compassion. The bad seeds were removed, now we have to plant good seeds 'Be kind' When the thorns are plucked; the field is still unproductive and will bring forth weeds. Hence, it has to be occupied with what is good. Anger is removed and is replaced by kindness; bitterness is removed to be replaced by compassion; evil speaking and malice are taken away to be replaced by forgiveness."

St. John Chrysostom 159

"Since Christ has forgiven your sins, which are more than seventy times seven, why do you neglect in forgiving your brother? Since Christ has forgiven you thousands of sins, you should forgive others too." **St. Augustine**160

"..."...Even as God in Christ also forgave you.' (Eph. 4:32) St. Paul asked God to forgive us because of the sacrifice of His Son. In order for God to forgive you, He offered His Son as a Sacrifice. But in order for you to forgive others, you do not have to sacrifice or risk anything, so why don't you forgive?"

St. John Chrysostom 161

Chapter Five

WORSHIP AND BEHAVIOR

The church is to accept God's call to enjoy the new life in Christ. This new life is manifested in man's life, worship and behavior; so all his life becomes "a sacrifice to God", so that his worship is not separated from his behavior.

- 1. Following God, "Sacrificial love": Eph. 5: 1- 2**
- 2. Behaving in the light of His resurrection: Eph. 5: 3 –12**
- 3. Being circumspect in behavior and worship: Eph. 5: 15 –21**
- 4. Marital relations and the mystery of Christ: Eph. 5: 22 – 33**

1. Following God: The Sacrificial Love"

"Therefore be followers of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma." (Eph. 5:1,2)

Since love is the language of the universal church, where unity of the spirit is practiced and where the community and every member in it grows, where one desires that the door of faith is opened to everyone and the mystery of Christ is fulfilled, then love is also the sign of our following God our Father and the Incarnate Word of God, who through love has offered Himself a sacrifice to God. St. John the Beloved said, "By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." (1 John 3:16)

A Christian shares with the Lord Christ His priesthood (the general priesthood) by offering his life a sacrifice of love for others like His Master. This is the trait of the new man instead of the old evil man.

"...God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God..." (1 John 4:16)

St. Augustine 162

"You were called a son, so if you refuse to follow His example, why do you ask for His inheritance?" **St. Augustine** 163

"Lest you think that the salvation of Christ was done as an obligation, listen to Him saying, 'He offered Himself.'

As your Lord loves you, love your friend! If you cannot love him as much as He loves you, love as much as you can. Forgive others. When you follow the Lord Jesus, you follow His example. It is our duty to forgive others their sins more than we forgive them their financial debts. When you forgive others their sins, then you are truly following God. You cannot say that you are poor and unable to forgive others their debts, for it is in your authority to forgive others their sins! Listen, he is offering you a piece of advice, for he is urging you as "dear children". Truly there is another reason to follow Him, because you are called His son. Not all children follow their father, but only the 'dear children.' Here is the foundation of every task! When there is no wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking, then the most important foundation 'love' exists. How did you become a son? He forgave your sins. In the same manner, you should forgive your brother! Through love, you were saved and became a son! If you can save others, wouldn't you offer the advice, which was once given to you, saying, "Forgive and you will be forgiven."

St. John Chrysostom 164

“God the Father ‘...delivered Him for us all...’ (Rom. 8:32), and also He has ‘...given Himself for us...’ (Eph. 5:2). It is obvious that the work of the Father and His will are one with the Son.”

St. Ambrose 165

"Walk in love" (Eph. 5:2)

2. Abiding in the light of the resurrection:

Through practical love, we follow God the light, carrying the fellowship of His nature, and then we are considered "...children of light" (Eph. 5:8). There is no place for the darkness of death in us, but we enjoy the light of His resurrection. By this interpretation, St. Paul is commanding us to abide as children of light, enjoying the power of His resurrection and its joy inside us, manifested in our daily life and our inner behavior, forsaking all the works of darkness, for he says,

"But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things, the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore, do not be partakers with them. For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light." (Eph. 5: 3-8)

We notice the following:

First: He pointed the works of darkness, which are not fitting for us as children of light. These should not even be named among you. Earlier, we practiced these for we were in darkness, but now we are light in the Lord. About the works of darkness, he concentrated on three major sins, which are fornication, uncleanness and covetousness (Eph. 5:3). These sins should not even be named among us, as true saints in the Lord. He repeated these sins in verse five, as the reason for not entering into the kingdom of God. Father Serabion said: ‘We have to avoid those three kinds of sins equally, for one of them can close the door of the kingdom before us.’ (166)

Second: **St. John Chrysostom** said: “St. Paul presented the first group of sins which are ‘bitterness, wrath and anger’ (Eph. 4:31), and the cause of these sins are clamor and evil speaking. The second group of sins are ‘fornication, uncleanness and covetousness’, and these stem from ‘foolish talking and coarse jesting’ instead of words of thanksgiving to God (Eph. 5:4).”

St. Paul is stressing the cause of the evil works, which may appear as trifle matters, but later become bigger. One may consider clamor or coarse jesting as something trifle which do not affect one's life, however coarse jesting may spoil one's inner vision, then one may become angry, and anger turns into hatred and bitterness toward others, and may even go as far as killing, though not literally but emotionally. One may start by inappropriate foolish talking, which in turn stirs the lusts of man toward adultery, uncleanness and greediness. Solomon the Wise warned us, by saying, "Remove your way far from her, and do not go near the door of her house." (Prov. 5:8)

Foolish talking and coarse jesting are signs of inner emptiness, which destroy and do not build, but drive one to adultery, uncleanness and greediness.

St. John Chrysostom said, “What is the use of coarse jesting? You merely laugh! Does the shoemaker occupy himself with something else beside his profession? Certainly not! Don't utter idle words, for, through these idle words, we fall into foolish talking. The present time is not time for idle joking, but rather time for repentance. Does any wrestler wrestles by joking?”

The devil walks about like a roaring lion (1 Pet. 5:8) seeking to devour you. The devil is setting traps against your salvation, and you are talking foolishly and with idle talks. Today is the time for spiritual war and strife, for vigil and putting on weapons, not for laughing and coarse jesting. The Lord Jesus said, '...You will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice...' (John 16:20) Christ was crucified for your sins and you sit and laugh? Listen to what David the Psalmist said, 'Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling.' (Ps. 2:11) Coarse jesting causes laziness, and the one who does it has no edifying words at all." **St. John Chrysostom** 168

Third: St. Paul contrasted foolish talking and coarse jesting with thanksgiving words. The believer rejoices by practicing the angelic life, the life of thanksgiving and continuous praise. Thus, his deep inner joy is not based on temporary foolish jokes but rather on his relationship with his Father on eternal basis.

In his previous talk, he contrasted the works of the old man, which are lying, anger, and stealing, with the basic work of the new man, which is "love", by which we follow God. (5:1) Now, he is contrasting the works of darkness, which are fornication, uncleanness, greediness, foolish talking, and coarse jesting, with the basic work of the light which is "thanksgiving", which is the work of the angels. In other words, through love, we declare our son-ship to God, and through thanksgiving, we declare our fellowship with the heavenly creatures.

Fourth: St. Paul added "greediness" to fornication and uncleanness. He said, "...No fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God." (Eph. 5:5) He considered greediness not a small sin when compared to fornication and uncleanness. But greediness is "idolatry" (Col. 3:5), for one makes money his god. Fornication is slavery to the lusts of the body instead of living a holy life, and greediness is slavery to money and materialistic matters instead of the eternal life and the heavenly glory. We cannot belittle greediness nor fornication and uncleanness for these are traits of the sons of disobedience, which bring forth the divine wrath. (Eph. 5:6)

Fifth: St. Paul did not say, earlier you lived in darkness but now you are in the light, but rather he said, "For you were once darkness but now you are light in the Lord..." (Eph. 5:8). Whoever lives in the darkness, he himself becomes darkness, and whoever dwells in the light, he himself becomes light and blessing, as the Lord said, "You are the light of the world." (Matt. 5:14 & Lk. 11:33-36 & Jn. 5:35)

Sixth: Becoming light in the Lord, they should abide as children of light (Eph. 5:8), and then the holy life becomes a natural fruit in them and not pretence. He said, "...Walk as children of light. For the fruit of the spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth, finding out what is acceptable to the Lord." (Eph. 5:8-10)

"Not through your self-righteousness but through the grace of God, you obtain all this. Earlier you deserved punishment but now you do not deserve it." **St. John Chrysostom** 169

"When you were in darkness, you were not in the Lord. But now since you are enlightened, you shine by the Lord, and that is not from you." **St. Augustine** 170

"Talking about St. Peter who walked on the water, as His Master commanded, he was able to accomplish what the Lord had told him to do, not on his own but through the Lord. Peter walked on the water, as the Lord commanded him, realizing that he is incapable of this power, but through faith, he had the power to achieve what human weakness was unable to do." **St. Augustine** 171

Since the Lord Jesus is the Sun of Righteousness, then we, through the Holy Spirit who is the light, enjoy the fruits of the light, which are, "goodness, righteousness and truth". As the

earthly life had no existence without the sun, in the same manner, we have no life without the Sun of Righteousness who grants every goodness, righteousness and truth.

Seventh: "proving what is acceptable to the Lord." (Eph. 5:10) He distinguishes between those living in darkness and those abiding by the works of the light. The former practice what is acceptable to themselves or to others, while the children of the light care to please the Lord and do what is acceptable to Him, repeating what St. Paul said, "Lord, what do you want me to do?"

Eighth: Since we enjoyed the Lord, the Light, who through His resurrection has abolished darkness, then we have forsaken the works of darkness and were transferred to the light. We became light, carrying the fruits of the light. St. Paul is warning us from regressing to darkness and its works. He said,

"And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of those things, which are done by them in secret. But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light." (v. 11-13)

St. Paul asked the believers to determine their stand whether they are children of the light or children of the darkness, not through foolish discussions but through practical life. He emphasized this point in more than one place, for he said, "...For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever?" (2 Cor. 6: 14,15) Also, St. John said, "In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother." (1 John 3:10)

Ninth: By abiding in the light as children of the light, we produce fruits of the light, declaring that the works of darkness are "unfruitful", moreover the works of the light expose the evil works and rebuke them. (v.11) St. John Chrysostom said: {You are light", for the light rebukes what goes on in the darkness. Since you are righteous, the evil people cannot hide, as when you light a candle, everything becomes in the light and the robber cannot enter. In the same manner, when your light shines, the evil people are rebuked and caught. Our task is to reveal them, why then does the Lord Jesus say, "Judge not that you be not judged." (Matt. 7: 1) St. Paul did not say, "judge them", but he said, "rebuke them", that is correct their mistakes.} 172

Tenth: Now St. Paul concludes his talk about abiding in the light by ascertaining our enjoyment of the light of His resurrection and emphasizing the victory of the light over the darkness. Probably, he excerpted praise from the liturgy of the baptism, which glorifies the Lord Jesus Christ who grants enlightenment to the human race instead of darkness, and the risen life instead of the death of sin. (John 11:11) He grants His believers the new risen life in a new creative way which corresponds to the creation of the light, for he said, **"Therefore He says: Awake you who sleep, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light."** (v. 14)

{This is the resurrection of the hearts that is the resurrection of the inner man or the soul. He Himself who grants light to the blind, raises the dead.} St. Augustine 173

{What he means by the sleepy and the dead person is the one indulged in sin, whose aroma stinks like a dead man and who cannot see anything, like a sleepy person, and he lives in dreams and pretense. Forsake sin so you may be able to see Christ, for anyone who commits sin hates the light and does not come to the light. (John 3:20) But whoever does not commit sin comes to the light. "... God is not God of the dead, but of the living." (Matt. 22:32). Since He is not God of the dead, then let us arise and live.}

St. John Chrysostom 174

3. Being circumspect in behavior and worship:

Since the word of God granted us the light of His resurrection, then let us arise from the death of sin. On our side, we have to live circumspectly, not as fools but as wise. He said: **First: "See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise." (v. 15)**

The spiritual life resembles a building whose foundation is the resurrection of the Lord who grants light instead of darkness, life instead of death, so that the believer walks circumspectly all the days of his sojourn, not by his own self but by the free grace, that is through the risen life in Christ Jesus.

Every believer practices this inner spiritual building, as well as those who work in the Lord's vine on behalf of the whole congregation, as St. Paul wrote, "...But let each one take heed how he builds on it." (1 Cor. 3; 10)

Here we notice that it is not only necessary to walk circumspectly but we have to behave in wisdom. Some considered that believing in the Crucified is foolishness and that relying on God is ignoring one's thinking and wisdom. That is why St. Paul emphasized "wisdom" or "knowledge". He said, "Understand what the will of the Lord is." (v.17) This point is very clear in all St. Paul's letters, for the Lord called us to have fellowship with Him, then we may realize His will and understand His wisdom.

Second: "Redeeming the time because the days are evil." (v. 16)

The sign of living circumspectly and wisely is to redeem the time. The believer realizes that his earthly life is his true treasure, for it is the reason for his eternal crown or his destruction. If he redeems the time, then his temporal strife will be changed to an eternal heavenly crown, and if he neglects his few days on earth, then his eternity is destroyed!

"The days are evil" because it deceives the person, so one is enticed toward the earthly matters, as if one will live forever on earth, then suddenly he finds himself before the Judge to give an account of his stewardship.

Pope Theophilus talked with Mother Theodora regarding this matter. This was mentioned in our book "The Dictionary of the Fathers and the Saints of the Church". 175

St. Augustine said: {Aren't these truly evil days, for we spent them in the corrupt body or under its burden, among the great tribulations? There is nothing in the world except vain

luxuries, without real joy, but there is scary fear, greediness, and deep sorrow. Truly these are evil days, yet no one wants it to end, but everyone wants long life.) 176

Truly the days are evil, for many of the fathers relate that the prophets of the Old Testament and the apostles of the New Testament and the Lord Himself ascertain the swiftness of the Second Coming of the Lord so we may be ready to meet Him, considering that the time, no matter how long it may seem, yet the days are evil when compared to the blessed eternity.

St. Hippolytus the Roman said: {Truly, what excuse does man give when he hears God's word in the church from the prophets, the apostles and the Lord Himself without giving any attention to himself nor to the time when he stands before the Judgment Seat of Christ?} 177

St. John Chrysostom commented on the previous statement (v. 15-17) saying: {He requires that they walk circumspectly and wisely without ignorance to uproot the roots of bitterness and wrath. They were called lambs to live among wolves. They find attackers from outside as well as from their household, that is why they live circumspectly and wisely so that no wrath may penetrate their hearts, but they witness the message of the Gospel through practical love, even to the attackers. (Rom. 13: 7) He concludes by saying: {when the rest of the world sees that we are patiently enduring the tribulations, then they are ashamed of themselves.} 178

St. John continues his comment saying, {the time is not your own! In the present time, you are strangers and foreigners, so do not ask to be honored and do not seek authority nor glory nor revenge. Endure all things, redeeming the time. I imagine a man who lives in a rich house, and then some robbers came to attack him. He would give them a big sum of money to redeem his life. In the same manner, you are living in a rich faith, but the attacker, the devil, wants to rob you all that. Give him what he wants but keep your rich faith. He says, "The days are evil". What is evil in the body? Sickness! What is evil in the soul? Sin! What is evil in water? Bitterness. The evil of something is according to its nature and corrupts it. We are used to say: "I had a bad and evil day." The good events that happened this day are from God and the evil events are from evil people. Thus, the evil that happens are from the making of people, that is why they are called evil days.} 179

Third: "And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit." (v.18)

Lot, who tortured himself by the wicked works of Sodom and Gomorrah, when he was drunk, had two sons, Moab and Ammon, from his daughters. Their offspring attacked God's work and His people, throughout the generations. In the same manner, everyone who is drunk brings forth fruit against God's works. St. Jerome warns us saying: {The Moabites and the Ammonites found their origin in drinking. (Gen. 19: 30-38)} 180

St. John Chrysostom said: {A regular man avoids drinking, how about the spiritual person who lives among the swords and is exposed to murder. Listen to what the Bible says, "Give strong drink to him who is perishing, and wine to those who are bitter of heart." (Prov. 31:6) Wine was given to us for only one purpose, to cure a sick body. However, this purpose was destroyed because it was abused. St. Paul said to his disciple Timothy, "No longer drink

only water, but use a little wine for your stomach's sake and your frequent infirmities." (1 Tim. 5:23)

{Do you want to be happy? Do you want to occupy your day? I give you the spiritual drink, for getting drunk makes us even lose our good talks and makes us mumble, and also mars our eyes and all our features. Learn to praise God with the psalms, so you may experience the sweetness of the work, for those who praise God are filled with the Holy Spirit, and those who sing the devilish songs are filled with the evil spirit.} 181

{Instead of rejoicing with the drunkenness of this world. Let us be filled with the work of the Holy Spirit dwelling in us, so we may, without ceasing, get drunk with the love of God, and we continually fly toward heavenly matters and settle in His eternal bosom.}

Being filled with the Holy Spirit does not mean accepting outer dwelling but accepting the work of the Holy Spirit in us and enjoying His power working in us. In his book about the Holy Spirit, St. Basilios the Great said that God gives the Spirit according to each man's readiness. The Spirit does not cease giving as long as one opens his heart and responds to His work.

St. John Chrysostom commented: {"Then Saul who also is called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him and said, 'O full of all deceit and all fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord?" (Acts 13: 9,10) Let no one think that St. Paul was not filled with the Holy Spirit when he talked with the magician, but the Holy Spirit inside him filled him with power to answer the magician. As the magician carried the power of evil, the Spirit offered him power... } 182

Fourth: "Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." (v. 19,20)

St. Paul gave us his life as an example, for in the same epistle, he presented many excerpts about church praises, demonstrating in a practical way that praising God is joyful to the soul as well as the community. The early church was " a holy community with continuous praising". St. Luke explained that in the book of Acts by saying, "So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all people." (Acts 2: 46,47)

Praising and thanking God are the work of the heavenly church, or the work of the heavenly creatures. Once we accept from Christ the heavenly life, then praises will naturally stem from the depth of the heart, where all one's being responds, even amidst tribulations. This is what shook the pagans, for they saw the Christians praising God inside the prisons, especially after the judgment of death was issued.

In the fourth and fifth centuries, the Egyptians monasteries and deserts were like paradise, where one only hears the perpetual voices of praises, as St. John Kasian related.

The church declares her joyful nature with the Lord by praises in all her liturgies, as well as the private prayers for every member.

St. John Chrysostom commented on the previous verse: {what does he mean by "in your hearts to the Lord" (v.19)? He means that praises should be with full understanding and meditation, for whoever utters the praises without reflecting on the words, then his heart will wander and will not benefit.}

He said, "Giving thanks always for all things..." (v. 20) He means that in everything by prayer and supplication...(Phil. 4:6) nothing delights the Lord except a thankful person.

We can offer thanksgiving to God by withdrawing ourselves from the sins mentioned earlier and purifying ourselves by the means, which he had related.

He said, "Be filled with the Spirit." (v.18) Is the Spirit inside us? Truly He is inside us, for when we uproot lying, adultery, uncleanness, covetousness, and become kind, tender hearted, forgiving one another, then we are qualified to have the Spirit to enlighten us.

He does not only dwell in us but fills our hearts. When this great light inflames us, then the road of virtue becomes easy and simple.

He said, "Giving thanks always for all things..."(v. 20) what does he mean? Do we thank for anything that befall us? Yes, even if for any sickness or poverty. In the Old Testament, the Wise Solomon said, "Accept what befall you with joy and patience, even when you become poorer." (Son of Sirach 2:4) How about in the New Testament?

Give thanks always. If you only thank during the times of comfort and success and riches, this is not strange. However, one should thank during difficult times of tribulations and afflictions. Nothing is better than the words, "I thank you O my Lord"...

Let us thank God for His blessings, whether seen or unseen, and which we involuntarily accept, for we receive many blessings without our knowledge and our will.

When we are poor or sick, let us keep thanking God, not by mere words of tongue but by deed and actions, and in the heart and mind. Let us thank Him with all our souls, for He loves us more than our parents. As far as good is from evil, so there is great difference between God's love and the love of our parents. These are not my words but the words of the Lord Jesus Himself who loves us. Listen to what He said, "Or what man is there among you, if his son asks for bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good gifts to those who ask Him!" (Matt. 7:9-11)

He also said, "Can a woman forget her nursing child, and not have compassion on the son of her womb? Surely they may forget, yet I will not forget you." (Is. 49: 15)

If He does not love us, why did He create us? Was he obliged to create us? Do we offer Him help or service? Does He need anything from us? Listen to what David the Prophet said, "O my soul, you have said to the Lord, You are my Lord, my goodness is nothing apart from You." (Ps. 16:2). Let us glorify God in everything!

"Submitting to one another in the fear of God." (v.21)

If you submit to the ruler, for the sake of your position, or for wealth, moreover, you should submit for the sake of the fear of God. Let us exchange services with submission, so there is no selfishness. No one should consider himself from an upper class and the other from a lower class as a slave. It is better that masters and slaves serve one another.

{Suppose one master has hundred slaves who serve him, and another has hundred friends, where each one serves the other. Which life is a happier life? In the former case, everyone is obliged to work, but in the latter, they work with their free will. In the same manner, God wants us to be like that, that is why He washed His disciples' feet.} 183

After St. Paul talked about the church from the practical aspect, through the daily behavior of the believer by putting off the deeds of the old man and practicing the deeds of the new man, rejecting the deeds of darkness as a son of the light and being filled with the work of the Holy Spirit, now he is relating this behavior with his worship, so it is changed to true praise with unceasing thanksgiving stemming not from the mouth but from the heart, mind and all the inner feelings as well as his work. Now St. Paul is presenting reflections of these measures on the family life, which cannot be separated from our spiritual strife or from our church life.

4. Marital Relations and the mystery of Christ:

The universal church, as declared by St. Paul in this epistle, reveals the mystery of Christ, that is, the mystery of the surpassing love of God through the Sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. This divine mystery presents deep and new interpretations to the marital, family and social relations. The marital life carries a picture to our relation with the Father in the Lord Jesus Christ, the relation of love and unity. We also see in the earthly marriage an icon of the heavenly marriage, and the Christian home a shadow of the eternal house of God.¹⁸⁴ Henceforth, the Law concerning marriage and the Christian home stems from the redeeming work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We notice the following:

First: The marital unity between man and woman is manifested as an icon to the unity between the Lord Jesus and His bride, the church. The former originates from the latter; therefore the marriage has to be fulfilled in the shadow of the cross, through the unity of faith in the Crucified Christ and the attachment to the church.

{How can we express the marital happiness, which the church officiates, the oblation confirms and the blessing seals!} Tertillian the Scholar 185

{The married couples have to ask the opinion of the bishop, so that the marriage becomes according to God's will and not according to lust.} St. Agnatio 186

{Since marriage has to be officiated by the priest, how can it happen where the faith is different?} St. Ambrosios 187

Second: The meaning of submission:

Many misinterpret the meaning of submission: "Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord." (v.22) They think that submission means that man should exercise his authority over her and that woman should yield to her husband.

In Christianity, submission does not mean weakness nor decrease in honor. That is what the Incarnate Word of God declared when He submitted to the Father, although He is one in essence with the Father. He exalted the virtue of "submission" to make it as a subject of race for us, until we reach the obedient and submissive Christ. St. Luke mentioned, "Then He went down with them and came to Nazareth and was subject to them..." (Luke 2:51) Although He is the Creator and Savior of St. Mary and St. Joseph, yet He was subject to them, and His submission did not hinder Him from fulfilling His mission, which they could not comprehend. He told them frankly, "Why is it that you sought Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" (Luke 2:49) Submission is not yielding on the expense of one's mission nor blind obedience without thinking, but rather a widened heart and acceptance of the other's will with mature thinking.

St. Hilopitus the Roman presented understanding of the submission of the Son to the Father. It is not a sign of Him being less in essence but He is united and equal with the Father. He said, {the unity goes back to the One God: The Father commands, the Son obeys, the Spirit grants understanding. The Father wanted, the Son did, the Spirit declared. This is what the Holy Bible clarifies.} 188

In the same manner, the submission of the wife to her husband is sharing with the Lord Jesus His obedience and submission to the Father, as a sign of love and unity and not demeaning her honor or decreasing it.

St. John Chrysostom relates that the woman, who is the subject of great love to her man, should not match this love with pride but with submission as response to his love. He said: {Love belongs to men, and submission belongs to women. If man offers all his love to the woman, then she in return, will love and obey Him, and he will be meek with her. Do not brag because man loves you, for God made him love you so you may easily obey him in submission. Do not fear to submit to him, for submitting to the beloved has no difficulties.}

St. John Chrysostom 189

St. Augutine asks all wives to follow the example of St. Mary who was very humble and submitted to Joseph (Luke 2:48), although she is the one who had the honor of bearing the Lord Jesus Christ. 190

Thus, our fathers understood the meaning of wife's submission with a spiritual perspective through the cross. Submission does not make her lose her equality nor does it mean that she does not share in carrying responsibility, but rather she submits so she may win his love being adorned with virtue.

St.Ambrosios said: {Let a man lead his wife as a pilot and honor her as his partner in life and as an heir with him in the Grace.} 191

We discussed this point in details in the book of "Marital love."

Third: The superiority of the man and his love:

Often, man thinks that being superior means to become a dictator with authority, however, St. Paul associated being superior with the sacrificing love. He says, "For the husband is the head of the wife, as also Christ is the head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body." (v.23) The Lord Jesus being the Head of the church was declared through His sacrificing love on the cross for her salvation. Likewise, if the man wants to be the head of his wife, let him offer a practical sacrificial love! St. John Chrysostom said: {Care for your wife in the same manner as Christ cared for the church, even if you have to offer your life for her! Endure any suffering for her sake!} 192

Since the man is the head, then there is no place for the head without the body, and there is no life for the head without the body. St. Ambrosios said: {Man without his wife is considered like one without a home.} 193

Fourth: Fellowship in the cross:

When the wife submits, in the Lord, to her husband, and the husband practices his love toward his wife for the Lord, then both of them share in the work of the Lord Jesus by true sacrifice, then their marital life becomes a visible sign of their fellowship in the work of the Sacrificial Lord Jesus. In other words both the husband and the wife see in the sacrifice of Christ, the sacrifice of love for others, as a living example to their family life. This is what St. Paul wrote here: **"Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it." (v. 24,25)**

Under the shadow of the cross, the wife joyfully submits to her husband for the sake of the Lord, and the husband declares his love to his wife, following the example of the Lord Jesus who offered His life to sanctify the believers.

From the words of St. John Chrysostom to the husband: {if you see her demeaning you, then your love and gentleness toward her can win her submission. There is nothing greater than these ties, especially from the husband and the wife! In spite of what you may face from her, do not be severe toward her, for Christ did not do that.} 194

Very strongly and clearly, St. Paul talked about the love of Christ toward His church as a living source for the love of man toward his wife, saying:

"And gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish." (v. 24-27)

We notice in the love of the Lord Jesus to His church the following:

A. He gave Himself for it, for love does not seek its own (1 Cor. 13:5). In His love for us, the Lord seeks our salvation to enjoy the fellowship of the inheritance with Him. He does not need us, but because of His love, He sacrifices His life for us. In the same manner, let the husband love his wife for her person as beloved to him, not just to fulfill his desires!

B. The purpose of the Lord Jesus toward His bride is to sanctify her and cleanse her with the baptismal water and this by the Word, for the water is sanctified, through Christ, the Word, offering His cross a price for our sanctification.

St. John Chrysostom said: {His church was full of defilement and abomination, but He did not despise her but gave Himself for her, as St. Paul said, "For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly." (Rom. 5:6) {In spite of her abomination, He took her and washed her and adorned her with beauty and gave Himself for her.} 195

With great power, the Lord talked about this sacrificing love, by the Prophet Ezekiel:

"Thus says the Lord God to Jerusalem: "Your birth and your nativity are from the land of Canaan, your father was an Amorite and your mother a Hittite. As for your nativity, on the day you were born your navel cord was not cut, nor were you washed in water to cleanse you; you were not rubbed with salt nor swathed in swaddling cloths. No eye pitied you, to do any of these things for you, to have compassion on you, but you were thrown out into the open field when you yourself were loathed on the day you were born. And when I passed by you and saw you struggling in your own blood, I said to you in your blood, "live!" Yes, I said to you in your blood, 'Live!' I made you thrive you like a plant in the field; and you grew, matured and became very beautiful. Your breasts were formed, your hair grew, but you were naked and bare. When I passed by you again and looked upon you, indeed your time was the time of love; so I spread My wing over you and covered your nakedness. Yes, I swore an oath to you and entered into a covenant with you and you became Mine,' says the Lord God. Then I washed you in water; yes I thoroughly washed off your blood and I anointed you with oil. I clothed you with fine linen and covered you with silk. I adorned you with ornaments, put bracelets on your wrists, and a chain on your neck. And I put a jewel in your nose, earrings in your ears, and a beautiful crown on your head. Thus you were adorned with gold and silver and your clothing was of fine linen, silk, and embroidered cloth. You ate pastry of fine flour, honey, and oil. You were exceedingly beautiful, and succeeded to royalty. Your fame went out among the nations because of your beauty, for it was perfect through My splendor which I had bestowed on you," says the Lord God." (Ezek. 16: 3-14)

This is a marvelous picture for the surpassing work of God through His sacrificial love on the cross!

C. "That He might present it to Himself...": In the rite of the Jewish marriage, there was a period between the marriage contract and receiving the bride. In the same manner, the Lord Jesus has signed the marriage contract by His precious blood on the cross, and bought us and accepted us as His bride. In His second coming, He receives the bride where all the chosen are gathered with Him on the clouds, as if He is presenting His bride to Himself. He loved her for no reason, but he wants her as His bride to respond to His love and to share with Him His eternal glory!

Let us pause a little. In His love, the Lord Jesus sacrificed His life for His bride, but He asks for her sanctification. No one will enjoy the wedding except those who are sanctified in Him. St. Augustine said: {some of the evil fish may enter the net of Christ in the church, but they have no part with the good fish.} 196

Father Dorotheos from Gazza said: {The Lord Jesus became incarnate to restore man to his former image. But how do we go back to the former image? When we learn from St. Paul who said, "Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and the spirit." (2 Cor. 7:1). Let us cleanse ourselves so we may resemble God. Let us remove the filth of sin so the beauty of the virtue may appear. David prayed for this beauty saying, "You gave my beauty strength." (Ps. 29:8) So let us cleanse ourselves so we may resemble God.} 197

D. Talking about sanctifying the church through the sacrificial love of Christ, he referred to baptism by saying, "with the washing of water by the word." (v.26)

{St. Paul confirms that in baptism, the old man dies and the new man is created, saying, "He saved us through the washing of regeneration..." (Tit. 3:5) Since the new birth takes place in the baptismal font, so how can a heretic, who is not a bride of Christ, give birth to children of God through Christ?

Only the church, which cleaved and united with Christ can give birth to spiritual children. St. Paul said, "... Just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify her with the washing of water by the word." (v.25,26) Since she is the beloved and the bride, then she alone is sanctified by Christ and is purified in his baptismal font. It is obvious that the heresy which states that she is not the bride of Christ, cannot be sanctified nor purified in the baptismal font and cannot give birth to children of God.} St. Kibrianos 198

E. Since the Lord Christ made His church His holy body and He being her Head, in the same manner the husband sees his wife as his body, so he loves her and takes care of her. The Apostle says:

"So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones." (v.28-30)

Here St. Paul is demonstrating three comparisons: Christ and the church, husband and wife, the head and the body.

He pointed the extent of the unity between the husband and the wife being his body.

St. John Chrysostom said: {nothing can unite our lives together except resembling the love between husband and wife.} 119 St. Paul declared two points: the first is the extent of our unity with the Lord Christ for we are members of His flesh and of His bones, and the second is our holy outlook to the body: "For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it."

Our unity with the Lord Christ being members of His body is the main and basic purpose of the redeeming work of God and our enjoying His Gospel. He wants us to be one with Him, to enjoy the eternal fellowship with Him as beloved children and heirs. This is very clear in all St. Paul's epistles, especially this epistle as long as he talks about the church being the body of Christ.

Regarding our sanctity of the flesh, he clarified that we should not hate the flesh because it is God's holy creation, but to hate his evil desires. The body is not an obstacle, which we want to get rid of, but it is a divine gift, which remains holy as long as we live according to the spirit. The early fathers emphasized this point so that we should not deviate toward the Gnostic ideas, which state that the body is an element of darkness, which should be destroyed.

St. Augustine said: {Let us care for the flesh, but only to keep it healthy. 200}

F. Since St. Paul is addressing the unity between the husband and wife, he presents an understanding of this unity since the beginning of creation, which is achieved through the work of Christ. He said, **"For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."** (v. 31) He excerpted this from the book of Genesis (2: 24).

This unity appears in a unique way between the Lord Christ and His church, where St. Paul called it "a mystery". He said, **"This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband."** (v. 32,33)

The Lord Christ gave Himself as an example of His unity with the church the bride. St. Augustine said: {He left the Father, as He emptied Himself from all the glories and took the form of a servant (Phil. 2:7). He remained one in essence without separation. He also left His mother, that is the Jewish nation, of which He took the flesh through the Jewish St. Mary, to become one flesh with His bride. 201.}

Chapter Six

THE PRACTICAL LIFE AND THE SPIRITUAL STRIFE

As we have mentioned in the earlier chapters, the church is "the mystery of Christ", or she is "our life in Christ Jesus", where through it, the believer knows his position as a living member in the one Body of Christ, and can influence other members, although he is unique and is characterized by certain talents to build the community.

The church life is not a philosophical thought, which we acquire, but rather an experience, which we live in private and public worship, in our behavior with others, in our family life, or in our everyday life at work. It is a gift of God through the cross, where we accept and live in unceasing struggle against the devil that fights the Crucified.

- 1. Family relations: Eph. 6: 1-4**
- 2. Work relations: Eph. 6: 5-9**
- 3. Spiritual Strife: Eph. 6: 10-20**
- 4. Conclusion and apostolic blessing: Eph. 6: 21-24**

1. Family Relations:

Relations between parents and their children are discussed, where children are called to obey their parents in the Lord. He said:

"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother, which is the first commandment with promise: that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth." (Eph. 6:1-3)

The natural law inscribes this commandment on the heart, for the children feel they are naturally obligated to obey their parents, through the strong ties of flesh and blood, and the feelings of the children of how much their parents endure from sleeplessness and toil for their sake. The Mosaic Law confirmed this commandment (Ex. 20:12 & Deut. 5:16, 27:16). When man fails to obey this natural commandment, God has given it even more priority over sanctifying His Sabbath. He said, "Everyone of you shall revere his mother and his father, and keep My Sabbaths; I am the Lord your God." (Lev. 19: 3) He also severely threatened for disobeying this commandment:

"And he who strikes his father or his mother shall surely be put to death." (Ex. 21:15)

"And he who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death." (Ex. 21:17)

"Cursed is the one who treats his father or his mother with contempt. And all the people shall say, 'Amen!'" (Deut. 27:16)

"Whoever curses his father or his mother, his lamp will be put out in deep darkness." (Prov. 20:20)

"The eye that mocks his father, and scorns obedience to his mother, the ravens of the valley will pick it out..." (Prov. 30:17)

Finally, God did not leave man to go through all these severe punishments, but the Only Begotten Son came as Substitute for all humanity, to declare His complete obedience to the Father, even to the point of death on the cross. (Phil. 2:8) He also submitted to His mother the

Virgin Mary, His mother according to the flesh and to the Righteous Joseph who adopted Him (Luke 2:51), so He became a living example to us.

“Is it possible that the teacher of virtue does not perform his duty toward her? He did not submit due to weakness but due to love.”] St. Ambrosios 202

“Obey your parents, following the example of your Bridegroom.” **St. Jerome** 203

“Let us learn to submit to our parents. The Lord Jesus submitted and became an example to all children to submit to their parents or their guardians if they are orphans. Since the Lord Jesus submitted to St. Mary and St. Joseph, shouldn't I submit to the bishop, whom God has appointed as my father? Shouldn't I submit to the priest chosen by the will of God.”

Origen 204

“The world was subject to Christ, and Christ was subject to His parents.”

St. Augustine 205

“This is a message written to a mother and her daughter, between whom a dispute arose. The Lord Jesus submitted to His parents; He revered His mother whom He was her Father. He honored His father, according to adoption, whom Christ Himself provided for! He knew that His mother carried Him in her womb, and His father carried Him in his arms. Truly, I do not rebuke the mother for she may be old or weak or lonely or have any other excuse, but I tell you O daughter, is the house of your mother, whom her womb was not small to bear you, smaller to accommodate you!” **St. Jerome** 206

St. Paul emphasizes that obeying our parents has to be in the Lord (Eph. 6:1). He means that obedience should not be blind, to cancel the personalities and thinking of the children, but in their submission, they discern what belongs to the Lord and what does not belong. For example, the parents cannot oblige the children to be atheist or to deny their faith. We have mentioned this point earlier when we discussed "Family love" 207, so we will just mention a few excerpts from the sayings of the Fathers:

“If the father is a heretic or a gentile, we should not obey him (because it is against the Lord), for he does not command ‘in the Lord.’” **St. John Chrysostom** 208

“But you may say that I fear that they may get angry with me, especially those who are above me. Do all your effort not to anger them, so God does not get angry.

You who are afraid to anger those who are older than you, look to see whether God is above those whom you are afraid to anger. By all means, do not anger them.

Your father and mother are the first ones who are older than you. Since they have taught you righteousness and have brought you to Christ, listen to them and obey them. May they do not command anything that is against God, who is above them, so they may be obeyed.

☩ Surely a father shouldn't get angry for giving preference to God in obedience, but when the father commands an order that does not conflict with God, then he should be obeyed, because to God, obeying the parents is a divine order.” **St. Augustine** 109

“The Bible commands us to obey our parents, but whoever loves them more than Christ, loses his soul.” St. Jerome 110

Additionally, many psychologists perceive that the Lord's talk with St. Mary when He said, "Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" (Luke 2:49), is a statement that indicates a spiritual revolution in the concept of obedience in a constructive way. "...He was subject to them..." (Luke 2:51), through fulfilling His divine mission. Thus, the parents should support the child, through true spiritual love, but they should stay outside the scope of his life, and not impose their personalities on his life, so that the child may achieve God's plan in his life, and not become a copy of his parents. This issue will be

discussed in more details in the second edition of the book "Family Love", emphasizing the different talents and abilities between fathers and children, through the harmony of love and unity in the Lord.

Going back to the apostolic commandment to the children: "Honor your father and mother, which is the first commandment with promise; that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth." (Eph. 6: 2,3)

The way he addresses this issue is completely different than the way he addresses husbands and wives. Addressing husbands and wives, he talked in a divine language, which revealed the mystery of Christ declared on the cross, so everyone will practice his relationship with the other through the sacrificial divine love. However, talking here about obeying and honoring parents, he talks in a simple way, which is befitting to children. **St. John Chrysostom** said that he does not talk with them about the kingdom but he said: "He presented a short advice, for the children cannot listen to a long conversation; that is why St. Paul did not mention the topic of the kingdom, for it is hard for children to understand such topics. But he mentioned what little children would like to hear: 'to live long on earth'" 211

St. Paul mentioned his commandment to the fathers: "And you fathers do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord." (Eph. 6:4)

From the negative side, it is not appropriate that fathers provoke their children; and from the positive side, they have to train them in the Lord, that is, through the divine commandment and with a living Biblical thought.

It is good that parents discipline their children, but before disciplining them, the heart should be widened with love, as **St. Augustine** said: "Mercy precedes rebuke, not anger." 212

"Do not provoke your children, as some parents do when they deprive their children of the inheritance or when they severely treat them as slaves and not as liberals."

St. John Chrysostom

We care about our belongings for the sake of our children; however, we do not care for our children themselves! How ridiculous is that?!

Shape your son with righteousness, then he will receive all your belongings. But if he is not righteous, he will not benefit from all the wealth, meanwhile if he is righteous then poverty will do him no harm.

"Let us not prevent them from doing what is acceptable, but from what is harmful. Let us not treat them as outcasts but as beloved children." **St. John Chrysostom** 213

We shall discuss this point in more details in our book about "Family Love".

2. Work Relationships:

Since the church is "life" lived in the Lord Jesus Christ declared through whorship in our family life, she also touches work relationships, which binds the employer with his employees and the master with his slaves. Since the relationship between the master and the slaves, in the apostolic age, was not governed by civil law, but the world gave the masters the right to use their slaves as cheap pieces of furniture without any human considerations. Some masters used to torture their slaves, without anyone defending them. That is why St. Paul addressed this issue, not on social basis but on spiritual level, where there is radical change in relationships from the roots and not through changing temporary laws, where masters and slaves meet under the shadow of one cross to enjoy one salvation and a common eternal inheritance.

St. Paul said: "Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart as to Christ; not with eye-service as men pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ doing the will of God from the heart, with goodwill doing

service, as to the Lord, and not to men, knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free." (Eph. 6: 5-8)

We notice the following:

First: The apostolic teaching did not revolt against specific social issues but rectified them with quietness, strength and effectiveness, without competing with the world. Since the society, at that time, created social classes, from slaves to masters, yet the apostle did not attack that, and did not ask the slaves to revolt. He asked them to solve that problem by winning the masters by the invisible inner love, by being sincere of heart and by true service from the heart to the Lord. This true service changes the master's heart from his oppression and unrighteousness, to taste the sweetness of the work of the Gospel in "the slaves"; hence the slaves become teachers by their good examples.

St. Augustine said: "The apostolic teaching put the master above the slave, and the slave under the master, but Christ paid one price for both of them. Do not despise those who are under you, but diligently ask for the salvation of their souls." 214

Second: St. Paul raised the status of the slaves. Since he asked them to obey their masters according to the flesh, yet he pointed their influence on the lives of their pagan masters, if they abide by the spirit.

"Not only husbands, wives, children, but even slaves participate in the organizing of the house and its maintenance. St. Paul never ignored that social class, but he gave them a long speech, not a short one like the one he gave to the children. He did not promise them with temporal matters (like long life), but with eternal blessings. Since they are less honored than the children, but they are more noble in their thinking." **St. John Chrysostom** 215

Third: The apostle is asking them to obey in fear and trembling, yet he is emphasizing that their slavery is not permanent, but it is temporary, according to the flesh, and it ends by the death of the body, where all will rise, without any discrimination, between master and slave.

He emphasizes that their slavery is according to the flesh, but everyone, whether master or slave, submits to the slavery according to the spirit of the One God, master of all!

"Since he stirred the wound of the soul (by remembering the slavery), yet, immediately, he lightened it. It seems as if he is telling them not to be sad because you are less than the wife and children, because slavery here is only by name. Being masters (according to the flesh) is short and temporary, because everything pertaining to the flesh is vanishing."

St. John Chrysostom 216

Fourth: Earlier, we mentioned the submission of the wife to her husband and that this does not mean that she is less in honor or she is not equal to the man, but rather it is submission of love and obedience to the Lord, so she carries the trait of Christ who obeyed to the point of death. We repeat here that the good servant does not see in St. Paul's commandment, "Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ", (Eph. 6:5) humiliation and shame, but rather following the example of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself who became a servant for us!

Through our membership in the body of Christ, the virtue of obedience and submission is elevated, so it becomes a sign of the fellowship with the Head, who though He is the Heavenly One, He became a servant, and this is considered glory and honor!

"Since you have commanded the free to submit to one another in the fear of the Lord, as you have said, "Submitting to one another in the fear of God" (Eph. 5:21), and since you have commanded the wife to honor her husband and respect him, although they are both equal, it is more befitting for me to talk with a servant. This is not a sign of his lowly birth but rather a sign

of his true nobility, for he knows how to be humble, meek and empty himself for his brother, so that a free person can serve another free person with more fear and trembling.

He said, "In sincerity of heart". Truly he said that for one could serve with fear and trembling but with no good will. Many servants may cheat their masters in secret, but to remove this cheating, he said, '...In sincerity of heart, as to Christ, not with eye-service as men pleasers...' (5-7) Look how many words he has used to put this good foundation!"

St. John Chrysostom 217

Fifth: St. Paul emphasizes that this statement relates to the faithfulness of God's children, even if they are servants working for brutal masters, for they do not serve human beings but they serve the Lord. They do not care to please men, even if they were their masters, but they do it by their own free will to please God. Faithfulness is their nature regardless of the circumstances surrounding them and their position at work.

"Do your work faithfully not against your will. He is urging anyone who is mistreated to still practice goodness (faithfulness at work), as a private act, which stems from one's free will.

Whoever pleases men is not a servant of Christ. (Gal. 1:10)

Practice it willingly, as a principle in your life and not grudgingly. If you do this, you are no more a servant as long as you do it as a principle, with good will, from the heart, and for Christ. This is the slavery, which the free St. Paul has experienced and glorified: 'For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake.'" (2 Cor. 4:5) **St. John Chrysostom 218**

Sixth: St. Paul stated the reward for the faithful servant saying, "Knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free." (Eph. 6:8) The church history has chosen for us many living examples of this kind of people, for He did not forget the labor of love which servants have presented to their masters and they won them to Christ as brothers and eternal heirs! Many masters became disciples to their servants because of the servants' wide hearts full of God's love. They became un-shameful disciples!

The church history presented many servants who became bishops and priests witnessing to the truth, and some became mother saints to whom virgins became their disciples, in the spirit of Biblical love. In conclusion, we can say that St. Paul attacked slavery from the inside, in its deep roots, by destroying its organization, if it had any.

After he attacked slavery in its deep roots, he presents now a commandment to the believing masters: "And you masters, do the same things to them, giving up threatening, knowing that your own Master also is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him." (Eph. 6:9)

St. John Chrysostom commented on this apostolic statement saying: "'do the same things to them' What are these things? 'Serving with good intention.' In any case, he did not say 'serve them', but clearly he clarified the meaning, for the Lord Himself is Servant to his slave. What great Master to whom he is referring!" 219

St. John Chrysostom continued: "If a master is dealing with a servant, let him know that he also is a servant to the Master, and by the same measure you use, it will be measured back to you. (Matt. 7:2) It is more appropriate to be compassionate with his brother the servant, so the Lord may be compassionate toward him, lest he hears the voice, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me.' (Matt. 18:32) God does not have partiality, He treats the master like the servant; if the master is compassionate toward the servant, then God is compassionate toward him, but if he uses threats, God uses the same method toward him.

He said, 'There is no partiality with Him.' Do not think that God forgives you because all what you commit is the right of a servant. Truly the pagan laws, as human laws, discern between

different kinds of transgressions. However, God's Law does not know that, for He offers His blessings to all, without partiality, and gives everyone his right.

But probably someone may ask, what is this slavery? How did it start in the human race? I tell you that slavery is the fruit of greediness and barbarism, for we do not know that there were servants to Noah, Abel, or Sheth nor to those who came after them.

You may say: 'Well, but Abraham had servants.' Yes, but he never exploited them as servants." **St. John Chrysostom 220**

3. Spiritual Strife:

He raised the status of the church by declaring her unity with the Lord Jesus, being His body. He clarified that it is a victorious life having surpassing characteristics, which are apparent in the lives of her children, whether in their worship or their family relationships or through their every day life. The Lord Jesus paid the price of this life, which is His life sacrificed for His love for us! This is what St. Paul very clearly confirmed in this epistle. Now before ending his epistle, he wanted to point our positive role as we are attacked very severely, not from people but from the devil. Establishing the church, as the kingdom of Christ, means destroying the kingdom of darkness, therefore he is addressing how the devil is attacking us and how we should be armed with weapons against all darkness so we may practice our growing church life.

He said: "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places." (Eph. 6: 10-12)

We notice the following:

First: Since every believer knows his status in the church, whether he is a priest or a lay person, whether a husband or wife or a child or a father or a mother, whether a servant or a master, every member is unique and each has his specific commandment that suits his position, however, there is one general commandment which all the members, as members in the body of Christ, are required to follow which is: "...Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might." (Eph. 6:10) All are brothers, being members in the one body, even if the priests carry certain spiritual fatherhood to their children in the Lord, and the fathers carry the fatherhood spirit toward their children, in the flesh or by adoption, so everyone carry a kind of brotherhood 221. Through this general brotherhood, all participate in one war against a common enemy who wants to destroy all.

"...Be strong in the Lord..." (Eph. 6:10) Since he is about to conclude, he talks about the spiritual strife. Listen, he arms them and leads them to the spiritual war. No one can rob the other's job but each remains in his position.

"...Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might." (Eph. 6:10), meaning in the hope we have in the Lord and through His help to us. Put your trust in the Lord, then everything will become easy.

"Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil." (Eph. 6:11)

He did not say against the attacks or enmities but against "the wiles". This enemy does not fight us openly and with simplicity, but through wiles. What does he mean by "wiles". He means by trickery...Satan does not suggest that we commit sin in its natural colors, but gives it other names using trickery and deception.

Now the apostle stirs the spiritual soldiers to be watchful, clarifying that our spiritual strife is like a skillful war; for we wrestle not against an easy simple enemy, but rather we wrestle against a deceitful enemy.

In the beginning, St. Paul stirred the disciples to realize how crafty Satan is, then about his nature and the number of his armies. He did not mention that to frighten the soldiers who were under him, but to make them enthusiastic, alert and watchful when they know his tricks. If he had mentioned how powerful the enemy is and stopped at that, then they would have been scared. But he mentioned the capability of victory over such an enemy, thus stirring in them the spirit of courage, as much as he showed the power of the enemy, as much as he inflamed the soldiers for spiritual strife.

"For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. (Eph. 6:12)

"Since he talked about how fierce the enemy is, then he added that he robs us from great blessings. What is this? This war takes place in the heavenly places, for it is not a conflict for riches or glory, but to enslave us. There is no way to reconcile as long as we are in this war. The war becomes fierce when it is for an important cause. The word 'in the heavenly places' means for the sake of heavenly matters. The enemy does not win anything by overcoming us but he wants to rob us of our glory. The devil exerts every effort to expel us from heaven." St. John Chrysostom 222

Second: **St. John Chrysostom** explained the term "the rulers of this world". "Thus they are called not because they have authority over the world, but because the Bible is used to address evil behavior as 'the world', as the Lord Jesus said, 'They are not of the world just as I am not of the world.' (John 17:16) What does this mean? Were they not of the world? Didn't they have bodies? Were they not among those of the world? One more time, He said, 'The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me...' (John 7:7) What he means by the world is the evil people, for the evil spirits have authority over them." 123

St. Paul is clarifying here that our war is not against any person, but rather it is against Satan the enemy of all human race. **St. Augustine** said: "Our wrestling is not against humans, whom we see that they hate us, for they are tools used by others; they are tools in the hands of others." 224

Third: The true enemies are invisible, and we gain victory over them through real struggle. **St. Augustine** said: "The saints gain victory over the invisible enemies through tangible matters." 225

Fourth: It is obvious from St. Paul's words that the war is not only severe, but because the devil has the biggest part of it for he does not sleep nor slumber, then the war is continuous and perpetual against all believers. **St. Jerome** said: "Does anyone think that we are safe, and is it correct that we sleep and do not struggle just because we received the baptism?" 226

Fifth: St. Paul presented us spiritual weapons with which each believer should arm himself to obtain victory, saying:

"Therefore, take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand." (Eph. 6:13)

These weapons are truly spiritual. **St. Ambrosios** said: "We should not think of physical weapons, but of the ones which are mighty before God." 227

The essence of the weapon itself is the presence of the Lord Jesus inside us. He is the One who conquered the devil, and He remains conquering inside us. The Lord Jesus Himself is our sword and our victory over Satan and all his armies.

“There is defense for our salvation as long as Christ exists.” **St. Ambrosios** 228

“Our weapon is the Lord Jesus.” **St. Augustine** 229

“We do not ignore that all spirits are not equally severe, active and deceptive. The weak spirits attack the beginners and weak. If the weak spirits are defeated, then the stronger ones come to attack the soldiers of Christ. It is hard for one to fight with his own strength, for none of the saints can match the deception of the strong enemies or can endure their brutality unless the Lord Jesus, the Chief of the wrestlers, defeats them and with the temptation makes the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it. (1 Cor. 10: 13)” **Father Sirinos** 230

Sixth: St. Paul, asking us to resist in the evil day, that is during the bitter temptations, it is befitting for us to continue our struggle until our full victory is declared. He said, "...And having done all, to stand." (Eph. 6:13)

With every temptation, we struggle so we may grow and our abiding in Him is achieved. The enemy continues to fight us and we continue to struggle, until the kingdom of Satan is destroyed and the kingdom of God abides in us.

“The spirits fall in sorrow, and since they want our destruction, they are destroyed; but their defeat does not mean that they will not come back to attack us. When they fail in attacking us, we say: ‘Let them be ashamed and confounded who seek my life; Let them be turned back and confused who desire my hurt’ (Ps. 70:2) Also, Jeremiah said, ‘Let them be ashamed who persecute me, but do not let me be put to shame; let them be dismayed, but do not let me be dismayed. Bring on them the day of doom, and destroy them with double destruction!’ (Jer. 17:18) No one doubts that once we conquer them we destroy them with double destruction.”

Father Sirinos 231

“My brothers, I know that these sufferings which we accept for Christ’s sake do not destroy us but rather help us.” **St. Ambrosios** 232

"...That you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand." (Eph. 6:13)

What he means by the evil day is our present life, for he also calls it "...this present evil age..." (Gal. 1:4), and that is because of the evil that is committed in it. He said, "having done all", that is, all the lust and evil desires and all what worry us. He does not talk about just committing them but having done all, meaning after mortifying our sins, we stand and abide in Him. Many fall after they are victorious, however, we have to stand and abide in Him after we become victorious. An enemy may be beaten, but he may rise again, if we do not abide in the Lord. If the spiritual enemies arise once more, they may fall if we abide in the Lord. If we are not shaken, the enemy cannot rise again.

"Put on the whole armor of God" (Eph. 6:11). See how he removes all fear. If it is possible that after we have done all, we abide in the Lord, then the enemy, no matter how strong, will not create in us fear but rather makes us continuously on the alert.

"...That you may be able to withstand in the evil day..." (Eph. 6:13) He encourages them by telling them that it is a short day (an evil day). This matter requires steadfastness then the victory will take place.” **St. John Chrysostom** 233

Seventh: Since St. Paul declared the true spiritual battle and demonstrated who our enemy is and how he is deceiving, he inflamed our hearts to yearn for the triumph and to abide in

the Lord, through our passing this present life as one short day. Now, he is portraying the spiritual weapons to protect us from all the tricks of the enemy.

These spiritual weapons are:

A. "Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth," (Eph. 6:14) He started by saying "stand", and standing steadfast in itself is a basic ingredient in strife, even in temporal matters, for it represents a weapon with which one should arm himself. Without being steadfast, man falls in despair and is defeated before any difficulty and does not achieve his goal.

St. John Chrysostom commented on the word "stand" by saying: "The first feature of that spiritual battle is to know how to be steadfast, for many things depend on that. Often he mentioned being steadfast, for he said, 'Watch, stand fast...' (1 Cor. 16:13) Also, '...So stand fast in the Lord.' (Phil. 4:1) 'Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.' (1 Cor. 10:12) '...And having done all, to stand.' (Eph. 6:13) No doubt he does not mean to be steadfast in any way, but in the correct way. Many who have experiences in wars know how to be steadfast in the main center. In the case of the wrestlers, the trainer asks the players to be steadfast. How about in wars and military matters! The one who is steadfast is usually straightforward and does not stand in laziness nor lean on anything. Being steadfast is declared by being straightforward, for those who are straightforward are steadfast. But those who are not steadfast cannot be abiding by truth or well organized. A luxurious person, a lustful man or a lover of money cannot be straightforward. Whoever is steadfast, as if getting this steadfastness from a private fountain, makes all his strife easy." 234

"Having girded your waist with truth" carries a symbolic meaning. The Roman soldier used to gird his waist with a leather belt with iron plates. The soldier girds himself as a sign of being ready to enter into battle. From one aspect, it gives firmness to his back, as well as helping him to be swift in movement, so his clothes will not hinder him. Also, it is used to protect some parts of his body. Many fathers relate that the waist refers to the bodily lust, and girding it with belt refers to controlling the lust or being chaste.

What supports us in our chastity is rejecting the vanities and accepting "the truth" that is the Lord Jesus Christ, the source of our purity and chastity. That is why St. Paul said: "Girding your waist with truth". Christ, the Truth controls our bodies and sanctifies it so that we may struggle for the kingdom instead of being occupied with the cares of the world.

St. John Chrysostom said: "If we gird ourselves with the truth, then no one can conquer us. Whoever seeks the truth will never fall to the earth." 235

B. "Having put on the breastplate of righteousness" (Eph. 6:14)

The Crucified Christ is the truth with whom we should gird ourselves so we may overcome the lust of the flesh and conquer all the vain philosophies, which occupy the mind, but it is incapable of presenting a chaste life in the Lord. He is also our "righteousness" whom we put on as the breastplate, which protects us from all the attacks of the sword and killing arrows. The Roman breastplate extended from the neck to the ankle and was made from metal, which protects the soldier from all the attacks of the enemy.

"As the breastplate cannot be poked, so in the same manner, righteousness. What he means by righteousness is the universal, virtuous life. No one can conquer this kind of life. One may hurt it, but no one can poke it, not even the devil. He is saying to let righteousness abide in the breast, and Christ said, 'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.' (Matt. 5:6) Thus, he becomes steadfast and strong as if putting on a breastplate."

St. John Chrysostom 236

C. "And having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace." (Eph. 6:15)

The believer has to arm himself with spiritual weapons, which touch all of his body, even to his feet. St. Kibrianos said: "My beloved brothers, let us arm ourselves with all our strength and be ready for the battle with an undefiled mind, straight faith and serious courage. Let the soldiers go to the battle prepared for them; let them be armed, even those who fell, so they may return to win what they have lost..." 237

Since the belt qualifies the soldier for movement without stumbling, then shoes are important to run swiftly in time of war and to protect him from slipping, and for climbing the mountains where military shoes were carrying prominent nails for protection.

We cannot swiftly walk amidst the battle, which the enemy stirs against us unless the gospel of peace protects our spiritual feet so we may walk according to His will and gospel.

While the enemy is attacking us, we shod our feet with the gospel of peace. **St. John Chrysostom** said: "Fighting the evil spirits requires the gospel of peace. Fighting against them ends the war, that is, the war between God and us. When we are in war against the devil, we are in peace with God. Therefore, do not be afraid, my beloved, it is "the gospel", that is, the good news, which grants victory." 238

D. "Above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one." (Eph. 6:16)

Since the enemy does not stop shooting his arrows, not only the metal ones, but also the fiery ones to kill the soul, then the faith is the shield, which destroys these arrows and puts out its flames. **St. John Chrysostom** said: "As the shield is put to cover the whole body as a guard, so is the faith to which everything is submitted. No one can attack this shield. Listen to what the Lord Jesus says to His disciples, '...For assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.' (Matt. 17:20) He means also by the flaming evil arrows the temptations and the evil desires. Being "flaming" is a trait of these desires. Since the faith can dominate the evil spirits, then moreover, it can dominate the lusts of the soul." 239

E. "And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God." (Eph. 6:17)

Since the helmet protects the head, then being occupied with the salvation and our hope in freeing ourselves from the coming punishments and enjoying the heavenly inheritance is the spiritual helmet which protects our head, which is our faith in the Lord Christ, the Head.

The sword of the spirit, which we hold unto, is the word of God. We can fight with it so we can differentiate between what is God's and what is not. With it we can uproot all evil inside us and cast it outside. The word of God is like the sword, which wounds but in the same time it heals!

Father Benofios perceives that this sword, the word of God, has to shed the blood, the blood of our sins which lives in us, for without shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins (Heb. 9:22) It was written in the book of Jeremiah, "...Cursed is he who keeps back his sword from blood." (Jer. 48: 10) As if the believer does not stop from killing every sin, whether in his heart or mind or feelings, by the commandment until he is all sanctified in the Lord.

St. John Chrysostom said that with this spiritual sword, we could kill the head of the serpent.241

F. "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints." (Eph. 6:18)

He concludes his talk about the spiritual weapons with prayer, not because it is the least important but to confirm it in the mind. All the previous weapons are divine gifts, which we

cannot enjoy without prayer. So he concludes by opening the door with which we obtain all the weapons to attack Satan and all his traps.

Since God talking with us (the word of God) is the spiritual weapon with which we destroy all the evil, which attacks the inside, then our talking with Him (prayer) is our support to obtain divine help through continuous struggle.

“He is not afraid of the devil's temptations, for he is armed, from head to toe, with the weapons which St. Paul has mentioned. He listens to God by reading the word of God and talks to God by praying. In summary, the devil will attack him but Christ will defend him.”

From his ascetic friend Bonsios

‘Through strict fasting and vigil (in prayer), we can put off the fiery arrows of the devil.’
St. Jerome 242

G. Group spiritual struggle: St. Paul concluded his talk about the strife against the devil by revealing a very important church and Biblical aspect, which is the devil fights each member individually, yet all his armies or all the evil spirits work together against the kingdom of Christ. Therefore, we should not fight the devil by ourselves but as a holy community. Truly it is an inner battle, which touches our personal relationship with God through our unity with each other. That is why St. Paul is emphasizing continuous vigil and supplications for all the saints. So everyone is asking with one spirit, so he feels that he is not away from his brothers.

Let us ask that others pray for us so God may support us. And let us pray for our brothers as a sign of our fellowship with them, our love to them and our unity in the spirit.

St. Paul who was selected from the womb for missionary service and whom God called publicly on the road to Damascus and who received abundant gifts, feels the need for the prayers of the people for him so God may support him, not only in his spiritual strife but in his mission with the Gospel. He says, "And for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak." (19,20)

Since his chains intercede for him as a faithful ambassador who endured sufferings for the sake of the gospel, yet he was in dire need for the intercessions of the church to fulfill his message without any obstacles. That is why the church is used to pray for the patriarch, the bishops, priests, deacons, and all the ministers. Also, the pope the patriarch and all the ministers pray for the entire congregation. Truly, in our strife, we need mutual prayers!

St. John Chrysostom commented on this verse by saying: “Prayers are capable of performing miracles.” 243

4. Conclusion and the apostolic blessing:

St. Paul concluded his epistle by the following:

First: He is sending Tychicus not only to deliver the epistle but as an eyewitness to comfort them about his condition in prison, that God is using him for the building of the kingdom and missionary work, so their hearts may be comforted. Sending the faithful servant, Tychicus, they hear the word of God through him for their edification. He says, "But that you also may know my affairs and how I am doing, Tychicus, a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord will make all things known to you; whom I have sent to you for this purpose that you may know our affairs, and that he may comfort your hearts." (Eph. 6:21, 22)

Second: He concludes by the apostolic blessing: "Peace to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Amen." (Eph. 6: 23, 24)

Since he wrote the epistle about the church that is in essence "peace with God and the brothers, love stemming from God and the Lord Jesus Christ, and grace presented to", therefore the blessing came to be in harmony with the essence of the epistle.

"He prayed for them asking for 'peace, love, and faith'. He uttered well, for he did not want them to look at love by itself but mingled with faith. Where there is peace, there is love, and where there is love, there is also peace. 'With faith', for without it, love cannot reach anywhere, moreover, it does not exist. 'In sincerity', he means 'purity' or 'for the sake of undefiled matters', that is, not for riches, glory, nor incorruptible treasures, but 'in sincerity' that is through virtue, for every sin is evil." **St. John Chrysostom** 244

This is a simplified picture of the main features of this living epistle, which declares our membership in the body of the Lord Christ and our enjoyment with the fellowship of His life and attributes in every act, whether hidden or apparent, even in our struggle against the powers of the darkness, until we attain our incorruptible and undefiled inheritance.